

2011

Measuring up: an examination of the expectations and realities of students during the primary to secondary transition

Sally Towns
Southern Cross University

Publication details

Towns, S 2011, 'Measuring up: an examination of the expectations and realities of students during the primary to secondary transition', PhD thesis, Southern Cross University, Lismore, NSW.
Copyright S Towns 2011

ePublications@SCU is an electronic repository administered by Southern Cross University Library. Its goal is to capture and preserve the intellectual output of Southern Cross University authors and researchers, and to increase visibility and impact through open access to researchers around the world. For further information please contact epubs@scu.edu.au.

**Measuring up: An examination of the expectations and realities of students during
the primary to secondary transition.**

Sally Towns

**School of Education
Southern Cross University**

**This thesis is presented as part of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

August 2010

Thesis declaration

I certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

I acknowledge that I have read and understood the university's rules, requirements, procedures and policy relating to my higher degree research award and to my thesis. I certify that I have complied with the rules, requirements, procedures and policy of the university (as they may be from time to time).

Name: Sally Towns

Signed:

Date:

PUBLICATIONS

The following work has been produced and reviewed as part of this research project.

CONFERENCE PAPER

Kean, B., & Towns, S. (2010). *Measuring up: An examination of the expectations and realities of students during the primary-secondary transition*. Paper prepared for AARE International Education Research Conference, Melbourne 29, 2010.

ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to investigate the primary to secondary transition for two key groups of students within Catholic Colleges in Tasmania. The first group was students from small rural schools transitioning to larger urban schools. The second group was students transitioning within schools that have a Preparatory to Year 10 (or Year 12) structure. New instruments: the Early Transition Questionnaire, the Late Transition Questionnaire and the Parent Questionnaire, were devised to gather data about students' expectations and experiences of the transition process, as well as parents' perspectives about transition.

Research questions were answered through numerous statistical analyses of questionnaire data. Contingency Table Analysis, Independent-samples *t*-tests and Mann-Whitney *U* tests were used to investigate the differences between rural and urban students, and internal and external transitioning students' expectations and realities of transition. Paired-samples *t*-tests or Wilcoxon signed rank tests were conducted to examine the difference between expectation and reality of transition for rural and internal transitioning students. Statistically significant differences were confirmed by the calculation of effect size.

For the Early Transition Questionnaire the sample consisted of 898 students, made up of rural (n=64) and urban (n=834) students, and internal (n=203) and external (n=695) transitioning students. The Late Transition Questionnaire sample consisted of 722 participants, made up of rural (n=49) and urban (n=673) students, and internal (n=189) and external (n=533) transitioning students. Finally, the sample of the Parent Questionnaire consisted of 461 parents of rural (n=28) and urban (n=433) transitioning students, and internal transitioning (n=111) and external transitioning (n =350) students. Seven Catholic secondary schools across Tasmania were involved in the study, four of which have a Preparatory to Year 10 (or Year 12) structure.

Sizeable differences were found between rural and internal transitioning students' expectations and realities of transition across the social, academic and organisational dimensions, parental influence and transition programs scales. Results suggest the existing transition programs help ease rural and internal transitioning students' organisational and

social dimension concerns, but greater attention should be given to the academic dimension of transition.

This study presents three distinctive contributions to the understanding of the primary to secondary transition for rural and internal transitioning students. Firstly, existing transition programs need to incorporate more strategies that meet the academic needs of transitioning students. Secondly, internal transitioning students have a different set of transitioning needs and programs should be designed to cater for these students. Finally, in the context of the cohort in this study, pre-transition anti-bullying strategies appear to be effective in reducing the incidents and reporting of bullying post-transition.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the assistance and support of a number of people.

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Dr Brian Kean, for his advice, guidance and encouragement during the many stages of this study. Additionally, I would also thank Dr Robert Smith and Tony Yeigh for their advice during the completion of this thesis.

Secondly, my sincere thanks go to the students, parents, teachers, college principals and the Tasmanian Catholic Education Office for their willing participation in the study.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to my husband and children for their patience and love and for their belief in my ability to complete this challenge.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Thesis declaration	ii
Publications	iii
Abstract	iv
Acknowledgements	vi
List of Tables	xiii
List of Figures	xvi
Glossary of terms	xvii

CHAPTER 1 THESIS OVERVIEW

1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Background and justification for the study	2
	1.2.1 Geographic context	3
1.3	Significance of the study	7
1.4	Research questions	9
1.5	Purpose of the study	10
1.6	Limitations of the study	12
1.7	Overview of thesis	14

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

2.1	Introduction	16
2.2	Approaches to the middle years – historical context	17
2.3	The nature of transition	24
	2.3.1 Transition and adolescence	28
	2.3.2 Transition and academic success	36
2.4	Expectations	44
2.5	Lived reality	61

2.6	The small rural school context	72
2.6.1	Defining rural	72
2.6.2	The Tasmanian context	74
2.6.3	Rural schooling	75
2.6.4	The Tasmanian experience	78
2.7	Internal transition	81
2.8	Parental influence	82
2.9	Transition programs	86
2.9.1	Transition programs – a definition	87
2.9.2	A sense of belonging	88
2.9.3	Types of transition programs	90
2.10	Transition research methodology	99
2.11	Summary	102

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1	Introduction	105
3.2	Methodological orientation of the study	106
3.2.1	Methodological considerations	106
3.3	Sample design and procedures	109
3.3.1	Profiles of participating schools	110
3.3.2	Participants	111
3.4	Development of instruments	112
3.4.1	Survey instruments	113
3.5	Data collection procedures	129
3.5.1	Student surveys – Early Transition Questionnaire	129
3.5.2	Parent Questionnaire	130
3.5.3	Student surveys – Late Transition Questionnaire	131
3.6	Ethics	131
3.6.1	Consent	131
3.6.2	Privacy and confidentiality	131
3.6.3	Protection from harm	132

3.6.4	Consequences of participation and non-participation	132
3.7	Data organisation	132
3.8	Validation procedures	133
3.8.1	Composite variables	133
3.8.2	Assumption testing	134
3.8.3	Difference testing	135
3.8.4	Effect size	136
3.9	Statistical analysis methods	137
3.9.1	Student expectations of the primary to secondary transition	137
3.9.2	Student experiences of the primary to secondary transition	141
3.9.3	Differences between early and late transition for rural and internal transitioning students	145
3.9.4	The effectiveness of existing transition programs	145
3.9.5	Parents' perspectives of the transition process	146
3.10	Summary	148

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

4.1	Introduction	151
4.2	Student expectations of the primary to secondary transition	153
4.2.1	Rurality	153
4.2.2	Internal and external transition	162
4.3	Student experiences of the primary to secondary transition	169
4.3.1	Rurality	169
4.3.2	Internal and external transition	173
4.4	Differences between early and late transition for rural and internal transitioning students	177
4.4.1	Rurality	178
4.4.2	Internal and external transition	182
4.5	The effectiveness of existing transition programs	187
4.5.1	Rurality	188
4.5.2	Internal and external transition	191
4.6	Parents' perspectives of the transition process	194

4.6.1	Rurality	195
4.6.2	Internal and external transition	201
4.7	Summary	207

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION – RURALITY

5.1	Introduction	210
5.2	Difference between the expectations of the primary to secondary transition for rural and urban students	211
5.2.1	Social dimension	212
5.2.2	Academic dimension	214
5.2.3	Organisational dimension	216
5.2.4	Parental influence	218
5.3	Difference between the experiences of the primary to secondary transition for rural and urban students	219
5.3.1	Social dimension	219
5.3.2	Academic dimension	221
5.3.3	Organisational dimension	222
5.3.4	Parental influence	224
5.4	Differences between early and late transition for rural students	225
5.4.1	Social dimension	225
5.4.2	Academic dimension	226
5.4.3	Organisational dimension	227
5.4.4	Parental influence	229
5.5	Perceived effectiveness of existing transition programs	230
5.6	Parents' perspectives of the transition process	234
5.6.1	Social dimension	235
5.6.2	Academic dimension	235
5.6.3	Organisational dimension	236
5.6.4	Transition programs	237
5.7	Summary	238

CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION – INTERNAL TRANSITION

6.1	Introduction	241
6.2	Differences between the expectations of the primary to secondary transition for internal and external transitioning students	242
6.2.1	Social dimension	242
6.2.2	Academic dimension	245
6.2.3	Organisational dimension	247
6.2.4	Parental influence	249
6.3	Internal transitioning students' experiences of the primary to secondary transition process	250
6.3.1	Social dimension	251
6.3.2	Academic dimension	252
6.3.3	Organisational dimension	253
6.3.4	Parental influence	254
6.4	Differences between early and late transition for internal transitioning students	255
6.4.1	Social dimension	256
6.4.2	Academic dimension	257
6.4.3	Organisational dimension	258
6.4.4	Parental influence	259
6.5	Perceived effectiveness of existing transition programs	260
6.6	Parents' perspectives of the transition process	262
6.6.1	Social dimension	262
6.6.2	Academic dimension	263
6.6.3	Organisational dimension	264
6.6.4	Transition programs	265
6.7	Summary	265

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

7.1	Introduction	268
7.2	Summary of main findings	268
7.2.1	Rural students	269

7.2.2	Internal transitioning students	269
7.3	Further research and future directions	270
7.4	Limitations of study	273
7.5	Final remarks	274
REFERENCES		276
APPENDICES		
1	Approval letter from Tasmanian Catholic Education Office	295
2	Letter sent to college principals	297
3	Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) notification	301
4	Survey instruments: Early Transition Questionnaire, Late Transition Questionnaire, Parent Questionnaire	311
5	Student information sheet	323
6	Parent information sheet	326

LIST OF TABLES

		Page
1.1	School Organisational Structures Across Australian States and Territories, 2009	4
2.1	Differences Between Primary and Secondary Schools (Braggett, 1997, p.4)	27
2.2	An Overview of Current Literature on Student Expectations of Primary to Secondary Transition	56
2.3	An Overview of Current Literature on Student Experiences of the Primary to Secondary Transition	68
3.1	Description and a Sample Item for Each Scale in the Early Transition Questionnaire	114
3.2	Survey Items From Parent Questionnaires as Identified in Findings from Related Literature	116
3.3	Survey Items From Student Questionnaires as Identified in Findings from Related Literature	119
3.4	Differences in the Wording of Items in the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires	126
4.1	Rankings (%) and Contingency Table Analysis Results for Aspects of Transition that Most Excite Rural and Urban Students About Starting Secondary School	155
4.2	Rankings (%) and Contingency Table Analysis Results for the Aspects of Transition that Most Concern or Worry Rural and Urban Students About Starting Secondary School	157
4.3	Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Median and Standard Deviation) for Rural and Urban Students, and Results of Independent-samples <i>t</i> -tests or Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> Tests, for Variables Measuring the Scales of Social, Academic and Organisational Dimensions, and Parental Influence	159
4.4	Rankings (%) and Contingency Table Analysis Results for the Aspects of Transition that Most Excite Internal and External Transitioning Students About Starting Secondary School	163

4.5	Rankings (%) and Contingency Table Analysis Results for the Aspects of Transition that Most Concern or Worry Internal and External Transitioning Students About Starting Secondary School	164
4.6	Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Median and Standard Deviation) for Internal and External Transitioning Students, and Results of Independent-samples <i>t</i> -test or Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> Tests, for Variables Measuring the Scales of Social, Academic and Organisational Dimensions, and Parental Influence	166
4.7	Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Median and Standard Deviation) for Rural and Urban Students, and Results of Independent-samples <i>t</i> -test or Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> Tests, for Variables Measuring the Scales of Social, Academic and Organisational Dimensions, and Parental Influence	170
4.8	Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Median and Standard Deviation) for Internal and External Transitioning Students, and Results of Independent-samples <i>t</i> -test or Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> Tests, for Variables Measuring the Scales of Social, Academic and Organisational Dimensions, and Parental Influence	174
4.9	Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Median and Standard Deviation) for the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires for Variables Measuring the Scales of Social, Academic and Organisational Dimensions, and Parental Influence, Effect Size (<i>d</i>) and Results of <i>t</i> -tests for Paired-samples or Wilcoxon Signed-rank (<i>z</i>) Tests for Differences Across Rural Students' Transition	179
4.10	Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Median and Standard Deviation) for the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires for Variables Measuring the Scales of Social, Academic and Organisational Dimensions, and Parental Influence, Effect Size (<i>d</i>) and Results of <i>t</i> -tests for Paired-samples or Wilcoxon Signed-rank (<i>z</i>) Tests for Differences Across Internal Transitioning Students' Transition	183
4.11	Descriptive Statistics (Frequency) for Types of Primary to Secondary Transition Programs for Rural and Urban Students	188
4.12	Descriptive Statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) and Results of Independent-samples <i>t</i> -tests for Variables Measuring the Effectiveness of Transition Program Between the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires for Rural and Urban Students	189
4.13	Reported Mean and Standard Deviation for the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires for Variables Measuring the Effectiveness of Transition Programs, Effect Size (<i>d</i>) and Results of <i>t</i> -test for Paired-samples for Rural Students	190

4.14	Descriptive Statistics (Frequency) for Types of Primary to Secondary Transition Programs for Internal and External Transitioning Students	191
4.15	Descriptive Statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) and Results of Independent-samples <i>t</i> -test for Variables Measuring the Effectiveness of Transition Program on the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires for Internal and External Transitioning Students	192
4.16	Reported Mean and Standard Deviation for the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires for Variables Measuring the Effectiveness of Transition Programs, Effect Size (<i>d</i>) and Results of <i>t</i> -test for Paired-samples for Internal Transitioning Students	193
4.17	Rankings (%) and Contingency Table Analysis Results for the Aspects of Transition that Most Excite Rural and Urban Students About Starting Secondary School, as Identified by Parents	196
4.18	Rankings (%) and Contingency Table Analysis Results for the Aspects of Transition that Most Concern or Worry Rural and Urban Students About Starting Secondary School, as Identified by Parents	197
4.19	Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Median and Standard Deviation) for Parents of Rural and Urban Transitioning Students, and Results of the Independent-samples <i>t</i> -test or Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> Tests, for Variables Measuring the Scales of Social, Academic and Organisational Dimensions, and Transition Programs	198
4.20	Rankings (%) and Contingency Table Analysis Results for the Aspects of Transition that Most Excite Internal and External Transitioning Students About Starting Secondary School, as Identified by Parents	202
4.21	Rankings (%) and Contingency Table Analysis Results for the Aspects of Transition that Most Concern or Worry Internal and External Transitioning Students About Starting Secondary School, as Identified by Parents	203
4.22	Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Median and Standard Deviation) for Parents of Internal and External Transitioning Students, and Results of Independent-samples <i>t</i> -test or Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> Tests, for Variables Measuring the Scales of Social, Academic and Organisational Dimensions, and Transition Programs	205

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
1.1 Map of Tasmania showing the South, North and North-West regions	6

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Internal transitioning students

These students attend a primary campus which is part of a combined primary to secondary college. These students, while still enrolled at the same school, move to the secondary campus of the school during the primary to secondary transition. Generally, these students experience a change in the physical environment, including teachers and their cohort of students grows larger as more students enrol from primary schools outside this structure.

External transitioning students

These students attend a primary school completely independent from the destination secondary school. Students must make an application for enrolment to the intending secondary school.

CHAPTER 1

THESIS OVERVIEW

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to examine the primary to secondary transition process and to investigate whether the experiences of moving into the secondary school meet students' expectations pre-transition. During the final weeks of Year 6, students begin the transition process through various activities, such as school tours and information sessions. The effectiveness of these transition strategies in easing transition concerns is also explored. Parents' perspectives of this primary to secondary transition are also investigated in this study.

This study focuses on the primary to secondary transition for two key groups of students within Catholic colleges in Tasmania. The first focus group is comprised of students transitioning from small rural primary schools to larger urban secondary schools. The study's purpose here is to establish whether rural students' expectations of the primary to secondary transition process are realised, to compare their expectations with students from urban areas, and to gauge the effectiveness of available transition programs.

The second focus group contains students transitioning within Catholic schools which have the extended Preparatory to Year 10 (or Preparatory to Year 12) structure. This is referred to in this study as an 'internal transition'. With both focus groups, the study's aim is to explore expectations and realities of the primary to secondary transition, to make comparisons with students transitioning outside this particular schooling structure (external transition) and to examine the type and effectiveness of existing transition programs.

Finally, transition does not occur for the student in isolation. Parents play an important role in the way students make the transition from primary to secondary school. Parenting styles and involvement in their child's schooling are associated with academic achievement and

with feelings of connectedness for students. It is suggested that the way in which parents perceive school and communicate this perspective can influence the transition experience of their children (Arrowsafe & Irvin, 1992; Lucey & Reay, 2000). Subsequently, this study also aims to examine parents' perspectives of their children's expectations about the primary to secondary.

This chapter provides the background to and justification for the current study. It outlines the significance of the study and identifies the research problems and questions which have been derived from the literature. It details the purpose of the study. Finally, an overview of the thesis is provided.

1.2 Background and justification for the study

Currently, at the end of each school year, many Year 6 students across Australia are preparing for the transition into secondary education and have developed a set of expectations about the impending change. Whether the actual experience is worse or better than anticipated may have an effect on the academic, social and organisational dimensions of their secondary education.

The study will primarily focus on two key groups. The first group involves rural primary school students because, unlike their larger primary school counterparts in towns and cities, they have unique characteristics. Generally, rural students have attended primary schools which are small in size, which service a small student population, and in a situation which enables teachers to develop a deep understanding and knowledge of each student's strengths and weaknesses (Cunningham, Choate, Abbott-Chapman & Hughes, c.1995; Johnstone, 2001; Pereira & Pooley, 2007; Swidler, 2000). Furthermore, the literature suggests strong links are often established between the school and the community, taking on a family-like nature (Fischer, 1995; Johnstone, 2001; Montgomery, Bull & Cutbirth, 1995; Nachtigal, 1992; Pietarinen, 1998).

The second group, those students whose transition is internal, firstly attend a primary campus which is part of a combined primary to secondary college. These students, while still enrolled at the same school, move to the secondary campus of the school during the primary to secondary transition. Generally, these students experience a change in environment, including teachers and their cohort of students grows larger as more students enrol from primary schools outside this structure. The expectations and realities of the transition process particularly need to be explored for these students because, in Tasmania, three quarters of Catholic colleges, as well as the independent sector, have this schooling structure. However, as the literature review will reveal, research on the transition of these students is non-existent.

Furthermore, the number of schools with a similar structure is increasing in Australia. Figures from the Independent Schools Council of Australia (2009) indicate a growing proportion of students enrolling in the independent schooling sector, which increased from 4% in 1970 to 14% in 2008. Given that 61% of all independent schools have a combined primary and secondary structure, it is evident that the number of students undertaking an internal transition is also increasing. Subsequently, further research is warranted into the transition experiences for internal transitioning students.

This current study will also examine the effectiveness of existing transition programs for students undertaking transition. The incorporation and implementation of transition programs at both the pre- and post-transition phases can affect the way in which students adjust to their new environment. Additionally, parents play a vital role in the way students view transition. An examination of parents' perspectives about transition may give further insight into the process.

1.2.1 Geographic context

In Australia, the responsibility for school education lies with the relative state and territory governments, as outlined in The Commonwealth of Australia *Constitution Act, 1900*. Schooling is compulsory in Australia but the organisational structure is left to the states and territories. As Table 1.1 indicates most children across Australia generally commence full-time education between five and six years of age. What is also evident from Table 1.1 is that

the transition from primary to secondary education varies across a number of states and territories.

Table 1.1

School Organisational Structures Across Australian States and Territories, 2009

Year level	TAS	VIC	NSW	ACT	SA	NT	QLD	WA
12								
11								
10								
9								
8					SECONDARY			
7	SECONDARY				PRIMARY			
6	PRIMARY							
5								
4								
3								
2								
1							First year of compulsory schooling	
5-6 years of age	Preparatory	Preparatory	Kinder-Garten	Kinder-garten	Reception	Transition	Preparatory	Pre-primary
							Not compulsory	

Compiled from data on Australian state and territory governments' Department of Education websites

Table 1.1 indicates the commencement ages for compulsory schooling differ across Australian states and territories. With the exception of Queensland and Western Australia, compulsory schooling commences at the pre-Year 1 stage (Queensland Government, 2009; Western Australia Department of Education and Training, 2009b). Table 1.1 indicates that in

New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory, students undertake the primary to secondary transition between their seventh and eighth year of full-time schooling (around twelve years of age). On the other hand, for students in South Australia, the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia, the primary to secondary transition occurs between the eighth and ninth year of compulsory schooling, at approximately thirteen years of age.

At the other end of school life, the age at which students are able to complete their education also differs across states and territories. The Australian Capital Territory, Northern Territory and New South Wales students are able to leave school at fifteen years of age (Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training, 2007; New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2009; Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, 2009). Victoria raised the school leaving age from fifteen to sixteen years in 2008 (Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008). In Tasmania, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia, a student who has completed Year 10 or turned sixteen is required to participate in further education or training for a further two years, or until they have gained a Certificate III vocational qualification, or they turn seventeen (Queensland Government, 2008; South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services, 2009; Tasmania Department of Education, 2008; Western Australia Department of Education and Training, 2009a).

Turning to the structures within Tasmania, the state is geographically divided into three regions – referred to as the North, North-West and South, as shown in Figure 1.1. Education systems, in particular the Catholic Education Office, use these regions to administer educational services.

Figure 1.1

Map of Tasmania Showing the South, North and North-West Regions (Australian Government: Caring for our country funded projects, 2010)



As displayed in Figure 1.1, there are two large regional centres located in the North-West of Tasmania. Firstly, Burnie, with a population of approximately nineteen thousand, was initially established as a pastoral area. The discovery of mineral deposits pre-World War I, and the establishment of a pulp mill, post-World War I, led to a steady increase in the area's population.

Secondly, Devonport, located on the Mersey River, is primarily a North-West regional service centre, servicing the twenty five thousand people who dwell in the rural and semi-rural hinterland that surrounds it. Devonport is considered a major sea gateway as it provides port facilities that link Tasmania to mainland Australia and to other nations.

Launceston is the largest urban area in the North of the state. Located on the Tamar River, it was established in the early 1800s and grew as a service centre for surrounding pastoralists. Launceston grew in size and population when tin and gold were found in the region. Today the city has a population of just under 100,000 people.

In the South, Hobart, located on the Derwent River, is the capital city and administrative centre for the state of Tasmania. Currently, Hobart has a population of approximately 205,000 people. Historically, Hobart was established as a penal colony and later developed as

a major whaling and ship-building location. Due to its isolation, Hobart experienced slow population and economic growth. The depth of the Derwent River has led to Hobart becoming a major shipping port and it is known colloquially as the 'Gateway to Antarctica'.

The schooling structure in secondary education in Tasmania is slightly different from many other states in Australia. Within the major urban areas, government secondary schools have been established with a Year 7 to Year 10, or Preparatory to Year 10 structure. Once students complete Year 10, they move to senior colleges to complete their secondary education. Within the Catholic Education Office, this model is generally used for secondary education in the south. Similarly, the Independent School Sector is generally established on the Preparatory to Year 12 model.

1.3 Significance of the study

Internationally and historically, interest in school transitions is not a new phenomenon. The systematic transition is an annual event, signalling a movement away from what is familiar and clearly understood, to the unfamiliar environment of the next stage of schooling. From any perspective – that of students', parents' or teachers' – it is clear that this process can cause feelings of apprehension and anxiety, but also feelings of excitement and expectation.

In Australia, the primary to secondary school transition occurs around the same time as the onset of puberty. Current research suggests simultaneous transitions have an affect on student self-esteem, self-concept and self perception (Elias, Gara & Ubriaco, 1985; Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996; Kinney, 1993; Simmons, Carlton-Ford & Blyth, 1987; Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman & Midgley, 1991), friendships (Berndt & Hawkins, 1985) and academic achievement and performance (Alspaugh, 1998a, 1998b; Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, Reuman, Mac Iver & Feldlaufer, 1993; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). Subsequently, school transitions have layers of complexity that must be considered.

Additionally, the different cultures between the primary and secondary school environments must also be reconciled by transitioning students. Braggett (1997, p. 41) characterises

primary schools as being smaller in size, and as having an integrated curriculum, flexible timetables, a core teacher for each class and close proximity to home. On the other hand, secondary schools have specialist teachers, are timetable driven, are larger in size, involve regular student movement around the school, have a less integrated curriculum and students often have further to travel home.

Considering the timing of transition with the commencement of adolescence and the changing nature of secondary schools compared with primary schools described above, transition can be an overwhelming process for students. For students from small rural schools, this impending change can be further complicated by the current culture and climate of the local primary school in which classes are small and strong connections are made between students and teachers and the local community (Cunningham et al., c.1995; Fischer, 1995; Johnstone, 2001; McKenzie, Harrold & Sturman, 1996; Montgomery et al., 1995; Nachtigal, 1992; Pereira & Pooley, 2007; Pietarinen, 1998). Furthermore, the ease in which students from small rural schools adjust to the primary to secondary transition can be affected by their isolation or by the distance from home to the secondary school. Transport requirements affect rural students' involvement in extra-curricular activities and their ability to access educational services (Cheers, 1987; Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000; Johnstone, 2001; Pereira & Pooley, 2007).

The research literature on transition emphasises the importance of transition programs to make the process as smooth as possible, decreasing the anxiety levels of all students and limiting the negative impact that transition may have on certain individuals. In the past, programs for school transitions tended to focus on the organisational aspects of transition which include school tours, orientation days and visits by secondary staff. In the last decade, research and literature on school transition advocate for transition programs to focus on developing a sense of belonging for transitioning students (Akos, Hamm, Mack & Dunaway, 2007; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Galassi & Akos, 2007; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Osterman, 2000). A sense of belonging is identified in the literature as being associated with increased motivation, academic performance, relationship development and group cohesiveness (Akos,

Hamm, Mack & Dunaway, 2007; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2009; Grossman & Cooney, 2009; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Osterman, 2000).

Adolescence is a time when students are searching for identity (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2007). The primary to secondary transition can cause mixed emotions for many students undertaking the process. Each individual student develops certain expectations about the change. The type of transition programs that are implemented before and during transition also influences the way that students adjust to secondary school.

For the two key groups of students identified in this study the primary to secondary transition includes other factors which may influence transition expectations and experience. For rural students the transition process has added factors, such as the long distances travelled to get to secondary school, and a change in the culture of the learning environment which may influence expectations and experiences. On the other hand, the number of students undertaking an internal transition is increasing across Tasmania, as well as Australia, and expectations and experience of the primary to secondary transition may be considerably different for these students. Given the lack of previous research in the area of internal transitions it would be worthwhile investigating the primary to secondary transition for this group of students.

1.4 Research questions

Numerous research questions were derived from the existing literature on the primary to secondary transition process.

The central question for this research is as follows:

What differences exist between the expectations and realities of the primary to secondary transition for students (a) from small rural schools, and (b) experiencing an internal transition?

The study, especially the data gathering process, was guided by the following five questions:

1. Do the expectations of the primary to secondary transition differ between (a) rural and urban students, and (b) internal and external transitioning students?
2. Do the experiences of the primary to secondary transition differ between (a) rural and urban students, and (b) internal and external transitioning students?
3. What differences exist between expectation and reality for students (a) from small rural schools, and (b) experiencing an internal transition, within the scales of social, academic and organisational dimensions, and parental influence?
4. What were the perspectives of the effectiveness of existing transition programs for (a) rural students, and (b) internal transitioning students?
5. What are the differences in perspective of the transition process for parents of (a) rural and urban students, and (b) internal and external transitioning students?

Research questions one and two, in which the expectations and experiences of rural and urban and internal and external transitioning students are compared, were developed to add richness to the findings of this study and to guide the data gathering process. However, question three has been developed within the scope of the current study, which focuses on the differences between expectation and reality of transition in a number of scales for two key groups of students, which include rural and internal transitioning students.

1.5 Purpose of the study

This study aims to investigate the expectations and experiences of the primary to secondary transition. It has a focus on rural students and internal transitioning students and examines the process in five scales: social, academic and organisational dimensions, parental influence, and transition programs. An examination of parents' perspectives about the primary to secondary transition process is also included.

There is a need to examine the primary to secondary transition for rural students for two main reasons. Firstly, in a number of previous studies the terms 'rural' and 'urban' have not been

clearly defined or are inconsistent across different studies (Alspaugh 1998a, 1988b; Cocklin, 1999; Fan & Chen, 1999; Johnstone, 2001; Pereira & Pooley, 2007; Pietarinen, 1998). The criteria used to define 'rural' are also used inconsistently across existing research and literature (Castles, 1986; Commonwealth School Commission, 1987; Cunningham et al., c.1995; Griffith, 1992; Meyenn, Sinclair & Squires, 1991; New South Wales Education Commission, 1984). Subsequently, it is difficult to compare and contrast studies with a rural focus given these discrepancies.

Secondly, current research and literature on Australian primary to secondary transition exist in a variety of rural and urban contexts (Cocklin, 1999; Cotterell, 1979; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Johnstone, 2001; Longaretti, 2006). Much of the work carried out is centred in other countries such as the United States (Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Alspaugh, 1998a, 1998b; Alspaugh & Harting, 1995; Arth, 1990; Benner & Graham, 2009; Blyth, Bush & Simmons, 1978; Maute & Brough, 2002; Odegaard & Heath, 1992; Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Smith, Akos, Lim & Wiley, 2008), Israel (Shacher, Suss & Sharan, 2002), the United Kingdom (Ashton, 2008; Brown & Armstrong, 1982, 1986; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Diemert, 1992; Gillison, Standage & Skevington, 2008; Graham & Hill, 2003; Lucey & Reay, 2001; Measor & Woods, 1984; Pratt & George, 2004; Weller, 2007) and Finland (Pietarinen, 1998). However, the current research on rural Australian primary to secondary transition is not extensive and the majority of literature can be found in conference papers (Cocklin, 1999; Johnstone, 2001, 2002; Howard & Johnson, 2004). Given the inconsistencies about the definition of 'rural' in Australia, there can be some limitations when generalising studies from the international arena. Furthermore, the structure of the school systems in these countries often differs from those in Australia and therefore findings from these studies may be unreliable, as students undergoing school transition may not be the same age as those undertaking the primary to secondary transition in Australia. There is a need, therefore, to conduct a study which explores the primary to secondary transition for students from rural and urban settings within an Australian context.

Additionally, as the number of students undertaking an internal transition across both the state of Tasmania and the nation is increasing, it is important to examine and compare their

expectations and experiences with external transitioning students. While not changing schools, students in this schooling structure still undergo a transition as they generally move to a new physical environment, such as a new campus, experience a variety of specialist teachers, a more rigid timetable and movement across learning spaces. As indicated, the current literature on this transition experience is non-existent and therefore a study into this process is warranted.

To undertake this task, this study of primary to secondary transition will have two focus groups. It will examine and report significant differences between the expectations and the lived experiences of the primary to secondary transition for rural and internal transitioning students. The types of existing transition programs will be identified and participants' perspective of the effectiveness of these transition programs, for rural and internal transitioning students, will be examined. Finally, parents' expectations about their children's transition into secondary school, as well as their perspective of the effectiveness of existing transition programs, will be investigated.

1.6 Limitations of the study

The longitudinal nature of this study features pre- and post-transition student data collection. A characteristic of the primary to secondary transition involves Year 6 students from numerous primary schools coming together to fashion the Year 7 cohort of a larger secondary school, which may create complexity in terms of the timing of data collection for this study. The timing of the administration of the questionnaire may influence responses on the instrument which will be used to measure the expectations of the primary to secondary transition. It is important to collect data closely to the pre-transition stage for students. Given the study is set across seven secondary colleges within Tasmania, the first phase of data collection is in the initial days of secondary schooling. Students will have left primary school behind two months earlier when levels of fear and anxiety are generally at their peak. The post-transition phase is designed to be administered three months into the school year, at a time when students are considered to be settled into their new environment, and the data collected will be valid for the research purpose.

A limitation of this study is the quantitative research methods which have been drawn from the positivist paradigm. As the instruments for data collection are questionnaires the measurement process may be inaccurate as the association between the established measures and the concepts that they are trying to reveal may be assumed rather than authentic. Additionally, quantitative research methodology assumes that participants have the knowledge required to respond to items on the questionnaire and that they have a sense that the items are important.

Another impediment of longitudinal studies which may have implications for this study is attrition. The reasons behind this may be numerous but for this study it may be a result of absenteeism on the day schools administer the questionnaire, or schools not administering all the questionnaires to all students for various in-school organisational problems. The problem of attrition presents limitations for this study as it may diminish the representativeness of findings across settings.

Although the total sample size of this study will be substantial, the sample size of the two key groups, rural and internal transitioning students, may be relatively small, which may affect the representativeness of findings. Furthermore, while efforts are made to cover a diverse range of schooling contexts across Tasmania, the study only involves schools within the Catholic Education system and not the other sectors, most prominently the Tasmanian Department of Education or Independent Schools Board. Subsequently, it will be important to proceed with caution when declaring findings and judgements and extrapolating findings to other schools and sectors.

Additional complications include the development of the questionnaires. Previous studies on the transition for rural students in Australia (Cocklin, 1999; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Johnstone, 2001, 2002) have involved qualitative methodology or a mixed method approach, rather than a quantitative methodology, while no previous Australian research exists on the transition of internal transitioning students. Consequently, new instruments were developed, which have further issues in ensuring that they have validity and reliability, as well as comparability of data. For this study, this involves ensuring the initial round of data

collection anticipates and includes variables that will be attended to at the post-transition phase.

Given these limitations, the findings of this research have the potential to provide valuable insight into the primary to secondary transition for both rural and internal transitioning students, and to suggest whether or not differences exist between their expectations and experiences of the process.

1.7 Overview of thesis

The remainder of the thesis will be developed in the following way:

Chapter two reviews the literature on the primary to secondary transition. It is divided into eight main sections. *Section 2.2* explores the approaches to the middle years of education in Australia. *Section 2.3* examines the nature of transition, including its timing with adolescence, and its effects on academic achievement. Student expectations of transition are reviewed in *section 2.4* and the lived reality of transition in *section 2.5*. The small rural school context, including the Tasmanian experience, is considered in *section 2.6*. *Section 2.7* discusses the limited research on the internal transition process. *Section 2.8* investigates the impact of parental influences on student expectations and experiences of transition. Finally, the effectiveness of existing transition programs and the types of transition programs undertaken during transition are explored in *section 2.9*.

Chapter three discusses the methodology used in this study. The methodological orientation of the study is outlined in *section 3.2*. *Section 3.3* describes the sample design and procedures, including a brief description of participating colleges. The development of the survey instruments is detailed in *section 3.4*. *Section 3.5* outlines the data collection procedures. Ethical issues are addressed in *section 3.6*. *Section 3.7* outlines the processes involved in data organisation. Validation procedures are described in *section 3.8*. *Section 3.9* outlines the statistical analysis methods used to address each of the research questions outlined in *section 1.4*.

Chapter four outlines the findings associated with the use of the instruments and addresses the key research questions in relation to the two focus groups: rural and internal transitioning students.

Chapter five presents a discussion of the findings for rural students and relates the findings to the literature review. Each research question is addressed and treated in order of its presentation in chapter one.

Chapter six discusses the findings from the research for internal transitioning students and relates the findings to the literature. Each research question is addressed in order of its presentation in chapter one.

Chapter seven is the final chapter and presents a summary of the main findings, makes recommendations for future research, considers the limitations of this study and concludes with some final remarks.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

At the commencement of each school year, thousands of students across the country make the transition from primary school student to secondary school student. In the months leading up to this time, students are filled with much anxiety and apprehension but also excitement about the journey ahead. For many students the transition into secondary school is viewed as a series of challenges to be overcome, while others see this period as an opportunity waiting to be explored. However, a study of the literature reveals that for many students the lived reality is not what was expected in the months preceding this stage in life. For some, the reality is worse than anticipated, while for others the transition process is relatively smooth as they negotiate the hurdles of secondary school life.

The aim of this study is to examine the primary to secondary transition process and to investigate whether the experiences of moving into the secondary school meets students' expectations pre-transition, within a wide location range of Tasmanian Catholic secondary colleges. In particular, this study focuses on students transitioning from small rural schools and students undertaking an internal transition. The effectiveness of transition programs in the process is also investigated, as well as parents' perspectives of the transition process.

This chapter discusses the literature associated with the transition from primary to secondary school. It begins by reviewing the historical context of the approaches to middle years reform with a focus on Australia, and in particular on Tasmania (*section 2.2*), and then considers the nature of transition (*section 2.3*). It includes an investigation of the literature on the association between adolescence, transition and academic success. An overview of the extensive research into students' expectations (*section 2.4*) and lived reality (*section 2.5*) of the transition process is provided. The complexities and characteristics of rural schooling are

presented (*section 2.6*), including a focus on Tasmania, as well as a discussion of the lack of research on internal transitions (*section 2.7*). This chapter also provides an overview of the research literature on the importance of parental influence during transition (*section 2.8*), as well as a discussion on transition program research and literature (*section 2.9*). Finally, the research methodology of existing literature on the expectations and experiences of transition will be reviewed (*section 2.10*).

2.2 Approaches to the middle years – historical context

During the latter half of the 1900s, educationalists and governing bodies in Australia were increasingly concerned about students in the middle years of schooling. Middle years are defined as the period of schooling experienced by young adolescents, generally from ten to fourteen years of age (Carrington, 2006, p. 101). On the other hand, ‘middle schooling’ is an organisational term to describe the schooling which connects primary and secondary school education by responding to the developmental needs of adolescents (Barratt, 1998, p. 1).

Reform in the middle years occurred at the organisational level, including changes to processes and structures within schools or systems of schools, as well as at state and federal levels, through educational authorities and organisations. Similar concerns and processes were also occurring in the United Kingdom, which is important to understand within the Australian context because, historically, Australia had drawn on many aspects of English schooling in its own educational approaches and structures. The following section examines some of the responses to an increasing awareness of the issues around the middle years learner. It commences with a brief overview of the development of middle schools in England and then focuses attention on the Australian context, exploring some of the national, state and territory responses. It concludes with an examination of curriculum development in relation to middle years learners in Tasmania.

In brief, the United Kingdom placed the transition from primary school to secondary school on the national agenda in the 1960s. The Plowden Report (1967), commissioned by the Central Advisory Council for Education (England) and under the chairmanship of Lady

Plowden, reviewed primary education and the transition to secondary education. The age of transition was considered and the report recommended that the age of transition, from the primary school to the secondary school, should be later than the traditional eleven years. The report recommended the establishment of middle schools to cater for students in the middle years. The report also stated that middle schools must “develop further the curriculum, methods and attitudes which exist at present in junior schools” (The Plowden Report, 1967, p. 146).

The British Government neither accepted nor rejected the recommendations but the 1968 Education Act did legalise the establishment of middle schools by local educational authorities in Britain and a new education structure was born (Blyth, 1980). The first middle schools opened in the late 1960s and by 1974 there were over 1,200 middle schools in England (Hargreaves & Tickle, 1980, p. 4). Hargreaves (1986, p. 5) suggests the vision of the middle school was to provide a “zone of transition” between the primary and secondary school. However, Hargreaves also argues that middle schools were developed, in part, for educational reasons but also as a matter of administrative convenience. The establishment of middle schools would mean these middle school organisations would fit into existing buildings left from the restructuring from selective secondary schooling to comprehensive secondary schooling.

The approach to the middle years has been considerably different in Australia. In 1955 the New South Wales government commissioned a report, entitled the Wyndham Report, to conduct a survey on secondary education. It was the first time that a major review had been conducted in Australia which focused, in part, on the middle years of schooling. Within this report, the transition from primary to secondary education was examined at a time when the government was considering a move away from the practice of predetermining primary school students’ selection into courses and into secondary schools.

The Wyndham Report (1955) considered four models to address issues associated with the middle years. These included an extension of the primary school allowing students to stay for longer periods of time; a similar organisational pattern to the American system – a “6-3-3”

organisation; intermediate schools, based on the New Zealand organisational models; and a transition year which would enable students to adjust to their new school environment (New South Wales, 1955, pp. 70-71). After consideration, the report recommended that the transition to secondary school required a more “elastic type of provision” (p. 72) and, subsequently, all students should transition from the primary school to secondary school without any type of examination. Secondary schools should provide a satisfactory education for all adolescents, with the transition being around the age of twelve years.

Almost forty years later, the Schools Council (1993) published a report entitled *In the Middle: Schooling for Young Adolescents* which analysed national policies and practices, considered current issues and recommended future directions for compulsory education in the middle years. In the introductory section of the report, education in Years 6-10 in Australia was referred to as the “forgotten years”, the “Cinderella section” or the “neglected period” of schooling in Australia (Schools Council, 1993, p. 3).

Following the circulation of a major Discussion Paper (Schools Council, 1992), which emphasised the importance of general education as the basis for future direction, and nation-wide visits to Australian schools, the Schools’ Council’s main premise was to review the appropriateness of existing structures and educational processes. In summary, the report recommended that the quality of middle schooling should be challenging, responsive and empowering, and that its organisational structures must be flexible, smaller rather than larger, and humane. Furthermore, teachers at this level should aim to promote increased understanding, positive relationships, practical support and student participation. Learning needs to be purposeful, self-directed and cooperative (Schools Council, 1993, p. 106).

The mid 1990s saw publications of other national reports on middle years learners and education as part of the National Middle Schooling Project, funded by the Federal Government through the Australian Curriculum Studies Association. As part of this project, *From Alienation to Engagement: Opportunities for Reform in the Middle Years of Schooling* (Cumming, 1996; Cormack, 1996) was published. This report aimed to address the challenges facing educational organisations at the time, including the increasing awareness

that not all students were achieving optimal outcomes within the traditional structure and organisation of primary and secondary schools (Cormack, 1996, p. vi).

Cumming (1996) made a number of statements which expressed concerns about the middle years of schooling, as well as some suggestions. The project suggested a number of strategies to better reduce student alienation at this stage. Some of these strategies associated with the middle years include the notion of a designated stage of schooling to best meet the needs of students from Years 5 to 8, as well as a total approach encompassing curriculum, school organisation, pedagogy and the physical environment. Additionally, Cumming suggested that the development of teaching teams could provide curriculum support; providing challenging and relevant activities to help engage students in their learning.

The need for a different approach to schooling for the 10-15 year olds in Australia, with an emphasis on academic needs and educational conditions, was acknowledged in *Shaping Middle Schooling in Australia: Report of the National Schooling Project* (Barratt, 1998). This project was established as a result of the recommendations *From Alienation to Engagement: Opportunities for Reform in the Middle Years of Schooling* report (Cumming, 1996; Cormack, 1996).

The future for middle schooling, as outlined in the report, was to advance the learning capacity of all students and to achieve meaningful outcomes which would benefit students and their communities. An holistic approach to teaching and learning, as well as assessment and reporting, was recommended for middle schooling. Subsequently, specific recommendations emerging from the report included the undertaking of longitudinal studies to determine the effectiveness of middle school reforms; implementation of literacy and numeracy projects; the creation of a network of middle school officers; an international conference on middle schooling; funding provision for professional development, and the creation of a web site for middle schooling (Barratt, 1998).

Another national level report on middle schooling and middle years learners was *Middle Schooling for the Middle Years: What might the jury be considering?* (Chadbourne, 2001).

The purpose of this report was to raise issues pertaining to the development of policy and perspectives in the middle years, as well as the values of middle schooling for Australia's indigenous students. The report discussed issues associated with middle schooling but did not make any recommendations. Some of the issues raised include the definition of middle schooling, the needs of adolescents, pedagogy, stages of development, reforms and innovations, teacher's work, and indigenous students.

Most recently, the 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, an agreed agenda for schooling developed by federal, state and territory governments, specifically identified middle years development as an important component of improving educational outcomes for all young Australians (Ministerial Advisory Council on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs, 2008). This focus on the middle years of schooling was not found in the Adelaide Declaration, which preceded the Melbourne Declaration, and was presented nine years earlier (Ministerial Advisory Council on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs, 1999), nor the earlier Hobart Declaration (Ministerial Advisory Council on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs, 1989).

In the section on middle years, the Melbourne Declaration states that student engagement is central to learning and effective transitions between primary and secondary schools are an important factor in student engagement. The Melbourne Declaration commits schools to providing "programs that are responsive to students' developmental and learning needs in the middle years, and which are challenging, engaging and rewarding" (Ministerial Advisory Council on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs, 2008, p. 12).

The interest and energy dedicated to the middle years of schooling have been reflected in these national publications as well as others devoted to middle schooling issues, such as Aboriginal issues (Groome & Hamilton, 1995), lifelong learning (Pendergast, Flanagan, Land, Bahr, Mitchell, Weir et al., 2005), innovation (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005), literacy and numeracy (Hill, 1995), attendance and retention (Dwyer, 1996) and resources (Prescott, 1995). Over the last decade, state and territory governments have

also commissioned reports on middle schooling and middle years learners as well as examining the structure of organisations. Some of these publications are reviewed below.

In New South Wales, the future of middle years was considered and reported in *One size doesn't fit all* (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2005), as well as in a report entitled *Excellence and Innovation*, promoting the implementation of strategies aimed specifically at the middle years learner (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2004). A review of junior secondary schooling with a focus on educating young adolescents, including a publication entitled *Case Studies on Middle Schooling*, was undertaken in South Australia (The Australian Curriculum Studies Association, 1993). In Queensland, *The Middle Phase of Learning State School Action Plan* was developed around five key areas - focus and accountability, curriculum, teaching and assessment, achievement, transition and teachers - to target middle years learners in state schools (Queensland Education, 2004). Finally, Victoria also called for changes in the approach to the middle years, especially in regard to a school's physical environment and organisational procedures, such as timetable and classroom layouts (Victorian Department of Education and Training, 2006).

Carrington (2003) provides an overview of the research and reforms in middle years since the early 1990s. Carrington states that the 1990s saw middle schooling reforms that focused on the capacities and needs of adolescents, with a particular focus on the issues of alienation and disengagement. Carrington suggests that future reforms must take into account the particular context of the adolescent, such as changing communication and information technology. Reform must also focus on the pedagogy, the curriculum and the assessment procedures which are relevant to the young adolescent.

Groundwater-Smith, Mitchell and Mockler (2007) propose that, in general, Australian middle years reforms have tended to be aimed at the primary to secondary transition, involve both curriculum innovations which move towards a flexible structure and away from prescriptive models, and a student centred pedagogy, which promotes teacher collaboration and a negotiated curriculum. Furthermore, Groundwater-Smith et al. (2007, p. 47) categorise the

Australian states and territories as following one of two approaches to middle school reform. The first are those which have devised and implemented specific strategies and interventions, and include Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia. On the other hand, New South Wales, Tasmania and South Australia have incorporated strategies and interventions for learners in the middle years as part of their broader curriculum overviews.

In Tasmania, in 2000, the Tasmanian Minister for Education released the *Learning Together* policy statement on education. While not specifically addressing middle years reform, this document aimed to review the Tasmanian education system. After a period of community consultation and research, the *Essential Learnings Framework* curriculum was developed. Five “essentials” formed the basis of the curriculum and included Thinking, Communicating, Personal Futures, Social Responsibility, and World Futures (Tasmanian Department of Education, 2005, p. 1). Strategies, identified as key in middle school reform, were used as guiding principles of the *Essential Learnings Framework* and include principal teacher classes (in which one teacher has the primary responsibility for one class of students in order to build a strong sense of connectedness), teacher collaboration, team structure incorporating grade teams, and a timetable minimising movement and change.

Commencing in 2005, the *Essential Learnings Framework* was to be phased in over five years with full implementation in 2009. However, professional and public concern about the complexities involved in implementing the framework led to the development of a new curriculum, *The Tasmanian Curriculum*, to be implemented from 2008. This new curriculum focused on recognised subject areas, learning opportunities which interest and challenge students, teaching for understanding, and an emphasis on students acquiring thinking and information and communication technology skills (Tasmanian Department of Education, 2008). As schools in Tasmania await the development and implementation of a new Australian curriculum for 2011, there is no requirement for Catholic schools in Tasmania to implement The Tasmanian Curriculum.

While the United Kingdom’s approach to middle years reform resulted in a restructuring of the schooling system, Australia’s approach has been somewhat different. Numerous

publications and reports commissioned by educational bodies called for middle years reform to respond to disengagement and poor academic performance. More recently, the importance of learners in the middle years has been identified by the 2008 *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. However, the historical response from states and territories across Australia has not been consistent, following one of two approaches: either through identified strategies or through broader curriculum reform, such as Tasmania's Essential Learning Framework and the more recent Tasmanian Curriculum.

2.3 The nature of transition

Over the last 30 years, the primary to secondary transition has been a frequent topic of research literature and studies. Researchers have examined transition and its effect on adolescents in relation to motivation, self-esteem, psychological distress, relationships, depression, self-perception and academic success, among others. However, before examining the research literature on adolescence and the association with transition and academic success, it is essential that we look at the nature of the transition itself.

The move from the primary school into the secondary school can be a difficult time in life. While putting their studies into context, Summerfield (1986, p. 11), in an investigation of academic performance following transition, described the primary to secondary transition as a move from being the oldest, most responsible students in a school setting, to being the youngest and least knowing. Hargreaves and Earl (1990), in a review of selected research about schooling in the transition years, describe the process as a rite of passage and associate secondary school transitions as a status passage to adulthood. Additionally, in a study on adjustment following transition, Dowling (1986, p. 87) suggests that transition may involve the loss of established friendships, as peers may move onto different secondary schools as well as multiple teachers.

Hirsh and Rapkin's (1987, p. 1235) study of the psychological well-being of students transitioning to junior high school bluntly state that the transition is "the end of childhood and the beginning of adolescence" and with it comes significant psychological, cognitive,

social and environmental changes. Additionally, Dowling (1986, p. 87) and Perkins and Gelfer (1995, p. 171) in their paper on planning for transition also put forward that school transitions involve an adjustment to a new physical, social and organisational environment.

The difference in cultures at different levels of schooling in the United States has been identified in previous literature. In a study on achievement loss during the transition process, Alsbaugh (1998a, p. 20) describes elementary schools as task oriented, while middle schools are performance oriented. Moreover, at the middle school, the teacher-student relationship changes as teachers only have students for a shorter period of time but students experience a diverse range of teachers and peers. In their paper on making a successful transition to high school Mizelle and Irvin (2000) state that high school students have more choices about curriculum and extracurricular activities, and school work is more demanding and difficult.

Education in Australia follows a three tier model which comprises primary education followed by secondary education and finally, tertiary education. Primary education is the first stage of compulsory schooling which is typically delivered in primary schools. Primary education may be divided into Infants and Primary areas, in which the primary years are generally between Years 3 and Years 6, or Year 7 depending on the state in which the school is located. Primary schools in Australia are equivalent to elementary schools in other countries, such as the United States and Canada.

Most commonly a student in primary school will stay in steadily advancing classes until they complete their primary education and transition into secondary education. Students in the primary years are usually placed with one core teacher who is predominantly responsible for their education and welfare during the academic year. This classroom teacher may be assisted by a specialist teacher in a subject area, such as languages other than English, music or drama, to deliver a comprehensive curriculum.

In Australia, primary school classes can be created using a variety of different models. Classes may be single year or grade groupings, for example Year 4 or Grade 4. On the other hand, multi-age groupings, often referred to as composite classes, are common in smaller

primary schools. Some schools may use these different combinations across the year levels and is often dependent on enrolment numbers and availability of classrooms.

Within an Australian context, Braggett (1997), in a book on the middle years, states that transitioning students have a big task when reconciling differences between the primary and secondary school settings. Braggett (1997, p. 41) provides a useful table identifying the differences between primary and secondary school and this has been reproduced below in Table 2.1. This table clearly identifies the different characteristics of primary and secondary schools in Australia, and provides some indication of the transition issues that must be overcome by transitioning students.

Table 2.1

Differences Between Primary and Secondary Schools (Braggett, 1997, p. 41)

Primary	Secondary
One main teacher	A number of teachers
Few, if any, specialist teachers	Almost all teachers are specialists
A homeroom	Students move to many rooms
Many schools are relatively small in size (100-350) – few exceed 500	Many schools enroll in excess of 700 pupils and 1000+ is not uncommon
Can be very close and personal	More impersonal
Teacher may integrate the curriculum	Less integration of subject-based disciplines
Flexible timetable, often arranged in large blocks of time	Rigid timetable; lessons usually 40, 45 or 50 minutes in duration
Variety of teaching methods during the day	More direct instruction from the teacher
Considerable movement in the classroom	Desk work dominates most lessons; less movement
Pastoral care provided by the main teacher	Less pastoral care and less contact between a teacher and a student
School often close to home	More travel may be involved

As indicated in Table 2.1, the differences between primary and secondary schools are quite varied. The differences identified by Braggett (1997) include teachers, culture, curriculum, school size, teaching and learning, pastoral care, travel and organisational issues, such as timetables and student movement.

From a school perspective there are many changes that transitioning students must experience during the primary to secondary transition in Australia, including a new physical environment, the number of teachers and academic expectations. For many students the age

at which they transition is during the developmental move into adolescence. The literature on the systematic school transition, coupled with the move into adolescence, is reviewed and discussed in the following section.

2.3.1 Transition and adolescence

In Australia, the transition from primary to secondary school occurs around the same time in which students move into the developmental period known as adolescence, which can make the systematic school transition more complex. The timing of transition and adolescence has been identified and explored in a number of previous studies. Pietarinen (1998), in a study on school transition in rural Finland, suggests while the reality of transition may not be what students expect during the pre-transition phase, it is important to acknowledge change is not limited to their learning environment. With transition, not only do students have to cope with external changes, such as school transitions, they must also cope with biological changes. Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman & Midgley (1991) state that the primary to secondary transition process occurs simultaneously with the onset of puberty. Jackson & Davis (2000, p. 7) also put forward that around the age that the primary to secondary school transition takes place, an adolescent's growth and development increases more quickly than at any other times other than during infancy

Not only is adolescence a period of rapid growth and maturation but also as a time when students are capable of more complex thinking and risk taking (Jackson and Davis, 2000). In these middle years of schooling, students are much more capable of greater participation in their wider environment and have greater capacity to make decisions affecting themselves and others. However, as Jackson and Davis point out, adolescence is also a time of social and sexual experimentation. According to Jackson and Davis (2000, p. 7), for many adolescents, these middle years of schooling are a time for first time tobacco, alcohol and drug use, as well as sexual activity.

Adolescence is a time when individuals struggle to find a sense of self, as well as a group identity. They are preoccupied with their appearances and with hero worship (Groundwater-Smith, Mitchell & Mockler, 2007). Akos, Queen and Lineberry (2005), in their book on

making a successful transition to middle school, maintain adolescents need time and energy to become accustomed to their new bodies. They are uneasy and awkward, and feel pressure to maintain a positive self image. Adolescents have added pressure in gaining acceptance from their peers, and are subjected to mood swings and bullying, and they change their opinions frequently. Akos et al. (2005, p. 19) aptly state that “adolescents are on a world’s stage, constantly being scrutinized by peers”. Subsequently, success or failure in the transition from primary to secondary school is dependent on a student’s ability to manage the biological and educational changes which are simultaneously taking place.

Individual adaptation processes has been identified in the literature as a means for students to successfully negotiate the transition process. In a discussion of the transition to secondary school Cotterell (1986), stresses the importance of adaptation processes as a way of coping with the stresses following transition. Of particular importance is the information-seeking behaviours students must employ to help manage their way in the new environment. Additionally, Cotterell states accessing adequate information in order to better traverse the transition into secondary school may well extend into the first term post-transition.

Adaptation behaviours were also identified by Graber and Brooks-Gunn (1996), who suggest most individuals successfully negotiate adolescent transitions but this period of time can have a short term effect on individual behaviour. Graber and Brooks-Gunn further suggest that these temporary changes in biological and affective systems are followed by either adaptation and new types of behaviours, or the resumption of old behaviours. A student’s inability to adapt effectively may have longer term influence on behaviour.

The literature identified above describes the types of thinking and behaviours associated with adolescent development but additional studies have examined the association between systematic transition and adolescence. This dual transition has been found in earlier studies to have a variety of outcomes for transitioning students. In an article on adolescence, school transition and prevention interventions, Berliner (1993) reviewed the recent research and found that the biological, cognitive and psychological changes of early adolescence, combined with the demands of school transition, are linked to adjustment difficulties. In

addition, Youngman (1986, p. 137), as part of an editorial review of previous research, surmises that ten per cent of students experience serious problems, such as enduring worries, feelings of not coping and losing interest, after the transition to secondary school.

Findings from earlier studies suggest self-esteem remains unchanged following school transitions. Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-Ford and Blyth (1987) investigated the dual transition. Students (n=621) from 18 schools within the Milwaukee school district were sampled. Participants were identified as having experienced a major change (in or before Year 7) along one of the identified dimensions: school change, which involved a school transition at the end of Year 6 versus a school transition at the end of Year 8; pubertal change; early dating; geographic mobility; and, major family disruption. Three dependent variables, including self-esteem, grade point average (GPA) and participation in extracurricular activities, were used in the study. Additional findings suggest girls suffer losses in self-esteem when the number of life changes experienced increases. GPA appeared to be negatively responsive to a variety of life changes identified in the study for both boys and girls. In addition, extra-curricular participation also declines as boys and girls encounter more of the life transitions.

Taking this work a little bit further, Hirsh and Rapkin (1987) also examined the transition to junior high school and changes in students' general self-esteem, as well as satisfaction with school life and peer social support. Data from a student sample (n=159) from the United States midwest was collected from self-report questionnaires. Hirsh and Rapkin found that students' general self-esteem was unchanged during the transition period. However, a decline in the perceived satisfaction of school life from the sixth to seventh grade which was not associated with academic competence was reported. Results from this study found that girls experienced an increase in symptoms of depression and hostility, while boys reported a decrease in similar symptoms.

In the two studies identified above (Hirsh & Rapkin, 1987; Simmons et al., 1987) girls are found to have higher levels of psychological distress during school transitions than do boys. This was confirmed in another study (Chung, Elias & Schneider, 1998) which examined the

transition of fifth grade students (n=99), over a twelve month period in the United States. An assessment battery measuring multiple indices of adolescence and adjustment, as well as teacher rating scales on a student's acting-out, moodiness and learning, as well as measures of academic achievement, including report cards, were collected. Additionally, boys in Chung et al.'s study reported a decline in academic achievement but no significant change was reported for girls.

Stress levels also remain unchanged following systematic school transition. In fact, Lohaus, Elben, Ball and Klein-Hessling (2004) report that students (n=564) undertaking school transitions show comparable decreases in stress levels compared with a control group of students not experiencing a similar school transition. Data was collected before and after transition and at a similar time for the control group of students. Lohaus et al. suggest that girls may exaggerate their levels and symptoms of stress pre-transition or under report them post-transition, which contradict studies (Chung et al., 1998; Hirsh & Rapkin, 1987; Simmons et al., 1987) which report no significant change in self-esteem following transition.

Contrary to the findings of the studies identified above (Hirsh & Rapkin, 1987; Simmons et al., 1987; Wigfield et al., 1991) transition to secondary school has been associated with changes in adolescents' general self-esteem. Wigfield et al. examined adolescents' general self-esteem, as well as their self-concepts of ability and liking for mathematics, English, social and sports activities following transition to junior high. As part of the larger Michigan Adolescence Study, students from twelve school districts, in the United States midwest, completed questionnaires over four phases of data collection. Two phases were prior to transition and two were gathered in the year following transition.

The results of the study (Wigfield et al., 1991) found that significant loss in students' general self-esteem occurred immediately following the transition to secondary school, although it increased during the year following transition. Students' self-concept of mathematics and English ability declined following transition. Students also had a marked decline in their self-concepts of social ability but Wigfield et al. suggest that this may be attributed to the

disruptive social networks during transition. However, decline in self-concept of sports ability commenced prior to transition but rebounded during the following year.

A student's positive self-belief and attitude about the way in which they manage the school transition can influence their experience post-transition and has been the focus of a number of studies (Rudolph, Lambert, Clark and Kurlakowsky, 2001; Youngman, 1978). Youngman (1978) found that students transitioning with a positive attitude to secondary school experience higher levels of performance post-transition in a study which aimed to determine the nature of individual transitions to secondary school. Participants included rural (n=390) and city (n=454) students in the Nottingham area of England. Data was collected pre- and post-transition on the scales of ability, achievement, attitude to school and personality. Six sub-groups of students were identified and categorised. Those displaying high ability reactions were labelled 'academic', 'disenchanted' or 'capable'. Those with low ability reactions were labelled as 'contented', 'disinterested' or 'worried'.

Cluster analysis reported different patterns of adjustment and attainment existing between the six identified subgroups. Of note, Youngman (1978) suggests that when a child has a positive attitude towards school there appears to be a beneficial effect on performance. This was evidenced by results from the 'contented' subgroup which, despite having a below average ability, found the transition to secondary school to be accompanied by improved motivation and attitude. Of most concern were the 'worried' group which displayed high levels of anxiety and low levels of self-concept, and the 'disenchanted' group which displayed moderately high ability but a deteriorating attitude and motivation following transition.

The benefits of positive self-belief were later confirmed by Rudolph et al. (2001). Findings suggest 'transitioning' students, who believed that they had little control over their school success and showed little investment in academic success, report more student related stress and became more depressed than 'non-transitioning' students. Rudolph et al. investigated the role of maladaptive self-regulatory beliefs, including perceptions of control over academic outcomes and investment in academic success, as vulnerability factors for academic and emotional difficulties during the transition to middle school. As part of the University of

Illinois' Transition to Adolescence Project student data (n=329) from three midwestern school districts was collected. Participants were categorised into two groups, including transitioning elementary to middle school students (n=187) and non transitioning students (n=142). Data was collected in two waves, using questionnaires, approximately six to seven months apart. Measures included self-regulatory beliefs, academic engagement, school related stress and depressive systems. Students who reported a lack of control over their academic performance and a lower level of academic investment demonstrated an increase in disengagement in school. Rudolph et al. suggest that these maladaptive beliefs led to helpless behaviour in the face of challenge, decreased effort and lower levels of academic achievement, thereby undermining adolescents' evaluations of the school environment.

While studies (Hirsh & Rapkin, 1987; Simmons et al., 1987) suggest that general self-esteem is not affected following school transitions, additional studies have found a significant decrease in perceived competence and social self-esteem following transition to high school. Berndt and Hawkins (1985) sampled students (n=101) from four elementary schools in the United States, using three assessments over a one year period. Berndt and Hawkins used structured questionnaires, individual interviews, teachers' ratings and school records to obtain data. Additionally, findings reported students' attitudes towards school, including involvement in class activities, affiliation with peers and teacher support, also decreased following the transition to junior high school. Finally, participants in the study reported fewer close friendships following transition than reported at the pre-transition phase, although Berndt and Hawkins reported an increase in the quality of student friendships post-transition.

The influence of pre-transition friendships on a student's adjustment post-transition was investigated further in a later study. Aikins, Bierman and Parker (2005) investigated the transition to junior high school in Pennsylvania, United States. Participants (n=111) included sixth grade students from seven elementary schools. Data was obtained from interviews and questionnaires at two points in time, including pre- and post-transition. Pre-transition measures included friendship quality, social skills, expected possible selves and future self expectations. Post-transition measures included friendship maintenance, friendship quality, emotional distress and school adjustment. In regards to friendship characteristics, Aikins et

al. (2005) found pre-transition friendship quality predicted friendship maintenance post-transition, which was associated with a more positive post-transition friendship quality and school adjustment.

Two additional studies (Benner & Graham, 2009; Kinney, 1993) have investigated school transitions for two specific groups of students. First, Kinney examined adolescent self-perceptions during the transition from middle school to high school. In particular, this study focused on students who were identified as unpopular “nerds” (Kinney, 1993, p. 21) in the middle school and how they overcame this stigma following transition into high school. The data collection methods employed by Kinney included observations of social interactions between classes, at lunch time and after school and interviews with students (n=81), either in small groups or individually.

In relation to the transition to high school, Kinney (1993) found that the group categorised as “nerds” experienced the transition to high school with some positive outcomes. Opportunities to participate in a wide variety of groups reduced their need for social acceptance by the more popular groups. Participation in school activity groups provided a sense of belonging and provided a supportive social environment. Furthermore, Kinney (1993, p. 32) found that some students experienced a shift in their personal identity and that students who once defined themselves as “nerds”, were now identifying themselves as “normal”.

Second, Benner and Graham (2009) studied the transition to high school for an ethnically diverse sample which involved a longitudinal study during the first two years of high school. Participants (n=1,979) were drawn from eleven middle schools in metropolitan Los Angeles, United States. The measures of the study included school climate, psychological functioning, academic behaviours, school structural characteristics and individual characteristics, such as social-structural characteristics and person-context interactions. Confidential questionnaires were completed during academic semesters, school record data, which included grades and absences were obtained from the schools and demographic data was downloaded from each participant’s middle and high school.

In summary, Benner and Graham (2009) found that students' grades declined and absences decreased as school-level socio economic status (SES) and ethnic diversity increased across the transition. The study found that a growth in school size was associated with a decline in grades and increased absences. Additionally, Benner and Graham state that schools with a more ethnically diverse culture promote stronger feelings of belonging.

Benner and Graham's (2009) study places a larger developmental context on other transition studies which have investigated the short term effects of transition. Participants in this study were perceived to be doing well in their respective middle schools but following transition reported being lonelier and more anxious following transition, as well as finding academic demands more difficult. For participants in this study, time did not make managing the new environment easier. Across the two years of the study students still reported feeling lonely and anxious, grades continued to decline and absences increased. Benner and Graham found that girls reported to have more difficulty with the transition than boys in that they reported higher levels of feeling lonely and anxious, despite doing better academically than boys, supporting findings from Chung et al (1998) and Hirsh and Rapkin (1987) studies.

Previous research suggests that a disparity exists between adults and transitioning students regarding the perceived greatest concerns of students about school transition. In an effort to identify prominent clusters of stressors characteristic of middle school environments, Elias, Gara and Ubriaco (1985) examined transitioning students' and administrators' perceptions of middle school environments. Participants (n=158) from 19 New Jersey school districts in the United States completed questionnaires after four weeks of entering middle school. Student questionnaires were concerned with the difficulty of adaptation to middle school and the time it took to adjust, perceptions of the school environment and the rating of potential problems. Administrator questionnaires measured similar scales to the student questionnaire but asked administrators to estimate the percentage of students affected by a problem and to indicate the time of year of greatest severity.

Elias et al.'s (1985) study found school administrators view the academic domain, including difficult school work and the high expectations of teachers, as the greatest causes of stress in

transitioning students. However, Elias et al. found that administrators' perceptions were at odds with the perceptions of students. Transitioning students report that potential conflict with authority, such as being sent to the vice principal, arriving to class with the incorrect material and arguing with teachers, as the greatest concern following transition. Other areas of stress identified by students include potential substance abuse, as well as fighting and missing friends from their previous school. Elias et al. suggest that the misconceptions that administrators have about the nature and impact of middle school entry can affect the type of support that is given to transitioning students, as well as the prevention and intervention programs required during this time.

This section has reviewed the literature which has investigated the association between systematic school transition and adolescent development, in particular the effect it has on self esteem and the importance of adaptation behaviours, self-belief and friendships during the school transition process. The following section (*section 2.3.2*) reviews the current literature which examines the relationship between academic achievement and systematic school transitions.

2.3.2 Transition and academic success

This section explores existing literature on how students manage the academic dimension following a school transition. Previous studies (Alpaugh, 1998a; Alspaugh & Harting, 1995; Crockett, Peterson, Graber, Schulenberg & Ebata, 1989; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000) suggest that school transitions are often associated with academic achievement loss post-transition.

School transitions can have a negative effect on academic success for some students at secondary school. Mizelle and Irvin (2000), in their paper on the transition from middle school to high school, state that many students in the United States experience difficulty negotiating the transition into high school and note that many students drop out, fall behind academically or fail to graduate on time. Mizelle and Irvin (2000, p. 1) suggest that five per cent of all high school students drop out of school each year while 60 per cent of students identified as at-risk will not graduate with their peers.

The problems associated with the primary to secondary transition, in an Australian context, were identified by Cotterell (1986, p. 74). Cotterell maintains that the processes of managing the transition into Australian secondary schools can take up to 12 to 18 months to cope with academic demands. Cotterell found a decline in school achievement and that the greatest sources of academic stress include increased homework demands, the new courses offered and teacher expectations. Cotterell also suggests that some students are so anxious about the social aspects of transition they appear to have little energy for the academic dimension of secondary school.

Factors, such as pressure from adults to achieve academically and peer pressure, can influence the way in which students adjust to their new environment following transition. Phelan, Cao and Davidson (1992) reported a variety of pressures and problems related to school. These included anxiety over grades, homework, teachers, and understanding content and concepts. Peer groups, family and school variables were studied independently, and four categories of students and their adaption patterns across social settings were identified. These groups included students from congruent worlds, students from different worlds who manage the transition across settings, students from different worlds who had difficulty transitioning across settings, and students from different worlds who resisted the transition across settings.

Phelan et al. (1992) found that these anxieties were common across groups but differences occurred between groups as well. Students from congruent worlds experienced pressure to do well academically, while students who resisted the transition were at risk of dropping out due to poor grades but reported to be worried about an uncertain future. Across all groups, students felt pressure from their parents to do well in school, including pressure to raise grades, to do well on tests and to complete homework. Finally, Phelan et al. reported that students across all groups feel that they can be themselves with friends but experience pressure when asked to participate in behaviours which concern adults, such as drinking, excessive partying and missing classes. Phelan et al. concluded that regardless of the source, these pressures can negatively affect a student's ability to engage in school.

On the other hand, school responsiveness, family support and extra-curricular participation were identified as important factors in achieving academic success following school transitions. Risk and resilience in adolescents was investigated by Catterall (1998). The study focused on students identified as at-risk in the eighth grade but who managed to improve performance and outlook by the tenth grade. Catterall used data collected from the National Education Longitudinal Study (1988) and, from a follow up data collection in 1990, a sub-sample of participants was identified as lacking confidence in finishing high school (n=4,000) and as receiving average or lower grades between the sixth and eighth grades (n=7,000). Catterall's results identified reasons why students drop out including not liking school, not getting along with teachers and other students, school failure, changing schools, friends dropping out, not feeling safe, and suspensions and expulsions. Catterall found that issues for students recovering from low performance between the eighth and tenth grade are associated with family support, responsiveness from the school and participation in school and community activities.

In order to explore the relationship between attainment and adjustment and to determine if these changes were positively associated with academic self-image following transition, Summerfield (1986) conducted a study on a complete intake of an 11-18 comprehensive school over a period of two and a half years in the United Kingdom. A sample of students (n=138) was tested on a range of measures including ability and achievement, personal adjustment and academic self-concept. Summerfield suggests that the variation in attainment among the seven cluster groups studied, despite previous attainment and ability in academic performance, resulted in many students experiencing problems following transition. No significant differences were found between boys and girls, although, boys displayed significantly higher Summerfield identified students whose attainment and adjustment deteriorated significantly following transition, including low ability students, as at-risk students.

Systematic school transition, regardless of the age at which the transition occurs, is associated with academic achievement loss. Alspaugh (1998a) investigated the nature of achievement loss associated with the elementary to middle school and the middle to high

school transitions, as well as the relationship between school-to-school transitions and the percentage of students who drop out. Three groups of schooling compositions were identified and include school districts with a K-8, 9-12 structure, school districts with a linear transition arrangement involving one elementary school, one middle school and one high school, and school districts with multiple elementary schools, one middle and high school respectively. A total sample of students from 48 rural and small town school districts in the United States was used in this study. Pre-transition and post-transition measures using the Missouri Mastery and Achievement Tests (MMAT) scores for reading, mathematics, science and social studies were used to gather data.

The three school groupings in this study (Alspaugh, 1998a) experienced a mean achievement loss in the transition to high school and were found to be statistically significant. These findings were consistent with the findings from an earlier study by Alspaugh and Harting (1995) which examined the transition effects of school grade-level organisation on student achievement. Alspaugh and Harting found achievement loss to be associated with the transition from elementary school to intermediate level schools. Alspaugh and Harting suggest that the decline in achievement could be attributed to the movement of students from the self-contained classroom environment of the primary school, characterised by small-group and individual instruction, to the secondary school, characterised by whole-class instruction.

Alspaugh (1998a) found that achievement loss was greater when students transitioned from elementary to middle school than during the middle to high school transition. In addition, achievement loss was also greater when a large number of elementary schools merged into the one middle school. Furthermore, in regards to drop out rates, Alspaugh (1998a) found that a statistically significant lower drop out rate for a school with a K-8 structure compared with those with middle school groups. Alspaugh suggests that the drop out rates found in this study may be linked with the loss of self-esteem and self-perception found in previous studies, such as Wigfield et al. (1991) described in *section 2.3.1*.

Alspaugh (1998b) also studied the effects of school-to-school transitions and high school dropout rates in 447 Missouri school districts in the United States. Alspaugh found increases in school-to-school transitions are linked with increased dropout rates. This confirmed previous research described above which links transition with a decrease in academic achievement (Alspaugh, 1998a; Alspaugh & Harting, 1995). Furthermore, the lowest dropout rates occurred in school districts in which there was only one school-to school transition.

Other studies (Crockett, Petersen, Graber, Schulenberg and Ebata, 1989; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999) confirm the findings of studies (Alspaugh, 1998a, 1998b; Alspaugh & Harting, 1995) which report a decrease in academic achievement post-transition. Firstly, the effect of different categories of school transitions on adjustment was investigated by Crockett et al. in the United States. The study was part of a larger investigation of development during adolescence. Participants (n=253) included students experiencing three types of transitions, including single early school transition before sixth grade, single later transition prior to seventh grade and those transitioning before both sixth and seventh grades, or identified as a double transition. Comparisons of results showed that students undertaking a double transition presented poorer academic performance than students in the single transition categories, although all students experienced some academic achievement loss.

Second, Isakson and Jarvis (1999) suggest that following transition from middle school to high school, peer group interactions were associated with reduced academic achievement and suggest that friends may not be as supportive of academic achievement as other aspects of high school life. Samples drawn from a public university affiliated laboratory school were representative of the larger Illinois community in the United States. Student participants (n=41) and parent participants (n=19) completed questionnaires three times throughout the study – one during the eighth grade and two the following year. Additional analysis found that while attendance rates initially improve following transition, they did drop significantly during the ninth grade.

Student motivation and engagement is important for academic success following school transitions. Galton, Morrison and Pell (2000), in an examination of transition research in

England and Wales, suggest that 40 per cent of pupils experience a decline in academic achievement during the transition from primary to secondary school. This review supports findings from the research above (Alspaugh, 1998a, 1988b; Alspaugh & Harting, 1995; Crockett et al., 1989; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999), which found a decline in academic achievement post-transition. Galton et al. attribute this decline to a lack of curriculum continuity between the primary and secondary stages of schooling. In an article which makes some concluding comments about transition, Galton and Morrison (2000) suggest that the lack of curriculum continuity is, in part, due to teachers in the new school wanting to make a fresh start, to excessive revision and to tasks which underestimate students' abilities. Subsequently, students become disengaged and dips in attainment may occur.

A decrease in student motivation following school transitions has also been investigated in previous studies. Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, Reuman, Mac Iver and Feldlaufer (1993) found declines in student motivation in the middle school to be related to decreases in teacher efficacy and the quality of the teacher-student relationship with the transition from elementary to middle school. Participants (n=3,248), including teachers and students, from 12 school districts in Michigan, United States, were involved in a four wave, two year study. Student questionnaires measured achievement related beliefs, motives, values and behaviours while teacher questionnaires measured beliefs and attitudes. Common measures included classroom environment, teacher-student relationships, decision making opportunities, teachers' sense of self-efficacy and tracking of students' mathematics ability (between-classroom ability groupings) were completed by students, teachers and observers.

A decrease in student motivation has been associated with school culture following transition. Anderman, Maehr and Midgley (1999) explored motivation by comparing the transition into two different middle schools with different educational philosophies. The first school was described as being traditional in its approach, while the second school had a more progressive approach, including team teaching practices, transdisciplinary projects and flexible delivery systems. Anderman et al. sampled transitioning fifth grade students (n=278) by completing surveys before and after the transition to middle school. Students at both schools reported a decline in task orientation and perceptions of task emphasis by teachers, as

well as an increase in perceptions of performance goal emphasis. Students attending the more traditional middle school reported higher mean levels of personal performance goals and personal extrinsic goals. Anderman et al. suggest that these results may reflect the approach of teachers at the more progressive middle school whereby teachers were attempting to de-emphasise comparative marking, to make tasks more meaningful and to pay particular attention to caring for students as individuals. No differences between schools were found in students' perceived self-competence, with all students reporting a decline in perceptions between pre- and post-transition.

The feeder school patterns into destination high schools have also been associated with academic achievement following school transitions. Schiller (1999) explored the feeder patterns of students as they moved from middle school to high school in the United States, and their associated academic success. Schiller analysed data collected from a subsample (n=12,000) of the larger National Education Longitudinal Study (1988), which followed a nationally represented sample of eighth graders as they made the transition from middle school to high school.

Schiller's (1999) findings suggest that, when large groups of students move from the middle school to the same high school, the stratification system tends to remain intact. However, when the students from the middle school dispersed to a variety of high schools, opportunities arise which enable students at the bottom of the academic ladder to move up, while those at the top may find themselves slipping. Schiller partly attributes these findings to the organisational practices between the middle school and high school. For example, Schiller suggests that in schools where a large cohort of students moves between the middle and high schools, a more efficient organisational practice may exist (such as teacher recommendations and test scores from the middle school) in placing students in courses.

Investigation of feeder school patterns and academic achievement was further extended by Langenkamp (2009) by investigating the systematic transition as a pathway which may play a role in students' initial academic performance at high school in the United States. Data was collected from the larger National Longitudinal Study of Health and its education

component, the Adolescent Health and Academic Achievement study. Data on academic achievement was collected from high school transcripts, including grade point average (GPA), at the end of the first year of high school. Pathways to high school were categorised into three types. Firstly, ‘uniform’ pathways (n=1,175) involved very little transformation of social relationships occurring from middle to high school. Second, students transitioning with the majority of peers from middle school but making up less than half of the incoming class were identified as following a ‘mixed’ pathway (n=719). Finally students not following the prescribed pathway to high school, transitioning alone or with few students from their middle school were categorised as taking a ‘divergent’ pathway (n=785). Three components of middle school social integration were also measured and included teacher bonding, popularity and extracurricular participation.

Following analysis of data, Langenkamp (2009) found that the transition pathway followed from middle school to high school, as well as social integration into middle school are associated with academic performance during the first year of high school. Students following the ‘mixed’ pathway received a higher GPA during their first year of high school than students following a ‘uniform’ pathway. Both the ‘uniform’ and ‘mixed’ pathways allowed for the maintenance of social relationships, yet students in the ‘mixed’ pathway had better opportunities to make new friendships. In addition, high-achieving students who undertook the ‘divergent’ pathway were associated with a lower GPA in the first year of high school.

In a pooled analysis, Langenkamp (2009) found that all the measures of middle school social interactions were associated with better academic adjustment. Separating the measures, Langenkamp found that teacher bonding was associated with a higher first-year GPA for students who undertook the ‘uniform’ and ‘mixed’ pathway. In addition, the popularity measure was only a significant predictor of academic performance for students following the ‘uniform’ and ‘divergent’ pathways. Interestingly, none of the three pathways reported an association between extra-curricular activities and a higher GPA, despite the pooled analyses reporting an association.

In summary, transition requires a move away from the unfamiliar primary school environment to the virtual unknown. It is often viewed as the gateway to adolescence, requiring an adaptation to external changes but also managing biological changes. For some transition is associated with negative outcomes (Berndt & Hawkins, 1985; Chung et al., 1998; Simmons et al., 1987; Wigfield et al., 1991; Youngman, 1978, 1986), while for others it is a positive experience (Kinney, 1993). School transitions have also been linked to a decline in academic achievement (Alspaugh, 1998a, 1998b; Alspaugh & Harting, 1995; Eccles et al., 1993; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999) and an increase in drop out rates (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). Whether the experience of moving into the secondary school is better or worse than expected pre-transition is yet to be determined and the following section reviews the existing literature on student expectations of school transition at the pre-transition stage.

2.4 Expectations

This section investigates the current literature and research on students' expectations of the transition from primary to secondary school, in both the international arena and Australian context. The literature suggests students have numerous concerns about moving into secondary school during the pre-transition stage and these revolve around the organisational, social and academic dimensions of schooling. In contrast, the research also indicates that many students are excited about the transition into secondary school and associate it with growing up, as well as an opportunity to start afresh in a new environment.

School transitions have strong links to student anxiety at the pre-transition stage. Brown and Armstrong (1986) examined the anxieties associated with the transition from primary to secondary school in London, England. Qualitative data, drawn from essay writing, was collected from an initial sample of primary school students (n=220). This study extended a previous study by Brown and Armstrong (1982) which found three major sources of transfer anxiety in girls. Brown and Armstrong (1982) collected data from primary to secondary transition students (n=173) from a girls' school in London. Students were asked to write about their feelings of the impending transition to secondary school. Questionnaires, based on the worries emerging from the essays, were developed and completed by teachers (n=8) at

the secondary school. The 1982 study found anxieties associated with school work and routines, discipline, strict teachers and inter-personal relationships, including not having friends and coping without friends from primary school.

In the 1986 study, Brown and Armstrong examined data from boys and girls during transition, as well as both the positive and negative feelings students may have about transition. Brown and Armstrong (1986) found that pre-transition students were most concerned about getting lost in the secondary school and homework, and there was a general anxiety that was found not to be attached to any identified concern. Alternatively, the most prevalent positive feelings identified in the pre-transition phase of the study included sport at the secondary school and the new and different subjects. Furthermore, Brown and Armstrong found two statistically significant differences between boys and girls, which included the fact that three times as many boys were looking forward to joining clubs at the secondary school, while girls were found to worry three times as much about getting lost.

Mixed feelings of anxiety and excitement have been identified in other international studies. Firstly, academic, organisational and social aspects were identified as the prevailing concerns and positive aspects of transition by Akos (2002) who investigated student perceptions about the transition from elementary to middle school. The research was conducted in four phases, involving one writing task and three questionnaires. The first two phases involved fifth grade students (n=331) from a large, rural, southeastern public school district in the United States. During the third phase, sixth grade participants (n=103) were randomly selected from the initial sample. The final phase involved a purposeful sample of participants (n=97) who experienced success at the middle school.

In terms of the expectations of transition, Akos (2002) found that students were preoccupied with the rules and procedures involved in the transition from elementary to middle school. Other areas of concern found in the first phase of data collection include expectations from staff, lunch, lockers, extracurricular activities, recess and sport. Results of the data collected on the questionnaire (administered at phase two) indicate that the greatest concerns involve older students (14%), homework (13%), lockers (12%), and getting good grades (12%). The

potential positive aspects of transition identified by students included making friends (16%), gym/PE class (15%), lockers (11%), changing classes (10%) and getting good grades (10%).

Second, in an investigation of the primary to secondary transition for students in Scotland, Graham and Hill (2003) found that students expressed feelings of anxiety about the non-academic aspects of secondary school. The study involved primary students (n=268) in the first phase, of which participants (n=173) completed the second phase of data collection. Secondary students (n=343) participated in the first phase data collection. Data was collected using survey questionnaires and supplemented by focus group discussions. The issues which cause the greatest concerns were found to be issues relating to the change of being the eldest members of the primary school to being the youngest in the secondary school. From a fixed list, it emerged that students were apprehensive about getting lost, not knowing anybody and being picked on in their new school environment. In contrast, the major positive anticipation of transitioning students was the possibility of making new friends, learning new things and doing practical subjects.

Rural students also report similar anxieties to urban students pre-transition in the international arena. Pietarinen (1998) conducted a study examining rural students' experiences of the transition from a small rural primary school to a bigger secondary school in Finland. A qualitative study, Pietarinen collected data, in the form of essay writing, from transitioning students (n=132) in a small Finnish town. Of the participants (n=132), 41 respondents were identified as rural and subsequently used in the analysis. Similar to Graham and Hill (2003), Pietarinen (1998) concluded that student's expectations, problems and fears were related to the possibility of losing friends and the size and complex organisation of the secondary school. However, Pietarinen's study identified different concerns which revolve around new forms of discipline and authority, new work demands and the prospect of being bullied.

Similar challenges and opportunities were identified in a later study. In their study of school transition in the United States, Akos and Galassi (2004) investigated two transition contexts. Participants in the elementary to middle school transition included sixth grade students

(n=173), parents (n=83) and teachers (n=12). In the middle to high school transition participants included ninth grade students (n=320), parents (n=61) and teachers (n=17). All participants took part in survey questionnaires, as well as answering open-ended questions which focused on areas of excitement and anxiety with transition. For both systematic transitions in the study, academic aspects (such as the amount of homework) and organisational issues (such as getting lost and getting to class on time) were identified as major concerns for the middle to high school transition.

Findings suggest that the social aspect of making new friends was identified as being the most anticipated event in both the elementary to middle and middle to high school transition experience (Akos & Galassi, 2004). However, students in the elementary to middle school transition identified having lockers as the greatest positive anticipation, while having more freedom and attending school events were identified by the middle to high school transition students as their top choice of opportunities. While not stated in the study, the differences in these expectations between elementary to middle and middle to high school transition students may be attributed to the difference in age and experience between the two groups of respondents.

Student concerns regarding transition appear to be fairly consistent over time. Maute and Brough (2002) investigated the concerns of transitioning students over two points in time, 1991 and 2001, to see if the causes of concern over a ten year period had changed. In 1991, eighth grade students (n=693) in Illinois, United States, were asked what concerned them most about transition using the Transition Concerns Survey instrument. Academic issues, such as getting good grades, taking tests, completing homework and class work, and parental expectations, were high on the list. Other major concerns identified include keeping friends, making new female friends and preparation for college and work life. The same survey was administered in Nebraska, Georgia in 2001 (n=598). After ten years, the major concerns were similar to those identified in 1991, with the exception of keeping new friends and making new female friends. In 2001 these were replaced with two other issues: taking difficult classes and organising time.

The following studies identified organisational issues to be major concerns of participants undertaking school transitions in these international studies. Odegaard and Heath (1992) found students (n=225) transitioning from elementary to middle school, across rural and urban contexts in the Midwest region of the United States, identify the size and complexity of the school grounds, older and possibly rougher students and the amount of homework as the most prevalent concerns of transition. Alternatively, the aspects of transition identified as being the most attractive to students include lockers, different teachers for different subjects, moving to different rooms, eating in the cafeteria, the athletic program and the opportunity to make new friends. These results were supported by the findings of Lucey and Reay's (2000) qualitative study in London, England in which participants (n=90), express organisational anxieties about the scale and unfamiliarity of their new school environment and getting lost.

Morgan and Hertzog (2001) also explored concerns of transitioning students as they moved from the middle school to the high school in the United States. An open ended questionnaire was distributed to all eighth and ninth grade students from Georgia. An initial 1,400 students were involved in the study and approximately 400 students' data from each grade level was then randomly selected and analysed. Furthermore, two middle school focus groups were established, each consisting of eight to twelve students.

Transition concerns were categorised into five areas: curriculum, facilities, safety and discipline, teachers and administrators, and general concerns. Morgan and Hertzog (2001) reported curriculum concerns as revolving around the difficulty of subjects, length of periods and details about how to get into college. Organisational issues about lockers and changing rooms emerged as facility concerns for students in the study. Safety concerns, such as drugs, guns, being late to class, and teacher and administrator issues, including what type of teachers they would have, discipline and getting help from the school counsellor were also reported in the study. Finally, general concerns including catching buses, food and being absent from class were also identified by participants in the study.

However, other studies have found the prevailing concerns regarding school transitions to be centred on the social aspects (Diemert, 1992). Data was gathered from fifth grade students

(n=23) by completing a questionnaire and the categorised into academic, procedural and social needs for analysis. Diemert's study had two purposes which included identifying common needs of transitioning students and determining how well students perceived adults had assisted them in the transition from elementary to middle school. Diemert found that the social aspects account for the majority of the ten most important needs following transition. These social needs included the teacher-student relationship, making new friends, the opportunity to talk to old friends and uncertainty about how to respond in negative situations with peers. Procedural aspects were then identified as the next most important needs, which included learning and adapting to new expectations and rules, finding their way around the new environment and being prepared for classes. Finally, academic aspects were the least identified needs and included academic expectations and accessing help from teachers.

Furthermore, Diemert (1992) found that the needs considered to be the most lacking in adult assistance by students in the study were identified as the social aspects. Diemert suggests this may be due to a perspective in which students feel adults interfere with this aspect of schooling or teachers and administrators have overlooked the importance of peer support during the transition process. Finally, all the needs considered least lacking in adult assistance were identified as procedural needs, which Diemert suggests is a reflection that teachers and administrators are actively involved in supporting students in understanding their routines and procedures.

School transition is often associated with a sense of increased independence and responsibility. Blyth, Bush and Simmons (1978) found similar associations in their longitudinal study which examined the transition of Year 6 and Year 8 students (n=622) in the United States. Blyth et al. found that transitioning Year 6 students were more academically oriented as well as having a greater sense of impending independence and responsibility, while Year 8 students were more concerned about their peers and establishing new friendships. The authors attribute these differences to the age composition of the transitioning students, as well as to the features of "anticipatory socialization which took place in each type of school" (Blyth et al., 1978, p. 159).

Increased independence and responsibility following transition to secondary school also emerged in Ashton's (2008) English study. Findings from data collected from a sample of Year 6 students (n=1,673) suggest that students associate the primary to secondary transition as a period of growing up. Other issues emerging from the study were concerns around friendships, in particular the prospect of making new friends and making the right friendship choices and whether they would be in the same classes as their friends. Other anxieties raised were issues about the possibility of being bullied, which was even more apparent for children from ethnic minorities, and fear of getting lost in their new environment.

School transition is associated with increases in student choices at high school. Smith, Akos, Lim and Wiley (2008) found students (n=172) identify transition opportunities to be associated with the larger size of the school and having more choice for lunch. Increased independence around curriculum choice was also highly anticipated by pre-transitioning students. Furthermore, students were generally looking forward to the opportunity to expand their social interactions. These anticipated opportunities were similar to Ashton's (2008) findings above.

Interestingly, Lucey and Reay (2000) found that some pre-transition students view the time as an opportunity to start again. Lucey and Reay (2000) found that a small number of students, who were the victims of bullying in their primary school, were hopeful they might get a new start with the transition to secondary school. They viewed the process as an opportunity to escape the chronic bullying to which they were subjected earlier in their primary school life. These findings were not found in other studies on social anticipations for transitioning students (Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Blyth et al., 1978; Graham & Hill, 2003; Pietarinen, 1998) but the Lucey and Reay (2000) study focused on exploring transitioning students' fears and the role they play in their narratives of the transition process. However, findings were later corroborated in other studies (Chedzoy & Burden, 2008; Weller, 2007) in which some students hoped that transition would be an opportunity to start again.

Opportunities to make new friendships following transition were also identified by Chedzoy and Burden (2005). From a sample of transitioning students in England (n=207), the study explored the aspects of transition perceived as easy or difficult for students. Students in this study were looking forward to the opportunity to make new friends and to make a fresh start in the new school environment. Students' concerns included the fear of being bullied, that teachers would be stricter and work would be harder.

The primary to secondary transition can be a time of pain, stress and anxiety regarding friendships for some transitioning students (Pratt & George, 2004). A small-scale qualitative study, with a sample of students (n=30) involved semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. While their conclusions, in terms of the organisational and academic dimensions, were similar to findings in other studies (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Ashton, 2008; Graham & Hill, 2003) in which students were concerned about the size and layout of their new school, the number of teachers and the type of curriculum, the greatest issues related to friendships.

Pratt and George (2004) found aspects of the social dimension to have greater significance for students than concerns relating to any other area. Transitioning with existing friendships was found to be an important component of transition, providing greater levels of confidence. The maintenance of existing friendships and the establishment of new ones were high on students' agendas. Additionally, bullying was identified as an issue of concern by many boys, in particular the potential for increased levels of violence and aggression following transition. Finally, as the primary to secondary transition involves students moving from the top of one hierarchy to the bottom of another, Pratt and George found many students expressed confusion about their new, anticipated social status post-transition.

Students not expecting to transition with their friends have been found to be generally less excited and more anxious about the move to secondary school (Weller, 2007). Over a three year period, data was collected through the completion of questionnaires from Year 6 students (n=588) in their final year of primary school. Parents (n=76) were then interviewed about admission and school choices. Follow up work with students included focus groups

with students (n=75), surveys (n=81) and individual interviews (n=20). Teachers were also interviewed. Weller's study also found that many students viewed transition as an opportunity to start again and some were found not to be interested in keeping their same friends from primary school. These findings corroborate findings from the Chedzoy and Burden (2005) study.

Fears about bullying and victimisation in the secondary school do emerge in a number of other studies on systematic transition. In their study of student transition into a comprehensive high school in the Midlands of England, Measor and Woods (1984) suggest students are fearful about the prospect of being bullied following transition. Their ethnographic study involved unstructured interviews and observations and found that students express concerns about the size and complexity of the new schools, movement around it, new forms of discipline and authority, academic demands and the prospect of losing friends. Additionally, Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm and Splittgerber (2000, p. 327), in their examination of current literature on systemic transition, cite numerous studies which found students to be fearful of being "picked on, teased, and even victimized by older students", as well as a sense that they will be "less safe in their new school environment".

While the organisational and social aspects of transition have emerged as predominant concerns in transition literature, the academic dimension has also been found to cause anxiety pre-transition. First, Arth (1990) sampled students (n=1,168) from nine schools across four states. Arth interviewed participants and found seven transition concerns which received a response rate of 25 per cent or more from participants. In order of acknowledgement, students rated failure, drugs, giving a presentation in front of the class, being sent to the principal's or assistant principal's offices, being picked on, unkind people and keeping up with assignments were identified as the most worrying concerns about transition to middle school.

Second, Shacher, Suss and Sharan's (2002) Israeli study examined levels of concerns and expectations about the transition to high school. Two sample groups from a new junior high school (n=547) and established junior high school (n=405) responded to a questionnaire at

the start of the school year. The researchers found that students attending the new junior high school presented greater concerns about social issues, such as establishing new friendships, than those from the established junior high school. However, participants from both schools had great concerns about academic issues, rather than the social or organisational aspects of transition. Shacher et al. concluded that the primary to secondary transition signified a departure from a structured and relatively protected environment to an arrival into a more demanding arena. Additionally, students were apprehensive and fearful that academic obligations would not be met. Shacher et al. (2002, p. 91) suggest this anxiety is influenced by Israeli culture in which secondary schooling is viewed as the “pressure cooker” for pre-tertiary examinations.

Organisational, social and academic aspects of school transitions also emerge as major concerns for transitioning students in Australia. Johnstone’s (2001) qualitative study on the experiences of the primary to secondary transition for ten rural Australian students found levels of anxiety around the social dimension of the secondary school. Using interviews, questionnaires and journal writing, the study revealed that participants felt vulnerable to bullying during the transition to secondary school. These feelings were attributed to the retelling of myths from older students prior to the transition and their “lowly status” of being Year 7 students (Johnstone, 2001, p. 4).

In addition, Johnstone (2001) found that students identify additional anxieties which were consistent with other international studies (Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Blyth et al., 1978; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Graham & Hill, 2003; Lucey & Reay, 2000; Pietarinen, 1998), including the organisational dimension of the school, such as the layout and size of the school, as well as the social aspects of forming new friendship groups. Participants in this study were also concerned about the number of different teachers to whom they would be exposed in the secondary school. Students expressed their concerns, not only about the number of new teachers they will have, but also the types of teachers they will experience.

In another Australian study, Johnstone (2002) investigated the transition from primary to secondary students from a rural perspective. Participants included students from four rural schools (n=13) in regional New South Wales. Data was collected using a mixed method approach and included questionnaires, informal semi-structured interviews and journal writing for both students and parents. From Johnstone's data analysis three themes emerge which categorise students' uncertainty and include the organisational culture, social culture and personal reactions and adaptations.

Concerns raised in this study (Johnstone, 2002), which were identified as organisational aspects of transition, include the increased number of teachers at the secondary school, getting lost, what to do on the first day of high school and the increased amount of homework. These concerns were consistent with the organisational concerns which emerged in the previous study reported by Johnstone (2001). For students transitioning with a peer, Johnstone found that students did not report a lot of concern about adapting to the social culture of the high school at the pre-transition phase. However, students reported an interest in the older students and they reported concerns about the large number of students at the high school. Finally, in regards to personal reactions participants used words such as "nervous" and "scared" to describe their feelings about transition (Johnstone, 2002, p. 5). On the other hand, participants also described themselves as "excited" and felt it was time to "move on".

Transitioning Australian students are anxious about the social aspects of moving into secondary school. Howard and Johnson (2004) investigated the primary to secondary school transition in both a rural and urban context in New South Wales. Findings, from data collected from interviews involving Year 6 (n=25) and Year 7 (n=68) students, teachers (n=10) and parents (n=21) suggest that student anxieties involve making of new friends and keeping old friends (especially for those transitioning without any peers from their primary school), fitting into the broader social context of the school environment and bullying from students within their own year group, as well as from older students within the school. Additionally, academic aspects of transition raised in the study included concerns to do with keeping up with school work. Practical issues of managing to find their way around the new

school environment and learning how to read the school timetable were also identified as pre-transition concerns for participants in this study.

Longaretti (2006) found that social anxieties of fitting in and making and keeping new friends were raised by transitioning primary to secondary school students. Australian Year 6 students (n=141) responded to questionnaires, 16 of whom volunteered to participate further in the study. Year 7 students (n=55) were also surveyed in relation to their transition experience. Other pre-transition concerns identified in this study involved the academic dimension of schooling and included getting good grades, completing class work and homework, and passing tests.

Finally, new forms of discipline and concerns about whether their teachers would be strict emerged in another Australian study. Cotterell (1979) investigated the transition process for students in Brisbane, Queensland. Participants included transitioning Year 6 students (n=607) who were asked to respond to four aspects of secondary school life, including school work, teachers, older students and the school itself. Data was collected from students during the last three weeks of primary school and then six weeks after commencing secondary school. Cotterell found that students in the pre-transition phase communicated feelings of nervousness about the relationship that may develop with the teacher and the teacher's ability to teach the class. These findings also emerged as concerns in other international studies (Brown & Armstrong, 1982; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Measor & Woods, 1984; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001). Additionally, students expected work to be hard following transition, although one third of participants expected it to be interesting. Boys in this study expressed greater concerns than the girls that the older students at the secondary school would be unfriendly.

In summary, Table 2.2 displays an overview of previous research which investigated student expectations of the process of the primary to secondary transition and to which has been referred in *section 2.4*. It details the author and title of the study, country of origin, sample size, findings and states whether the study had a rural focus.

Table 2.2***An Overview of Current Literature on Student Expectations of Primary to Secondary Transition***

Author (Date)	Study	Country	N	Findings	Rural focus
Akos (2002)	Student perceptions of the transition from elementary to middle school	USA	331 students	Students preoccupied with concerns about rules and procedures in first phase. Second phase students' identified concerns involved older students, homework, lockers and grades. Potential positive aspects included making new friends, gym/PE class, lockers, changing classes and getting good grades.	Yes
Akos & Galassi (2004)	Middle and high school transitions as viewed by students, parents and teachers	USA	173 Year 6 students, 83 parents, 12 teachers, 320 Year 9 students	Transition posed challenges and opportunities for all students. Transition concerns included amount of homework, getting lost, pressure to do well. Positive anticipations included choosing classes and making new friends, more freedom and attending school events.	No
Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm & Splittgerber, (2000)	School transitions: Beginning of the end or a new beginning?	N/A	N/A	Current research has found that students were concerned with getting to class on time, finding lockers, getting lost, prospect of being bullied and falling grades.	No
Arth (1990)	Moving into middle school: Concerns of transescent students	USA	1168 students	Seven transition concerns identified, including failure, drugs, giving a presentation in front of class, being sent to principal or assistant principal, being picked on, unkind people and keeping up with assignments.	No

Ashton (2008)	Improving the transfer to secondary school: How every child's voice can matter	England	1673 students	Major issues were based around friendships – making new friends, making the right friends, whether they would be in same classes. Other issues include bullying and getting lost. Interested in types of teachers. Saw transition as a time of growing up.	No
Blyth, Bush & Simmons (1978)	The transition into early adolescence: A longitudinal comparison of youth in two educational contexts	USA	622 students	Students transitioning at Year 6 are more academically oriented and have a greater sense of increased independence and responsibility than students transitioning at Year 8 who are more focused on peer relationships.	No
Brown & Armstrong (1982)	The structure of pupils' worries during transition from junior to secondary school	England	173 students 8 teachers	Anxieties about transition associated with work and routines, discipline and inter-personal relationships and other students and teachers.	No
Brown & Armstrong (1986)	Transfer from junior to secondary: The child's perspective	England	220 students	Prominent fears were getting lost, homework and general anxieties not associated with anything in particular. Positive feelings pre-transition included sports in secondary school and the new and different subject. Boys more positive about joining clubs and girls more worried about getting lost.	No
Chedzoy & Burden (2005)	Making the move: Assessing student attitudes to primary to secondary school transfer.	England	207	Students' expectations included concerns that they may be bullied, school work will be harder and discipline to be stricter. Students also anticipated transition to be an opportunity to make new friends and have a fresh start.	No

Cotterell (1979)	Expectations and realities: A study of transition from primary to secondary school	Australia	607 students	Transitioning students expected teachers to be more strict, school work to be harder and older students to be unfriendly and aggressive.	No
Diemert (1992)	A needs assessment of fifth grade students in a middle school	USA	23 students	Social needs included the teacher / student relationship, making new friends, opportunities to talk to old friends and knowing how to respond in negative situations with peers. Procedural needs included rules, finding way around the school and being prepared for class. Academic needs included academic expectations and how to get help from teachers.	No
Graham & Hill (2003)	Negotiating the transition to secondary school	Scotland	268 primary students, 343 secondary students	In general, students have positive attitudes towards transition. Positive expectations included making new friends, learning new things and doing practical subjects.	No
Howard & Johnson (2004)	Transition from primary to secondary school: Possibilities and paradoxes	Australia	25 Year 6 students, 68 Year 7 students, 10 teachers, 21 parents	Key transition challenges were social – making and keeping new friends, fitting in to broader school community, concerns of bullying. Additionally, keeping up academically and navigating their way around the new school and managing to work out the timetable.	Yes
Johnstone (2001)	The lived reality of the transition to high school for rural students	Australia	10 students	Rural students had mixed feelings about transition. Their anxieties emerged around the physical environment, organisational and social culture and emotional challenges.	Yes

Johnstone (2002)	The transition to high school: A journey of uncertainty	Australia	13 students	Students concerned about the organisational aspects including getting lost, homework, the increase in number of teachers and what to do on the first day. Students transitioning with peers were not worried about the social culture of the high school but were interested in the older students at the school, as well as the large number of students. Students felt nervous and scared but also excited as they felt that it was time to move on from the primary school.	Yes
Longaretti (2006)	School Transition: Aspirations and inspirations	Australia	141 Year 6 students (16 completed the next phase), 55 Year 7 students	Students presented anxieties around social aspects, including fitting in and making new friends. Academic concerns included managing class work and homework, passing tests and getting good grades.	No
Lucey & Reay (2001)	Identities in transition: Anxiety and excitement in the move to secondary school	England	90 students	Opening up the imagined world of secondary school to primary school students is important for easing their fears of transition.	No
Maute & Brough (2002)	The next best step: Helping our students transition "out"	USA	1991= 693 students, 2001= 598 students	In 1991 the greatest concerns were academic, including getting good grades, completing homework and class work, taking tests and parental expectations, keeping friends and making new female friends, preparing for college and work life. In 2001 the concerns were similar to 1991 with the exception of keeping friends and making new female friends which were replaced by taking difficult classes and organising time.	No

Measor & Woods (1984)	Changing schools: Pupil perspectives on transfer to a comprehensive	England	Not stated	Students were concerned about the size, complexity and movement involved in transition, new forms of discipline and authority, academic demands and losing friends.	No
Odegaard & Heath (1992)	Assisting the elementary school student in the transition to a middle school	USA	225 fifth and sixth grade students	Greatest concerns were associated with size and complexity of school environment, older students and amount of homework. Most attractive aspects included lockers, different teachers for different subjects, moving into different rooms, eating in cafeteria, athletic program and opportunity to make new friends.	No
Pietarinen (1998)	Rural school students' experiences on the transition from primary school to secondary school	Finland	41 students	The most significant transition areas for rural students were the physical (size and layout), social (losing friends and being bullied) and academic (work demands) environments.	Yes
Pratt & George (2004)	Transferring friendships: Girls' and boys' friendships in the transition from primary to secondary school.	England	30 students	Friendships were greatest concerns about transition, including maintaining old friendships, establishing new ones. Boys also identified bullying as a concerning prospect.	No
Shacher, Suss & Sharan (2002)	Students' concern about the transition from elementary to junior high school: A comparison of two cities	Israel	952 students	Students transitioning to a new junior high school presented more negative feelings and concerns about transition than students transitioning to an established junior high school. Academic issues are of great concern to all students.	No

Smith, Akos, Lim & Wiley (2008)	Student and stakeholder perceptions of the transition to high school	USA	172 students, 64 parents	Students concerned about the difficulty of school work and organisational aspects of transition. Students excited about having more choice for lunch, getting lost, finding their way around their new environment, increased curriculum choice and opportunity to expand social networks.	No
Weller (2007)	'Sticking with your mates?' Children's friendship trajectories during the transition from primary to secondary school	England	588 Year 6 students, 81 Year 7 students, 76 parents	Students not transitioning with friends were more anxious and less excited about moving to secondary school. Some saw transition as a time to start again, while others were not interested in maintaining present friendships.	No

As *section 2.4* has demonstrated and Table 2.2 highlights, students have many similar expectations of the primary to secondary transition, both in an international and Australian context. However, differences do exist and appear to be influenced by factors such as gender, rurality, culture, location, previous experiences, past stories and myths. As the literature reveals, many students experience feelings of excitement that the transition to secondary school is a time of increased independence and personal development. However, current literature also demonstrates the major causes of anxiety for transitioning students emerge out of three key areas: the social aspects of making new friends, the fear of being bullied and losing current friends; the academic aspect, including increased academic pressure, levels of difficulty and homework; and the organisational environment, which includes fears of getting lost and getting to class on time in the new school environment. The existing literature which examines whether student expectations of the transition to a new school environment are realised will be explored in the following section (*section 2.5*).

2.5 Lived reality

This section examines the current research and literature on the post-transition experiences of students and investigates whether the reality of moving into secondary school is consistent

with student expectations pre-transition, as discussed in *section 2.4*. The literature suggests most transitioning students quickly adapt to the organisational and social aspects of transition, although adjustment to the academic dimension may take longer than anticipated. However, some studies report a change in the student-teacher relationship as well as increased feelings of anonymity and these studies are reviewed in this section.

A review of existing literature suggests that the organisational concerns identified pre-transition, such as getting lost, are quickly overcome following transition. However, academic aspects post-transition are not managed as well as anticipated pre-transition. Concerns of elementary school students about their transition to junior high school were studied by Mitman and Packer (1982). Participants (n=208) comprised seventh grade students and data was collected in two phases. Comparisons between the two questionnaire phases indicate a decline in overall concerns about the transition from elementary to junior high school. In the early phase of the study, students' greatest concerns included the amount and difficulty of homework, getting to class on time, difficulty and completion of school work, finding rooms, the possibility that teachers would be stricter than at elementary school, bullying, theft and boredom. Interestingly, eight of the ten highest ranked items from the first phase were still listed in the items of concern after the second phase. Concerns about finding rooms and strictness of teachers were replaced by concerns associated with being able to understand what teachers say in class and dating. Overall, students reported more concerns about the academic aspects of transition than social aspects.

Brown and Armstrong (1986), in the second phase of their study (*see section 2.4*) of the transition from primary to secondary school in London, England, collected data from students (n=89) of the original 220 students who participated in the first phase of the study. These participants wrote an additional essay which described their feelings about their experiences post-transition. Brown and Armstrong (1986) found that environmental and organisational worries diminished post-transition but that academic issues, such as class work and homework, strict teachers and uncertainty of changing rooms were the persistent concerns of post-transitioning students. The positive feelings post-transition were associated with the relief things had become familiar, including teachers and other students.

Furthermore, Brown and Armstrong (1986) did not find any significant differences in the worries or positive feelings between boys and girls, although boys were found to experience persisting fears following transition.

Within the organisational context of primary to secondary school transition Anderson et al. (2000), in their review of current transition research literature, found that the organisational discontinuities of size, departmentalisation, streaming, teacher expectations and student anonymity were issues in the transition process. Although Cocklin (1999, p. 5) found that, while rural students found the size of the new school to come as a “shock”, it was only an initial issue which was easily overcome following transition. The differences in findings may be attributed to the organisation of the school as Cocklin suggests that the secondary school’s designated Year 7 area in the study site enabled students to mix independently of the larger school population. This aided the process of transition and diminished the effects of the larger school crowd.

That the reality of the transition experience not always meets students’ expectations pre-transition continues to emerge in later studies. Graham and Hill (2003) found that, for participants in their Scottish study, with the exception of an ethnic minority group involved in the study, participants reported they had coped “better with the changes than they had expected” (Graham & Hill, 2003, p. 4). Findings indicated that the social concerns which were anticipated during the pre-transition phase were not realised post-transition. In actual fact, it emerged in the study that the academic aspects of secondary school were more confronting for students. Finding their way around their new school environment and an increase in homework were aspects of transition which were identified by student respondents as being worse than expected.

A focus on rules and procedures are most commonly presented by students following transition. As part of a four phase study, Akos (2002) found that the reality of transitioning into the middle school raised different concerns from those pre-transition (*see section 2.4*). Areas of concern identified by participants post-transition involved bullies or older students (24%), getting lost (19%), doing well in class (19%) and being late to class (7%). The most

difficult aspects of the transition process included getting lost, making friends, learning class schedules, lockers and getting to class on time. The positive aspects of transition identified in the study included freedom, friends, different classes and lockers.

Similar findings to Akos (2002) and Graham and Hill (2003), in relation to students' actual experiences of transition, were found by Akos and Galassi (2004). The academic aspects of maintaining grades and completing homework and the organisational dimensions of managing their way around the school were realised. Additionally, Akos and Galassi also found that the time and process in which students adjust to the three dimensions, including social, academic and organisational areas, of the secondary school environment varies and that this needs further consideration. Akos and Galassi found that transitioning students quickly adjust to the organisational changes of secondary school life but that more time and careful programming are required for academic and social dimensions.

In addition to this study, Akos (2004), in a study on transition to middle school, found that Year 8 students from Virginia, United States, mentioned organisational themes (41%) more frequently than academic (34%) or personal/social (25%) themes when giving advice to pre-transitioning students. All students in Virginia, as part of the 2000 Standards of Learning state assessment, were asked to write an essay about the advice they would give a student who would soon commence middle school. From each of the seven school districts fifty essays were randomly sampled. In total 350 essays were analysed.

From the analysis, 46 themes emerged and Akos (2004) categorised them into organisational, academic and personal/social themes. Organisational themes included choosing and changing classes, knowing and following rules, and knowing about lockers. The academic themes involved the need to study and improve study habits, as well as homework and the difficulty of work. The personal/social themes included meeting new friends, choosing friends, being nice and getting along, and having a positive attitude.

Interestingly, Akos (2004) put forward that although themes from this study are consistent with aspects of other studies, including Akos and Galassi (2004) outlined above, the

frequency of the organisational advice from the sample of Year 8 students is surprising. Akos and Galassi (2004) found organisational needs during the primary to secondary transition are most pertinent before and immediately after transition but Akos (2004) proposes that the frequency of organisational advice from this study may indicate the organisational aspects were the most memorable.

In contrast, previous studies found that the academic concerns identified pre-transition were not strongly evident post-transition. First, Chedzoy and Burden (2005) found that participants consider academic work at their destination school too easy and some of it similar to work undertaken in primary school. However, participants indicate the volume of homework to be too high, had limited value and impacted on their social life. The study also found that the social expectations of making new friends were realised for many students in this study. Additionally, the pre-transition concerns of finding their way around the new environment were quickly overcome post-transition.

In a later study, Smith et al.'s (2008) investigation of student and stakeholder perceptions of the transition to high school found that post-transition students (n=119) expressed less academic concern during their first year of high school than they did pre-transition (*see section 2.4*). Within the social domain ninth grade students responded more positively about establishing new friendships and getting along with others than at the eighth grade phase, although there was a decline in ninth grade responses from the eighth grade in the areas of participating in extracurricular and school activities, not feeling safe and not feeling accepted by other students. Furthermore, post-transition students found it much easier to find their way around their new school and experienced a decrease in responses about lunch choices and difficulty with new rules.

From a rural perspective, academic achievement does not necessarily relate to how well rural students had adjusted to their new school environment. Pietarinen (1998) found students in to feel dissatisfied that they were not part of the school's planning and decision making processes or of the development of school activities post-transition. This reasoning for the change in academic achievement has not been highlighted in other literature that examines

academic achievement and transition (Alspaugh, 1998a; Alspaugh & Harting, 1995; Graham & Hill, 2003). Although the Pietarinen (1998) study focused on Finnish rural students and highlighted how the small rural primary schools participating in this study are characterised by relationships in which clear communication and decision making occurred between students, the responses of teachers and parents may account for this difference in findings.

Post-transition, studies have found that an unexpected difficulty for students following transition has been the style of teaching at the destination school. Pietarinen (1998) found students to experience difficulty negotiating student-teacher relationships post-transition. Some students felt that the relationship between teacher and student was not mutually trustworthy and Pietarinen attributes this to the differences in class structure between primary and secondary schools.

The inconsistencies between teachers at the secondary school, in terms of style, behaviour and management emerged as a concern in a number of other studies. Johnstone (2001) concluded that considerable personal adaptations were required by transitioning students during this time. Cocklin's (1999) case study of the transition experience of three students from rural New South Wales revealed that the biggest adaptation for transitioning students was the change in the student-teacher relationship and this corroborates Pietarinen's (1998) findings. Respondents indicated that the student-teacher relationship became a negative experience, as students often expect an extension of their pre-transition experience. The effects of teacher expectations were also explored by Blyth et al. (1978), suggesting that students felt pressured to act more maturely and plan for the future.

Similar findings were found in Chedzoy and Burden's (2005) study. In general, participants in their study found teachers in the secondary school to be less strict and friendlier than anticipated pre-transition (*see section 2.4*). However, it was also noted that a quarter of participants felt teachers at the secondary school "did not know who they were", increasing feelings of anonymity (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005, p. 31). Furthermore, Chedzoy and Burden found that, while the size of the destination school was an initial concern post-transition for students, anxiety was reduced after the first term. Comparable findings were found for other

organisational features, such as school structures and the number of teachers transitioning students faced, as well as increased feelings of anonymity.

Increased feelings of anonymity were also found by Blyth et al. (1978). Their research found that students transitioning from Year 6 into junior high reported higher ratings of feeling anonymous than those students transitioning at Year 8. Blyth et al. (1978) suggest that this finding may be a result of students constantly moving rooms for classes. Following transition, Blyth et al. reveal that feelings of victimisation, especially for males, increase for students transitioning at Year 6 compared with those transitioning at the end of Year 8.

Concerns of bullying are a lingering concern post-transition. Pellegrini and Long (2002) conducted a study of bullying, dominance and victimisation during the transition from primary to secondary school. A three year study located in rural United States, it consisted of participants (n=129) in the final sample, which was 83% of the first year sample size. The findings suggest that, initially, reported levels of bullying and aggression increase with the transition to secondary school, but then decreases. Additionally, a decline in self-report data about victimisation was also found. Pellegrini and Long conclude that boys, more than girls, engage in bullying and aggressive behaviour in order to establish dominance in the newly established peer group following transition, but the incidence of bullying decreases over time.

To summarise, Table 2.3 displays an overview of previous research on the primary to secondary transition which has examined student experiences of the process and has been referred to in *section 2.5*. It details the nature of the study, country of origin, sample size, findings and states whether the study had a rural focus.

Table 2.3***An Overview of Current Literature on Student Experiences of the Primary to Secondary Transition***

Author (Date)	Study	Country	N	Findings	Rural focus
Akos (2002)	Student perceptions of the transition from elementary to middle school	USA	103 students – phase III, 97 students – phase IV	At phase III students concerns included: bullies, getting lost, doing well in class, being late to class. At phase IV aspects of transition identified as most difficult included getting lost, making friends, class schedules, lockers, getting to class on time. Positive aspects included freedom, different classes, friends and lockers.	Yes
Akos (2004)	Advice and student agency in the transition to middle school	USA	350 students	Organisational themes were mentioned more frequently than personal/social or academic themes	No
Akos & Galassi (2004)	Middle and high school transitions as viewed by students, parents and teachers	USA	173 Year 6 students, 83 parents, 12 teachers, 320 Year 9 students	Following transition students quickly adjusted to the organisational dimension, such as layout of school. More time and consideration during transition needs to be given to the academic dimension, including concerns around homework and increased academic pressure, as well as the social dimension, including establishing new friendships.	No
Alsbaugh (1998a)	Transition effects of school grade-level organization on student achievement	USA	Not stated	Academic achievement loss is greater when transition happened at Year 6, rather than Year 8. Achievement loss was greater when a large number of elementary schools merged into one middle school.	Yes

Alsbaugh & Harting (1995)	Achievement loss associated with the transition to middle school and high school	USA (Missouri)	Not stated	Losses in academic achievement levels following transition occurred when students moved from self-contained classes to departmentalised classes. Achievement levels recover after first year.	Yes
Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm & Splittgerber, (2000)	School transitions: Beginning of the end or a new beginning?	N/A	N/A	Studies found that post-transition students' courses more difficult, teachers stricter and rules more strictly enforced. Some studies found that students found it difficult to make friends and felt more alone at secondary school.	No
Blyth, Bush & Simmons (1978)	The transition into early adolescence: A longitudinal comparison of youth in two educational contexts	USA	622 students	Feelings of anonymity greater for Year 6 than Year 8 transitioning students. Year 6 transitioning students, especially males, had greater reporting of victimisation than transitioning Year 8 students.	No
Brown & Armstrong (1986)	Transfer from junior to secondary: The child's perspective	England	89 students	Environmental and organisational worries soon reduced post-transition. Persistent worries included class work and homework, strict teachers and room changes. Positive feelings associated with familiarity. No significant differences were found between boys and girls.	No
Chedzoy & Burden (2005)	Making the move: Assessing student attitudes to primary to secondary school transfer.	England	207 students	Post-transition students found layout did not cause anxiety. Academic work too easy and repetitive from primary school, but overburdened with homework. Secondary school an opportunity to make new friends and a new start. Teachers not as strict as expected.	No

Cocklin (1999)	A journey of transition: From Gumly Gumly Public to secondary school	Australia	3 students	Students found the transition experience positive, making friends easier than anticipated. Initially the physical layout was overwhelming but quickly overcome. The biggest difference identified was the teachers and the different relationships they had with students.	Yes
Graham & Hill (2003)	Negotiating the transition to secondary school	Scotland	268 primary students, 343 secondary students	Students coped better than expected, except an ethnic minority group. The realised concerning issues following transition include an increase in homework and teachers, and finding their way around school.	No
Johnstone (2001)	The lived reality of the transition to high school for rural students	Australia	10 students	Students' concerns about the physical layout of school and the increase in the number of teachers are quickly overcome following transition. Greatest difficulty in adjusting to transition was the inconsistencies between teachers, in terms of their style and management.	Yes
Mitman & Packer (1982)	Concerns of seventh-graders about their transition to junior high school	USA	208 students	Greatest concerns were associated with academic aspects of transition. At the early phase students greatest concerns were amount and difficulty of homework and school work, getting lost, strictness of teachers, getting to class on time, boredom, theft and bullies. At the later phase similar concerns were reported with the exception of the teachers and getting lost items. These were replaced by concerns about being able to understand what teachers say in class and dating.	No

Pellegrini & Long (2002)	A longitudinal study of bullying and dominance and victimization during the transition from primary school through secondary school	USA	129 students	In general, reports of bullying and aggression increased with transition to middle school but then declined. Reports of victimisation decreased during transition to secondary school.	Yes
Pietarinen (1998)	Rural school students' experiences on the transition from primary school to secondary school	Finland	41 students	Students felt dissatisfied that they were not part of the planning and decision making process. Students disappointed with their relationships with teachers. Their social concerns, including establishing new peer networks, and organisational concerns, including adapting to new procedures, were realised.	Yes
Smith, Akos, Lim & Wiley (2008)	Student and stakeholder perceptions of the transition to high school	USA	119 students	Students expressed less concern about academic aspects of transition than at the pre-transition phase.	No

The ease in which students manage the transition from primary to secondary school varies between individuals and contexts, as demonstrated in *section 2.5* and outlined in Table 2.3. Many transitioning students coped better than expected pre-transition but for others their concerns were realised post-transition. In general, students quickly overcome their anxiety about finding their way around the new school environment. Additionally, the social aspects of developing new friendship networks are also quickly established. In terms of the academic aspects, students found that the increase in the volume of homework and difficulty of school work were persistent concerns post-transition. Short-term achievement losses are identified in the literature as being an issue during the primary to secondary transition. Finally, rural

students report the change in the nature of the student-teacher relationships to be one of their most important adjustments during the primary to secondary transition.

2.6 The small rural school context

The aim of this study is to examine the primary to secondary transition process and to investigate whether the experiences of moving into the secondary school meets students' expectations pre-transition for two key groups - the first of these being rural students. In order to investigate transition for rural students it is important to explore the existing literature on rurality and rural schools in Australia, and in particular Tasmania. This section provides an overview of the characteristics of small rural schools. The difficulty of categorising a rural school is complicated by obtaining an agreed and shared definition of the term 'rural' and this is discussed (*section 2.6.1*). The Tasmanian context (*section 2.6.2*) is also provided. The final part of this section explores rural schooling (*section 2.6.3*), as well as rural schooling in the Tasmanian Context (*section 2.6.4*).

2.6.1 Defining rural

One of the difficulties of undertaking a study in a rural context is the diversity of ways in which the term 'rural' is used and the criteria which are used to define it. Within an Australian context, there is debate about what constitutes a small school and what comprises rurality. Furthermore, different Australian Government departments cannot agree on a mutual definition, which adds greater confusion to the issue.

In 1984, a New South Wales Education Commission report, reviewing education in rural New South Wales, adopted a simple geographic definition of 'rural' and 'urban'. Rural became all areas outside the Sydney-Newcastle-Wollongong conurbation. However, the report argues that rural areas cannot be easily defined, especially when taking into account the delivery of services; therefore different profiles must be used to categorise 'rural'. Measures such as distance and time, as well as isolation and access were identified as contributing factors to levels of rurality and should be considered in categorising areas as 'rural' or 'urban' (New South Wales Education Commission, 1984).

The disparity between methods used to define ‘rurality’ was highlighted by Starr and White (2008), in a paper on leading in small rural schools. According to Starr and White, the Federal Government defines ‘rural’ as all non-metropolitan places with a population of less than 100,000. Meanwhile, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) categorises ‘rurality’ based on demographic densities. According to this framework, ‘rural’ can be defined as a place of less than 1000 people. A comparison of these definitions produces a large difference in the demographics of Australia:

using the ABS definition there are approximately 2.3 million rural Australians (less than 15% of the total population) while using the Commonwealth definition, this number rises to more than 5.7 million non-metropolitan Australians (approximately 34% of the total population) (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, as cited in Starr & White, 2008, p. 1).

Furthermore, the Commonwealth School Commission (1987, p. 25) states that in terms of rural schooling rural Australia is “... all of the nation excluding the greater metropolitan regions and, generally, areas within 50 km of those regions”. Application of this definition would locate rural Australia as all areas outside the metropolitan areas of Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong, Brisbane, Gold Coast, Melbourne, Geelong, Hobart, Adelaide and Perth. However, according to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) (2000, p. 6) the best available estimates suggest between one-quarter to one-third of all Australian students attend schools in rural and remote areas.

The confusion associated with a lack of one clear definition presents additional problems associated with the concept of rural disadvantage as presented by Cunningham, Choate, Abbott-Chapman and Hughes (c.1995). According to Cunningham et al. (c.1995, p. 2), rural disadvantage may be based on a continuum of a community’s size or degree of isolation. Furthermore, Cunningham et al. state that when classifying a population as rural or remote there is a tendency to further class this population as homogeneous, which would be a mistake as not all rural people share a common way of life. Cunningham et al. argue for the use of social mapping as an important instrument in distinguishing different groups co-

habitating a rural area, thereby differentiating socio-economic and educational status (Cunningham et al., c.1995, p. 2).

To demonstrate the difficulties associated with defining the term 'rural' in another context, Arnold, Biscoe, Farmer, Robertson and Shapley (2007) used six separate definitions and classification systems to examine education policy and practice in rural areas in the United States. Drawn from different federal agencies (Management and Budget, Health and Human Services, Education, Agriculture, the Government Accountability Office and the Census Bureau), these definitions were broad but were applied in the study because they had relevance to education policies and practices. Alternatively, Meyenn, Sinclair and Squires (1991) provide a definition of rurality which involves ecological, occupational or cultural dimensions. In an article on the role of teachers in rural schools Meyenn et al. suggest that a community's rurality is determined by its size, degree of isolation, economic base and cultural affiliations of its residents and that when moving towards the rural end of the rural-urban continuum the comprehensiveness of choice and option declines.

Another model to classify rurality has been developed by Griffith (1992) in the Services Access Frame (SAF) which is used to measure a community's access to activities and services. It uses three elements: population centre size, a time cost distance unit, and economic resources in its classification. While there is no one way to provide a concrete definition of 'rural', the SAF model has been supported by HREOC (2000) as being the most equitable instrument for developing educational profiles in rural areas. The strengths of this model (Griffith, 1992) include the identification of communities which have limited access to services; it does not require a boundary line to identify relative access to services, and it allows for the addition of extra indicators to be included. However, categorising areas as 'rural' can be a time consuming activity as access to services would need to be determined, as would the time, cost, distance unit and economic resources.

2.6.2 The Tasmanian context

Within the Tasmanian context, data from the 2006 census reveals the proportion of the state's population living in rural areas is approximately 27 % (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity

Commission, 2000). In the Tasmanian Government Submission (2000) to the HREOC's National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education, two methods to define rurality were provided, demonstrating the difficulty of applying a common definition.

The first method in the submission was an application of the ABS definition, categorising Greater Hobart as being the only urban population area in Tasmania. Application of this method reveals rural students make up 59% of the student population. The second method, an extension of the ABS definition to include the regional areas of Greater Launceston, Burnie and Devonport, results in approximately 19% of students located in rural areas (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000).

2.6.3 Rural schooling

Rural communities are often portrayed as disadvantaged when compared with the resources and services available in urban locations. In a report on rural disadvantage and post compulsory participation, Cunningham et al. (c.1995) suggest that, coupled with poor teacher retention, rural-urban migration and eroding infrastructure, rural schools face numerous challenges. However, Cunningham et al. (c.1995, p. 1) suggest that there are many advantages to rural schooling which should not be discounted and include less formal atmosphere, small size, and close relationships between teachers, administrators, parents and students.

In order to contextualise studies on rural education, the following characteristics of small, rural schools have been identified in the literature. Firstly, the small number of students in each year level enables teachers to have a deep understanding and knowledge of the strengths and limitations of individual student's abilities (Johnstone, 2001), as well as providing individual instruction and flexible teaching practices (Pietarinen, 1998, p. 6). The classroom environment is usually structured and self-contained (Reynolds, 2005, p. 6). There often appears to be a partnership of teaching and learning involving all key stakeholders – staff, parents, students and community (Cocklin, 1999, p. 4) and students tend to develop deep connections with one central teacher (Reynolds, 2005, p. 6).

Secondly, Fischer (1995, p. 37), in a paper discussing transition for special education students in rural communities, states that as a partner, rural schools have become a force in the local community and often turn to their community as a curriculum source. This idea is also supported by Johnstone (2001, p. 2) and Pietarinen (1998, p. 5) who suggest rural schools tend to take on a family-like nature in which strong links are established between the community and the school. Furthermore, Montgomery, Bull and Cutbirth (1995, p. 20), in a paper examining the use of creative thinking techniques to help rural educators assist successful school to work transitions for disabled students, also maintains “the school community becomes the local community in a rural setting”.

Additionally, academic achievement levels have been found not to be affected by rurality. Fan and Chen (1999) studied achievement differences between rural, suburban and urban students in the United States, using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988. Participants included eighth grade students (n=24,500), teachers and parents. Fan and Chen found that rural students performed equally well in academic performance in reading, mathematics, science and social science, and they suggest that rural students do not suffer academic disadvantage as a result of their attendance in rural schools.

In terms of comprehensive curriculum delivery, McKenzie, Harrold and Sturman (1996), in a study examining the curriculum provisions of students in Australia’s rural schools, found that rural and remote schools experienced curriculum constraints, covered fewer major curriculum areas and had less depth in curriculum area subjects than urban schools. Additionally, teachers in rural and remote areas are less specialised in their teaching loads. However, McKenzie et al. did find both school size and average class size smaller in rural and remote secondary schools than in urban schools.

Rural primary schools facilities are generally older, but relatively well maintained (Nachtigal, 1992). In an examination of rural schooling in the United States, Nachtigal claims that rural schools represent a community’s largest investment and serve as the hub of many community activities. Subsequently, they are usually well cared for, despite the fact that they are often older, remodeled structures.

With the movement from primary to secondary school, many students from small rural primary schools experience difficulties which may impact upon adjustment during the transition process (Johnstone, 2001). The main difficulty for many of these students is the isolation or distance from the secondary school. HREOC (2000) suggests transport requirements may have a negative effect on a student's involvement and participation in extra-curricular activities, such as sport, cultural activities, school functions and employment opportunities.

Cultures of most secondary schools appear to be very different from rural primary schools (Pietarinen, 1998, p. 9). In general, secondary schools can be more impersonal, more formal, more evaluative and more competitive. Other literature on school transitions describes primary schools as child-centred environments (Corby, 2003, p. 1) with more task-oriented goals (Alspaugh, 1998a, p. 20). On the other hand, secondary schools are described as performance oriented (Alspaugh, 1998a, p. 20), timetabled driven (Braggett, 1997, p. 41; Corby, 2003, p. 1) and students have greater academic responsibilities (Braggett, 1997, p. 41; Reynolds, 2005, p. 6).

Following the move to secondary school, a change to the student-teacher relationship was found by Alspaugh (1998a, p. 20) and Pereira and Pooley (2007). The relationship becomes more impersonal (Braggett, 1997, p. 41; Pereira & Pooley, 2007; Pietarinen, 1998, p. 7) with a clear hierarchy of status and control (Cocklin, 1999, p. 5). Swidler's (2000) study examining the practices of one teacher schools in Nebraska, suggests that secondary school students experience little close and consistent interactions with their teachers. Additionally, Braggett (1997, p. 41) and Reynolds (2005, p. 6) stated that students have to manage the expectations of several teachers rather than those of the one core teacher in the primary school.

In addition, Cheers (1987), Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (2000), Johnstone (2001) and National Board of Employment, Education and Training (1991) concur that access to services and resources, such as a library, which support and reinforce formal educational experiences, tend to be limited for students from rural areas. This may have

implications for academic achievement and may have serious outcomes for the way in which students from rural primary schools adjust to the transition into secondary school.

Finally, Pereira and Pooley (2007) studied student transitions from a high school to a senior high school in rural Western Australia to better understand the issues relevant to the transition of Australian rural students. The sample included Year 11 and 12 students (n=10) who had made the transition from a high school catering for students from Years 8 to 10 to a senior high school situated in a town approximately an hour's travel away.

Pereira and Pooley (2007) found the transition for rural students to be complicated by geography which inhibited students from interacting with their peers outside school. Academic pathways were also limited as inter-town segregation reduced the opportunities for rural students to participate in non-academic based activities. Furthermore, students perceived a shift in the relationships with teachers at the senior high school in which students felt teachers take on a more formal role rather than the informal, personal relationship experienced at the high school. These findings confirm other literature detailed above in which the distances travelled by rural students to access secondary and senior secondary schools can have implications for their social and academic outcomes.

The literature described in the above section (*section 2.6.3*) details the characteristics of rural schools, including physical structures and teaching pedagogy. Additionally, it also highlights the many challenges and opportunities facing students, parents and staff in rural schools. The following section (*section 2.6.4*) turns to the history, characteristics, challenges and opportunities of rural schools in the Tasmanian context.

2.6.4 The Tasmanian experience

In the 1930s, the Tasmanian Education Department, in a report on Tasmania's Area Schools, recognised the current education systems in Tasmania's rural areas as being inadequate. At the time, rural schools provided a primary education course but the provision for secondary students was found to be insufficient and it was deemed students leaving for the workforce at age fourteen were too young. Additionally, economic conditions rendered it virtually

financially impossible for many families to send their children to urban areas for post primary schooling (Education Department, Tasmania, 1942).

The solution to this concern in Tasmania was the establishment of area schools. Combining a number of district schools into one large school, area schools were conveniently located in an area to which students from outlying areas would travel. As stated in the report the Tasmanian Education Department's objective was to provide a comprehensive education from elementary school through to secondary school which met the needs of 12-15 year old students. Subsequently, the first two area schools, located in Sheffield and Hagley, were opened in Tasmania in 1936 (Education Department, Tasmania, 1942).

Forty years later, in a report entitled *The Future of District Schools in Tasmania*, commissioned by the Education Department of Tasmania (1978), the District Schools Committee conducted a review of district schools, formerly known as area schools, in Tasmania. Changing circumstances meant an adequate provision of a secondary education was now declared to include a four year course giving students entrée into senior secondary or tertiary education. It was viewed that this change in curriculum would enable young people to choose between an urban or a rural future.

Furthermore, the committee stated that district schools, despite their isolation from urban areas, possessed important advantages, including the formation of close relationships between teachers and students, continuity of education and a smaller learning environment. In summary, the committee recommended the long-term future of district high schools as long as they could provide a comprehensive secondary curriculum to students until Year 10. Specific recommendations pertaining to each individual district school in Tasmania were also included in the report (Education Department of Tasmania, 1978).

In 1971, the Education Department of Tasmania commissioned a report entitled *The Educational Needs of Rural Areas*. One of the major issues emerging from the report involved transporting students to school. The report identified that transportation issues affected an estimated 19,000 Tasmanian school students in rural areas. The report

acknowledged the transportation difficulties experienced in rural areas and stated the following effects: the limitations for students taking part in extracurricular activities after school and on weekends, unsuitable departure times and routes, fatigue of students, and students having to stand too long. The report recommended that, in order to overcome these issues, more country high schools or junior high schools should be established to provide education for the first two years of secondary school (Education Department of Tasmania, 1971).

Thirty years on, the Tasmanian Catholic Education Commission submission to HREOC (2001) on rural and remote education in Tasmania, claims opportunities for rural students to socialise outside school hours are limited. The document cites the non-existence of public transport, the dangers of individuals riding or walking along narrow country roads and the limitations experienced by parents when having to transport their children to events as some of the causes of limited socialisation opportunities.

This document also claims limited socialisation issues may contribute to lower self-esteem and self-realisation. The report suggests a narrow range of attitudes and a set of preferred practices may emerge when socialisation does occur in small communities. In addition, cultural experiences may be limited or biased within small rural communities (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2001).

The Submission from the Tasmanian Catholic Education Commission (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2001) also addresses a number of issues which have implications for rural education in Tasmania. First, the retention rate for rural students is identified as being much lower than those of their urban counterparts. This was supported in the Tasmanian Government Submission (1999) to the HREOC's *National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education*. In 1999 the retention rates of students from rural schools was 5.5% less than their urban counterparts and 3.9% below the state average. Youth unemployment and youth suicide are also acknowledged in the submission as being much higher in the rural areas of Tasmania than in the urban centres.

Secondly, cited as anecdotal evidence, the submission asserts the quality of applicants for rural teaching positions is less than that of urban applicants. When teachers do accept positions they tend to stay for long periods of time as their personal connections are established. Subsequently, according to HREOC (2001, p. 4) the average age of rural teachers is higher and the “accommodation of educational change more difficult”. This has implications for school resources as there needs to be large financial investments in providing professional development (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2001).

Finally, the Tasmanian Catholic Education Submission (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2001) also identifies the difficulty in accessing supporting health services for students. Speech Pathologists, Occupational Therapists and Psychological Assessments are difficult to locate or access in rural schools. Families needing to access these services are required to travel to urban centres, incurring further financial costs of travel and accommodation.

The very definition of the word ‘rural’ complicates research into rural issues. Applications of different definitions, such as those of the Australian Government or the Australian Bureau of Statistics, can alter the way in which people interpret data. Subsequently, rural schools are often described as disadvantaged when compared with urban schools. However, the literature suggests that rural schools have many advantages (Cocklin, 1999; Fischer, 1995; Johnstone, 2001; Nachtigal, 1992; Pietarinen, 1998; Reynolds, 2005) and these limitations and advantages are highlighted within the Tasmanian context.

2.7 Internal transition

The aim of this study is to examine the primary to secondary transition process and to investigate whether the experiences of moving into the secondary school meets students’ expectations pre-transition for two key groups - the second of these being internal transitioning students. As indicated in Chapter 1, the research on students undertaking the primary to secondary transition from within the same school is non-existent. A

comprehensive search has revealed no previous studies in this particular area. Given the steady increase of enrolments in the Independent Schools sector, from 4% in 1970 to 14% in 2008, as well as the fact that 61% Independent schools have a combined primary and secondary structure (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2009), then the number of students undertaking an internal transition may be significant and worthy of further study.

2.8 Parental influence

Parents' perceptions of the transition from primary to secondary school are investigated in this current study as part of the overall aim. The existing research on the association between school transitions and parents has varied widely and is discussed in this section. Early research explored parental experiences of the primary to secondary school transition (Bastiani, 1986; Worsley, 1986). More recent research explores the way parents influence the transition experience for transitioning students, as well as their role as informants in the transition process (Arrowsafe & Irvin, 1992; Lucey & Reay, 2000). Other researchers have investigated the way in which parenting styles and activities can affect school performance and achievement (Akos, Queen & Lineberry, 2005; Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts & Fraleigh, 1987; Falbo, Lein & Amador, 2001; Paulson, 1994). This is discussed below.

Overall, parents and students perceive the school transition process to be managed well. In the late 1970s, Worsley (1986) investigated parents' responses to an induction program of a new intake of students in a school moving from a selective high school to a comprehensive high school in the United Kingdom. Data collected from a questionnaire (n=83) was analysed to explore how well parents perceived their child to have adjusted to high school, and to gauge the extent to which family background influences adjustment and the relationships between family life and adjustment. In particular, parents identify the meetings and talks with their child's classroom teacher, during the induction program, as particularly useful in the transition process. Recommendations from the study, such as earlier notification of acceptance to enable more time to be taken in transitioning students, for personal interviews and for detailed information outlining aims, organisation, curriculum and resources, were all identified.

Parents are often overwhelmed by the differences between primary and secondary school following transition. Bastiani (1986, p. 110) explored parental experiences of transition, using examples drawn from a more extensive study entitled *The Development of Effective Home/School Programmes Project* at England's University of Nottingham School of Education. The interviews draw attention to the organisational differences between primary and secondary school with particular focus on the secondary school's size and complexity, perceived separation of teaching and caring, and the increase in the specialisation of teaching. Parents' responses suggest that the differences between primary and secondary schools are not just a result of the structural differences but also of the way the two organisations operate. Parents in this study were more responsive to the way in which primary schools operate and considered secondary school administration to be too bureaucratic and impersonal, in particular the means by which communication occurs between parents and teachers.

Research suggests that students who cope better with transition are those whose mothers help with homework and are actively involved in a child's school career. Baker and Stevenson (1986) concluded that students from families with higher socio-economic status generally do better in the system, partly because their parents have better management skills and are more likely to monitor progress. Reay and Ball (1998), in a report of a study on parental choice of secondary school, found children from higher socio-economic status families have greater choice of secondary school. Reay and Ball found choice to be a reflection of families' wider social power or powerlessness outside the home.

Parenting styles can also influence the transition experience of students. Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts and Fraleigh (1987) conducted a large-scale study to investigate styles of parenting on academic achievement in high school students (n=7,836) in San Francisco, United States. Measures included parenting styles, described as authoritarian, permissive and authoritative, and student performance, involving self reported grades and grade point averages. The study reported that students from families high in authoritarian or permissive parenting styles tended to have students who did less well in high school than students from families with authoritative parenting styles.

The influence of parenting styles was further investigated by Arrowsafe and Irvin (1992), in a study examining the perception of sixth grade students' experiences (n=54 in 1989 and n=81 in 1990) of transition into middle school in the United States. Arrowsafe and Irvin found that several students reported that parents had spoken to them about the transition into middle school. Most of the identified communication, however, tended to be warnings about anticipated behaviours, rather than positive information. Additionally, students had also been informed about transition from their siblings and peers. Arrowsafe and Irvin suggest that, while information from these sources can be helpful, they can also cause fear and stress. Furthermore, parent information meetings should not only involve organisational and curriculum details but should also address the importance of effective communication between parents and students post-transition.

The influence of parenting styles, including demandingness and responsiveness, and parental involvement on achievement outcomes for adolescents was investigated by Paulson (1994). Participants (n=247) included ninth grade students from urban, suburban and rural areas of the southeast and midwestern region of the United States living with two parents. Analysis of student reports and questionnaires found that parenting practices have important influences on student achievement. Significant relationships were found between parenting values toward achievement and involvement in school functions and achievement outcomes. Paulson suggests that these results may be indicative that parents, regardless of parenting style, impose high expectations for academic achievement.

Parents can successfully influence a student's academic performance and social groupings post-transition. The effectiveness of parenting styles during the transition to high school was explored by Falbo, Lein and Amador (2001). Data was collected in two phases from middle school students (n=26) transitioning to high school pre- and post-transition. At the conclusion of the first year of high school, student performance data was collected, including final grades, number of credits earned and the percentage of absences. The parent activities identified by Falbo et al. which were associated with successful student transition include daily monitoring of progress, including socialisation experiences. This finding corroborated findings from Dornbusch et al.'s (1987) study which found parents had the potential to

influence their children's academic achievement, peer groupings and participation in the school.

Prior knowledge about secondary school can impact on a student's expectation about transition. Lucey and Reay (2000), in a study of anxiety and excitement during the primary to secondary transition in England, concluded that students' expectation about their treatment at secondary school was found to be gained from other students and teachers, pre-transition. Participants included fifth and sixth grade students (n=90) and parents (n=10). Students were involved in focus group discussions and students (n=10) and their parents participated in interviews. Lucey and Reay state that this information given to pre-transitioning students was often fragmented, with their peers, siblings and other relatives embellishing stories and myths. Johnstone (2001) found similar outcomes but also puts forward that older students known to transitioning students tend to give them a sense of security in the unfamiliar secondary school environment.

Communication between parents and the destination school is important for transitioning students from low-income or English as second language families. Crosnoe (2009), in a study on family-school connections for students from low income and English as a second language families, used the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), in the United States, to determine whether communication between parents, middle schools and high schools reduces discontinuity in maths and science during the middle to high school transition. Data was collected using the 1988 base year and the 1990, 1994 and 2000 follow up years of NELS. Adolescent participants (n=17,899) data was used to measure maths and science performance, focal adolescent groups, family-school communication and socio-demographic characteristics. Students from low-income or English as a second language families commenced high school in a higher level of mathematics when there was communication between parents and the middle and high schools, especially when middle school bridged the gap between middle and high school in mathematics and science coursework. Crosnoe suggests that communication between the middle school, high school and home has the potential to reduce the key disparities in learning outcomes for these students.

Parents have a number of concerns about student transition to secondary school (Akos & Galassi, 2004). These concerns include the social dimension, such as fitting in and making new friends, the organisational dimension, including coping with the pressures of secondary school, and the academic dimension of achievement and performance, such as homework, difficulty of classes and pressure to do well.

Family involvement is vital for student success during the transition from elementary to middle schooling. Akos, Queen and Lineberry (2005) found parental support to be important to adolescent mental health, despite the developmentally appropriate need for autonomy and independence. Furthermore, Akos et al. suggest that students whose parents are supportive during this time are associated with increased self-esteem, self-reliance, school satisfaction and positive school adjustment. Increased communication with teachers, academic achievement and student retention are also linked to parental involvement in a student's middle schooling experience.

The current research and literature reveals that parents play an important role in the way many students make the transition from primary to secondary school. This section reports that parents act as informants in the process and can positively and negatively influence the way a student may anticipate the transition. Research shows particular parenting styles and activities are closely associated with academic achievement and connectedness with the new school environment. The following section (*section 2.9*) discusses the importance of transition programs in establishing a sense of belonging at the post-transition school and examines the existing research on different types of transition programs.

2.9 Transition programs

The aim of this study is to examine the primary to secondary transition process and to investigate whether the experiences of moving into the secondary school meet students' expectations pre-transition. The effectiveness of transition strategies is also considered in this study. This section outlines the importance of transition programs in the primary to secondary transition process. The definitions of 'transition' and 'transition program' are

considered (*section 2.9.1*). The importance of establishing a sense of belonging during the transition is investigated and discussed (*section 2.9.2*). Finally, an examination of different transition programs identified in research and literature is reported and reviewed (*section 2.9.3*).

2.9.1 Transition programs – a definition

In a study reviewing federally initiated transition programs from preschool to school in the United States, Kagan and Neuman (1998) raise some important issues about transition which can be transferred to any educational environment. Kagan and Neuman suggest the definition of ‘transition’ is uncertain in many settings as it may be regarded as a one-off activity conducted at the end of a school year. Alternatively, transition may be viewed as a link between family and school or as a means to provide continuity in curriculum, pedagogy and behaviour management across settings. For transition programs to be successful Kagan and Neuman (1998, p. 366) recommend that they be defined as a “continuity of experiences that children have between periods and between spheres of their lives”.

Additionally, Knipe and Johnstone (2007, p. 11), in their examination of middle schools and middle schooling education, make the distinction between orientation programs, transition programs and middle schooling programs. Orientation programs are defined as programs held during a single day and are aimed at assisting students better comprehend their new environment and include school tours. Transition programs usually involve students participating in activities over a longer period and develop deeper general knowledge about their destination school. On the other hand, middle schooling programs have been defined by Knipe and Johnstone (2007) as underpinning middle school philosophies and may involve students regularly attending secondary school classes over an extended period of time. However, the type of program offered by schools is dependent on a number of factors which may include financial constraints, the number and type of feeder schools, the distance that students have to travel to get to the secondary school, and the priorities of the school.

2.9.2 A sense of belonging

The concept of belongingness has emerged as being central to a students' sense of acceptance within an educational setting and has been identified in a number of studies. Osterman (2000) reviewed current literature to investigate the significance of the sense of belongingness to the individual and its place within a school setting. The findings from this study have certain implications for schools and in particular transition programs, because, according to Osterman (2000, p. 325), when student needs are not met in school settings, then decreased motivation, impaired development, isolation and poor academic performance may occur. Galassi and Akos (2007, p. 131) also state that relatedness, autonomy and competence are basic needs which are essential for optimal human functioning. Satisfying these needs is vital for moving students along the motivation continuum. Additionally, students who feel a strong sense of connection with teachers and parents should have a good sense of how to self-regulate school related behaviours.

Osterman (2000, p. 331) concludes that, when students feel accepted they experience a positive attitude towards school, class work and teachers. Subsequently, these students are more likely to enjoy school and the curriculum and have a greater commitment to achieving well. Furthermore, students who feel a sense of belonging tend to be more supportive of others, including those students not directly linked to their friendship group.

Individuals bond and form relationships with peers who share common interests, behaviours and orientations. Akos, Hamm, Mack and Dunaway (2007), in an article on the importance of peers in early adolescence, state that following transition, students will maintain these friendships, as well as developing new relationships with new peers as a way of gaining acceptance and a sense of belonging in the new school environment. Subsequently, Akos et al. advocate for counselling strategies which build trust, form group norms and build cohesiveness in order to develop a sense of belongingness. This could also have wider implications for school transition programs.

New peer relationships are an essential component in developing a sense of belonging in a school's transition program. Butts and Cruzeiro (2005) investigated the factors which

students perceive as being the greatest influence related to the middle to high school transition in the United States midwest. Participants (n=495) completed a questionnaire following transition into high school. Recommendations put forward to promote a sense of belonging include the promotion of more collegiality among teachers, in order to further develop interesting and engaging activities, and structuring the physical environment so that it has a smaller school feel, described by Butts and Cruzeiro (2005, p. 75) as a “school-within-a-school”, in which interpersonal relationships could be enhanced.

Howard and Johnson (2004) suggest that the ability to relate to others has positive implications for students arriving at the destination school without many peers from their primary school and for those with limited social skills. This notion is supported by Gillison, Standage and Skevington (2008) who identify “relatedness” as a key component for successful transitions, as improved quality of life was affected by a sense of belonging and independence.

Students who feel disconnected from their new school environment are at a much higher risk of dropping out. Grossman and Cooney (2009), in a research brief on the middle school to high school transition, state that the larger school environment is a much more complex social world in which students often find it difficult to make social connections with their peers. Grossman and Cooney suggest that some students may change their attitude, appearance or behaviours in a bid to establish a sense of belonging.

Belonging to the social world and being comfortable within it is important to each individual. Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 184) state that social functioning is dependent upon a number of factors, which include a person’s experience with dependency, autonomy, trust and intimacy, and cultural values and expectations. These factors play an important role in how relationships are developed and how these relationships will be expressed through behaviour. Lazarus and Folkman suggest that the quality of these relationships is affected by the way day-to-day events are managed, which in turn has implications for transitioning programs in the social domain.

Aspects of schooling which help anchor students to a new environment and community are important in facilitating a successful student transition. Koizumi (2000) identifies anchor points within three dimensions of a student's life and these include the physical environment, such as buildings, location, houses and rooms, the interpersonal environment, such as family members, friends and teachers, and the socio-cultural environment, including culture, language and customs. Koizumi suggests the use of anchor points, such as information, home-based classes, lockers and siblings to help structure the environment, to provide continuity across the transition period and to assist student adaptation to the new school setting. Finally, Koizumi states that teachers, administrators and parents need to provide supportive environments to ease the transition. Strategies, such as tours and student mentors, were identified by Koizumi as key transition strategies.

The literature identified above indicates the necessity of designing and implementing transition programs which promote a sense of belonging in the new school environment. In particular, the research calls for programs which assist in connecting students to the social world (Akos et al., 2007; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The following section reviews the current literature of specific transition programs and strategies designed for systematic school transitions.

2.9.3 Types of transition programs

The literature discussed in *section 2.9.2* details the importance of creating a sense of belonging for students undertaking a systematic school transition. The following section explores the types of strategies which address the social, organisational and academic dimensions of transition to a new school environment. This section also reports on the findings of each associated study across a variety of different contexts.

Involvement in extracurricular activities has the potential to influence student belonging and support positive student academic and psychological outcomes. Akos (2006) found significant relationships between involvement in extracurricular activities and academic achievement, and students' feelings of connectedness. Data collected from a questionnaire were administered to sixth grade students (n=173) in the United States. Akos states that

extracurricular activities must be appealing to students, encourage peer interaction and cooperation, and have the potential to develop relationships between students and adults, as well as having a clear structure.

Transition strategies which provide information, build skills and better help students anxious about transition are important during transition process. Akos and Martin (2003) present a psychoeducational transition group model for students preparing for the transition from elementary to middle school in the United States which addresses student adjustment issues, such as friendship quality and stability, social and network support, and provide important information about the transition. Additionally, small same-sex groupings which target students focus on the academic, organisational and social aspects of the school transition.

For students to successfully traverse the primary to secondary school transition students may need to make some personal adjustments post-transition. Anderson et al. (2000) advise that being prepared for secondary school is a multi-dimensional concept. For students to go successfully from the task-oriented, child-centred environment of the primary school to the performance-oriented secondary environment, they need to display traits such as, independence and industriousness, conformity to adult standards, academic preparation, and well developed coping mechanisms.

Communication pre-transition and familiarity with the destination school environment can ease transition anxiety. Brown and Armstrong (1986) recommend a number of strategies at both primary and secondary levels that would help ease the anxiety of transitioning students. These include encouraging pre-transition students to communicate worries whilst at junior school, helping familiarise students with the layout of the secondary school and regular visits of new teachers to the primary school. Brown and Armstrong also suggest that teachers need to be aware of the types of worries transitioning students may experience and that these feelings may be intense, but that they can change over time. In addition, teachers should use pastoral care techniques to facilitate transition, as well as providing in-service training that would help develop a pastoral care curriculum.

The need for regular communication pre-transition was also highlighted by Summerfield (1986). An exchange of information and consistent internal assessment procedures to monitor achievement and behaviour changes were identified by Summerfield as being important. School tours for students and in-service training for Year 7 teachers to acquaint them with the range of issues which they are likely to encounter following transition are important for effective transition processes. In terms of curriculum, Summerfield suggests regular communication between primary and secondary schools to avoid repetition of work, as well as detailed information about transitioning students so that relationships between teachers and students can be enhanced.

Additionally, the concept of communication between primary and secondary schools to improve the transition experience in a specific subject area was also found by Capel, Zwozdiak-Myers and Lawrence (2007). They studied the primary to secondary transition in relation to physical education involving Physical Education Heads of Department (n=14) and found that there was a greater emphasis on social/pastoral integration rather than activities which supported curriculum continuity. Strategies to support curriculum continuity between the primary and secondary school, such as passing on of individual student records and providing opportunities for primary and secondary teachers to work together, were suggested by Capel et al. While the study focused on physical education, they suggested these transition strategies, employed across all curriculum areas, would benefit the transition of students into the secondary school.

Transition strategies should address the organisational concerns in the short term but transition programs must also focus on the academic concerns, post-transition. Akos and Galassi (2004, p. 218) state that the primary to secondary transition should be considered as “temporal phenomena” which provide opportunities and challenges in three areas – social, academic and organisational. Their study found that transitioning students adjust more quickly to the organisational aspects of transition but the social and academic dimensions may require different strategies and timetables. Therefore, schools should incorporate transition programs which incorporate procedural activities, including tours, academic activities, such as the explicit teaching of study skills and discussions of the academic

expectations of secondary school, and social experiences that promote group work, including team building and cooperative learning activities, are vital.

Transition strategies, which assist students in the organisational domain, such as tours, explanations of curriculum and other safety and security issues, are important and should remain in existing transition programs (Maute & Brough, 2002). However, Maute and Brough also advocate for transition programs which assist students in gaining confidence and academic success. Similar to Akos and Galassi's (2004) ideas as identified above, Maute and Brough suggest that transition programs should also focus on study skills, problem solving and decision making experiences.

Visiting the destination school prior to transition to enable students to get a feel for the new environment has been identified as an important transition strategy (Graham & Hill, 2003; Lucey & Reay, 2000). In particular, Graham and Hill (2003) found that enabling students to familiarise themselves with the layout of the school has been regarded by students as helpful in their preparation. However, it was recommended by students that these visits need to be longer and/or more frequent. However, Johnstone (2001) found that despite the use of orientation days, participants in this study still did not display confidence in their knowledge of the secondary school in terms of layout and their teachers. Lucey and Reay (2000, p. 8) found that practice lessons for pre-transition students provide a taste of secondary school life. They were able to witness interactions at many levels, including the friendliness of older students and the relationships between students and teachers.

To assist students transitioning from elementary school to middle school, Schumacher (1998) promotes the notion of providing assistance before, during and after the move. Transition programs which build a sense of community, respond to student needs and offer multi-faceted approaches to facilitate the process are the most effective. Specific strategies identified by Schumacher include teachers from middle school visiting elementary school; letters of welcome to incoming students which also invite them to school activities; parents of middle school students contacting incoming parents; teachers and counsellors from both

schools meeting to share information, and the distribution of a school handbook outlining organisational procedures at the middle school.

Transition programs need to be longer in duration. In a later report Morgan and Hertzog (2001) maintain that transition programs should not end when eighth grade students arrive at the high school but, like Schumacher (1998), advocate for programs which continue throughout the year following transition. Morgan and Hertzog argue for a transition program which continues throughout the first year at high school. Specific activities were highlighted and include identifying safe students at the high school for assistance; labelling hallways with room numbers and teacher's names; meeting with administrators to review rules and regulations, and having specific trans-disciplinary ninth grade teachers.

Effective communication between teachers and counsellors at both the middle and high school is important in assisting in the transition process. Morgan and Hertzog (2001) advocate for specific strategies including informal lunches between teachers at the middle and high school, developing ongoing dialogue related to the scope and sequence of curriculum, staff orientation of high school, and professional development on the topic of the adolescent learner. Involving parents in transition planning was suggested by Morgan and Hertzog as an effective transition strategy. These strategies include gatherings to discuss policies and practices with high school administrators, informal meetings with parents of eighth and ninth grade students to discuss issues related to high school adjustment, and a parents' night outlining curriculum and extracurricular activities.

In a recent study examining the transition to high school in Philadelphia, United States, Gold, Evans, Haxton, Maluk, Mitchell, Simon et al. (2010) recommended five transition strategies for schools to meet the needs of ninth graders transitioning to high school. Data was collected from student surveys (n=10,573), interviews (n=68), observations (n=18), document reviews, student demographic and enrolment data, student outcomes, and teacher surveys (n=2,006). Findings from the study suggest the need for schools to have student orientation at the beginning of each school year to establish a single school culture, in which expectations are communicated. The second strategy involves restructuring larger high schools in

Philadelphia into smaller learning communities to help improve personalisation. Third, assign students to grade level classes as well as remedial classes in English and maths to improve literacy and numeracy skills of transitioning students. A fourth strategy involves using individual student data to track student progress, identify student weaknesses and strengths, provide curriculum feedback and inform interventions where required. Finally, the strategic placement of strong teachers to the transitioning ninth grade classes for the purposes of improving instruction and student academic outcomes. Gold et al. found evidence of a gap in the effectiveness of ninth grade teachers and those teachers teaching senior years at high school.

Streamlining processes during the transition from primary to secondary schools in Australia may assist in the transition process for students. Nine problem areas were identified by Braggett (1997) as needing attention during transition, including detailed information about organisational issues, such as changing rooms, teacher expectations, homework and textbooks, providing information about curriculum, how to read timetables, social issues, such as bullying, pastoral care, continuity of learning experiences, developmentally appropriate learning experiences, group activities, and respect and self-esteem.

Other strategies which emerge in the literature as useful in the transition process include the visiting of teachers from the secondary schools to the primary school (Graham & Hill, 2003). In an article examining the transition from elementary to middle school math, Schielack and Seeley (2010) suggest that classroom visits help teachers to develop an awareness of the ways that these different environments operate, thereby gaining insight into the challenges that students will encounter during the transition. In addition, Schielack and Seeley also support the notion of curriculum alignment so that students can develop connections among topics, as suggested above by Capel et al. (2007).

Teachers have a significant influence on transitioning students' schooling and coping abilities. Pietarinen (1998) suggests that a teacher's personal attributes, teaching style and strategies can affect the social interactions which occur in the classroom, as well as the teaching and learning process itself. Pietarinen's recommendations include schools

employing strategies which enable teachers to be better informed about students' previous learning environments, including physical, social and academic issues, in order to ease the transition for rural students.

The challenges facing students during transition can be viewed as a rite of passage. Howard and Johnson (2004) found that participants, both students and parents made very few suggestions for ways to improve the process and reduce anxiety levels during the primary to secondary transition. Howard and Johnson suggest that in order to overcome this view, parents must first be educated about the importance of transition programs in helping students reach their goals. Howard and Johnson suggest that transition programs which emphasise supportive social networks, such as clubs, homerooms and associations, are essential for successful primary to secondary transition experiences.

Planning teams have been identified by Perkins and Gelfer (1995) as being important for successful transition programs between elementary school and middle schools in the United States. Teams made up of teachers, administrators, specialists and parents from both schools collaboratively plan and implement strategies which best meet the needs of each cohort. Activities such as pen pals, school tours, mentoring and independent journal writing time were identified as possible experiences. Perkins and Gelfer emphasise the importance of collaboration and clear communication for planning teams to be successful. Hertzog and Morgan (1998) state that transition teams provide teachers at the high school with essential information about the incoming cohort's academic and social needs, thereby ensuring more successful outcomes for students.

In easing the transition between middle school and high school, Hertzog and Morgan (1997) suggest the implementation of strategies which have been identified in other literature, including parent information nights, school tours, transition teams, high school teachers speaking to students at the middle school, counselling and mentoring. Other strategies not identified elsewhere include teachers swapping schools for a day to enable a better understanding of school context, developing a "shadow" program (Hertzog & Morgan, 1997, p. 30) in which students, staff and administrators follow someone in the high school for a

period of time, and offering activities which enable students to find links between courses offered in the high school and their future careers.

Schools which use a combination of transition strategies experience more success in easing transition anxiety. Mac Iver and Epstein (1990) examined the structure, use and expected effects of responsive practices, such as group advisory periods, interdisciplinary teaching teams, remedial activities for identified students, reporting of effort and progress, and transition activities in easing school transition for students. Elementary and middle school principals (n=1,753) completed questionnaires. Findings suggest that schools which use a combination of practices simultaneously were found to have larger benefits than those using one practice in isolation.

Bridging the social culture between primary school and secondary school to assist students during transition also emerges in the literature (Johnstone, 2001). Additionally, Johnstone (2001, p. 6) recommends the use of “virtual tours” in helping familiarise rural students with the new environment during the pre-transition phase. Emails and chat rooms were suggested ways of developing social networks. Corby (2003) also advocates the incorporation of technology in easing the primary to secondary transition for rural students. The implementation of an online environment, entitled *The Virtual Bridge*, was considered advantageous in a pilot program conducted by Corby for rural transitioning students in Tasmania. Online presentation areas, bulletin boards, emails and chat rooms helped students to feel “comfortable” about the transition to secondary school (Corby, 2003, p. 5).

For many students the transition from primary to secondary school is a positive experience. Looking at the association between adolescence, schooling and digital culture, Carrington (2006) states that many adolescents link transition with growing up, starting afresh and accessing a wider curriculum. A range of effective transition strategies, identified by Carrington, include bridging units across sites to enhance curriculum continuity, remediation and support programs, holiday programs, online buddy systems and post-induction programs targeting learning skills and problem-solving strategies.

Transition programs for students identified as at risk of failure, or as the potential to experience problems during the transition, have also been identified in the literature. The School Transitional Environment Project (STEP), as an approach to prevent the harmful effects of school transition and create developmentally enhancing environments, was described by Felner et al. (1993). STEP aims to alter ecological characteristics of a school environment in two key ways: reorganising the social system of the school by creating smaller learning environments with a consistent set of peers, and restructuring homeroom teachers' functions to include an advisory role and increasing teacher support through regular contact with other teachers in STEP. Results of the five year longitudinal study found that drop-out rates for students in STEP (24%) had declined to approximately half that of students in the comparison group (43%). Students in STEP presented significantly higher weighted quality grade point averages and an improvement in absenteeism rates than did students from the comparison group. Felner et al. suggests that STEP made a difference to assist at-risk students to stay above the threshold of vulnerability following transition.

Students with attention deficit disorder require specific transition interventions to help ease the transition experience. Hemphill (1996) identifies a number of strategies during the transition process which include touring the new school to locate service areas such as libraries and toilets, scheduling core academic classes earlier in the day and electives in the afternoon, requesting a teacher to whom the student will better relate, and assistance in the organisation of student workbooks. Other interventions include parental communication with teachers and administration which also involves feedback about progress, homework and the necessity for medication.

Schools could enhance their transition programs by using instruments which provide data to identify students at high risk of dropping out following transition. Cohen and Smerdon (2009) in a summary of recent high school reform movements in the United States suggest the use of instruments which collect data on credit accumulation, attendance and course failures in the Chicago and Philadelphia regions of the United States and is used to determine high school and college readiness. Cohen and Smerdon maintain that this data could better

inform and evaluate current transition programs in schools in an effort to prevent the incidence of dropping out post-transition.

Transition programs for students at risk of school failure were also explored by Chapman and Sawyer (2001). Chapman and Sawyer found a lack of continued support for students at-risk between the middle and high school transition. Participants (n=8) were identified as students at risk of failure in the eighth grade. The students received tutoring and supportive counselling, and participated in enrichment activities. The participants in the study were placed with a student mentor at the destination high school, completed a number of school tours, met with the principal and discussed success strategies with the counsellor. Parents were also involved in the program and a parent information night was held to provide a connection between at-risk students, parents and the high school administration. At the conclusion of the program Chapman and Sawyer found all participants were satisfied with the quality of the transition program.

Transition programs are an integral part of the primary to secondary transition process. Much of the current literature acknowledges the importance that a sense of belonging has on easing the experience for transitioning students. What is also apparent from the literature is the importance of implementing transition strategies which incorporate social networking and address academic issues, such as homework expectations and study skill sessions. The existing literature also reveals the importance of implementing transition programs which assist individual adjustment, attempt to decrease the anxiety levels of all students and limit the negative impact that that may have on students who are at greatest risk of failure during this period.

2.10 Transition research methodology

Previous studies on the expectations and experiences of systematic school transition have been undertaken using quantitative, qualitative and mixed method research methodologies. Within the different approaches there are a number of methodological considerations which must be addressed, including research design, sampling and data collection procedures, instrument design and validity and reliability issues. The following section will review the

three research methodologies used to study school transition in existing literature and referred to in *section 2.4* and *section 2.5*.

The literature review identifies a number of transition studies which have utilised quantitative research methodologies (Catterall, 1998; Diemert, 1992; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Maute & Brough, 2002; Schiller, 1999). These studies used non-experimental designs to research different aspects of transition. In these quantitative studies sampling decisions have been achieved by random sampling to achieve representativeness, which included sampling a class because of its heterogeneous nature (Diemert, 1992) or as a national representative sample from a national survey (Catterall, 1998; Schiller, 1999).

Some quantitative studies have collected data using instruments, such as questionnaires, previously developed thereby ensuring the instruments validity and reliability. These instruments identified in these quantitative studies include the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1988 which also involved a follow-up panel collected in 1990 (Catterall, 1998; Schiller, 1999). Other studies (Isakson & Jarvis, 1998) used a variety of pre-designed instruments, such as the Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) scale, the Daily Hassles Scale (DHS) and the Perceived Social Support from Friends (PSS-Fr). Additionally, Maute and Brough (2002) utilised a previously developed survey, Transitions Concerns Survey, for their study. In contrast, studies (Diemert, 1992) which have designed and used a survey instrument must then ensure their instrument is analysed for validity and reliability of data.

Some of the literature reviewed in this chapter on school transition has undertaken qualitative research methodology to investigate different aspects of school transition (Akos, 2004; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Cocklin, 1999; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Pietarinen, 1998). A critique of qualitative research methodologies suggests this method is too subjective; often relying on the researcher's views of what is significant. An additional issue that must be considered in reviewing the qualitative studies is the issue of generalisation in which there is an issue in determining how findings can be generalised to other settings. With this in mind the qualitative studies in this literature review have utilised a variety of data collection

methods. Cocklin used interviews with subjects in a case study on rural students' experiences as they moved to secondary school and then compared the experience to their expectations and primary school perceptions. Similarly, Howard and Johnson also collected data using interviews with participants. Alternatively, Akos (2004), Brown and Armstrong (1986) and Pietarinen (1998) utilised essay writing as the instruments for data collection in their phenomenological research on school transition.

Sample populations varied across the qualitative studies which is clearly a reflection of the data collection procedures undertaken and the size of the study sites. Cocklin's (1999) case study approach involved students (n=3) and Howard and Johnson's (2004) larger study site involved interviewing participants from a sample of Year 6 students (n=25), Year 7 students (n=68), teachers (n=10) and parents (n=21). Studies which used other data collection techniques, such as essay writing, also varied in sample size, such as Brown and Armstrong (1986) collecting data from students (n=220) and Pietarinen (n=41).

Predominantly, the research on the expectations and experiences of school transitions has employed a mixed method approach, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches in tandem, thereby strengthening the overall studies (Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Graham & Hill, 2003; Johnstone, 2001, 2002; Longaretti, 2006; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001; Smith, Akos, Lim & Wiley, 2008; Weller, 2007). There are a number of strengths of the mixed method approach. First, the logic of triangulation in which the findings of one research methodology can be checked and corroborated against the findings derived from the other enhances the findings of the first method. Second, quantitative research is often critiqued as being motivated by the researcher's concerns while qualitative research is driven by the subject's perspective. This is overcome in a mixed method approach whereby both perspectives can be married together in a single study to more comprehensively investigate a topic or issue of interest. Third, the addition of quantitative evidence alleviates the fact that it is not often possible to generalise qualitative findings across settings. Finally, qualitative research makes it possible for an interpretation of relationships between variables which does not occur in quantitative research alone. The

findings from the qualitative research component enhance the findings gathered from the quantitative research (Punch, 1998; Weathington, Cunningham & Pittenger, 2010).

Within some of the studies reviewed in this chapter the initial quantitative research has facilitated the qualitative research component. This was evidenced in studies (Graham & Hill, 2003; Longaretti, 2006; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001; Smith et al., 2008; Weller, 2007) whereby focus groups were established following school-based questionnaires to larger populations. In contrast, qualitative methodology preceded and informed the quantitative aspect of Akos' (2002) study of student perceptions about the transition from elementary to middle school in which the first phase involved a writing task. The following two phases involved questionnaires to randomly selected samples, while the fourth phase involved a purposeful sample of participants. In other studies which employ the mixed method approach both quantitative and qualitative data are combined to provide a general picture. Previous research (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Johnstone, 2001, 2002; Pratt & George, 2004) uses this technique to fill any holes in the qualitative aspect of the research.

The existing research on the expectations and experiences of systematic school transitions has employed a variety of research methodologies, including quantitative, qualitative and mixed method approaches. Studies utilising quantitative research methodologies have, in some cases (Catterall, 1998; Schiller, 1999), used data collected from broader national surveys, such as NELS. Alternatively, qualitative research methodologies used in studies of school transition have undertaken case studies (Cocklin, 1999) or phenomenological research (Akos, 2004; Brown & Armstrong, 1986). Finally, many of the studies investigating areas of students' expectations and experiences of school transition have employed mixed method research design, combining elements of quantitative and qualitative research approaches to add breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration to this area of investigation.

2.11 Summary

This chapter reviewed the current research and literature on the transition from primary to secondary school. Interest in the middle years learner in Australia has grown since the early

to mid 1990s. Reports, reviews and recommendations have been commissioned at both national, state and territory levels across Australia, addressing issues pertaining to young adolescents and their schooling. Some states, such as Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia, have developed and implemented specific strategies and interventions addressing adolescent learners, while other states, in particular Tasmania, have incorporated strategies and interventions into curriculum overviews.

Transition is a physical move from one school environment to another. However, this systematic transition occurs at a time when many students are also adjusting to biological changes. The literature reveals that these simultaneous transitions may also be linked to changes in a student's relationships with parents and friends, self-esteem, motivation, stress levels, self-concept, friendships and academic achievement.

The literature suggests that students undertaking the primary to secondary transition process experience a mixture of anxiety, apprehension and excitement. The transition is a movement away from what is familiar and from a situation in which students are established in the culture of the primary school, towards the unfamiliar and daunting secondary school environment. What the literature reveals is that students develop both positive and negative expectations about the impending experience. While many students have concerns about their academic achievement and the amount of homework, organisational and social challenges bring about a great deal of anxiety. The size and layout of the school, fears of getting lost, separation from friends and fears of being bullied have emerged as concerns in the literature. However, some view this time as a period of growth and increased independence, and anticipate the transition with enthusiasm.

Unfortunately, for some the reality of the experience is worse than originally anticipated. The increased risk of being bullied, the demands of completing homework, of managing their way around the school environment, of making new friends and negotiating the teacher-student relationship, all surfaced in the current literature as real concerns post-transition. Others coped better than expected at the pre-transition phase, in particular the concerns

associated with the organisational aspects of transition, such as navigating their way around the new school environment, and social aspects, such as making new friends.

A study of the literature reveals the inconsistencies when defining the term 'rural'. Without a definitive definition, it may be difficult to generalise across different populations. However, studies show students from small rural schools have added burdens when negotiating the transition phase. Increased isolation and distance from school affects their ability to socialise with peers outside school time, as well as their participation in extra-curricular activities. While community is central to many rural schools, the movement to secondary school may result in feelings of disconnection for the transitioning student.

A lack of research on the internal transition process suggests that studies need to be conducted in this area. As previously indicated, there has been a significant increase in the number of students undertaking this process, thereby warranting further investigation.

Research indicates that parents play a central role in a student's transition from primary to secondary school. Parents who act as informants during the transition process have been reported in the literature as being powerful enough to influence a student's anticipation levels, either positively or negatively, depending on the information given. Furthermore, parenting styles and parental involvement in the school were reported in the literature to be associated with academic achievement and a sense of connectedness with the new school environment.

Promoting a sense of belonging within a school's transition program has been revealed in the literature as critical to a successful primary to secondary school transition. Additionally, the current research suggests that effective transition programs must address not only the organisational and social aspects of transition but also the academic dimension, as this appears to be an ongoing concern of transitioning students post-transition. Finally, the literature identifies specific strategies and interventions that were found to be effective in assisting students' adjustment to secondary school, as well as students identified as being at the greatest risk of school failure.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology utilised in this study of the differences between the expectations and realities of the primary to secondary transition for students from small rural schools, as well as students experiencing an internal transition. The study's aim was to explore the primary to secondary transition experience from both a student and a parent perspective, within a wide location range of Tasmanian Catholic secondary colleges.

The methodological orientation of the study is outlined in *section 3.2*. *Section 3.3* describes the sample design and procedures and includes brief profiles of participating colleges, as well as an overview of the participants. The remaining sections describe the development and structure of the instruments, the data collection procedures and the analysis methods employed.

Section 3.4 provides an outline of the development of the three instruments (Early Transition, Parent and Late Transition Questionnaires). This includes a discussion of the survey instrument scales, the form of each survey, the instructions to respondents, the order and grouping of items, the refinement of the questionnaires, the pilot study and the reliability and validity of the instruments.

Data collection procedures for the three questionnaires are described in *section 3.5*. *Section 3.6* addresses the ethical issues involved in the study. This includes consent, privacy and confidentiality, protection from harm and the consequences of participation and non-participation.

Section 3.7 outlines the processes involved in the organisation of data. Validation procedures, including the development of composite variables, assumption testing and difference testing are discussed within *section 3.8*.

Section 3.9 outlines the analysis methods used to address each of the research questions identified in Chapter 1. For each research question, detailed procedures of validation and analysis methods are described.

The final section, *section 3.10*, summarises this chapter, highlighting important aspects of the methodology employed in the study.

3.2 Methodological orientation of the study

3.2.1 Methodological considerations

This current study is set within the quantitative research paradigm. This paradigm is also referred to as a ‘positivist’ paradigm, which is described as a conventional quantitative method using principles of natural science to study human behaviour (Burns, 1997). The aim of quantitative research is to generate hypotheses that can be tested, which will allow explanations of laws to be assessed (Bryman, 2004).

Within the positivist paradigm, the researcher’s goal is to uncover the existing reality by identifying the existence and size of differences between individuals and/or groups of individuals. According to positivists, the world is made up of observable, measurable facts. In order for the reality to be unearthed, the researcher removes him or herself as much as possible from the research. As positivists assume that there exists a fixed, measurable reality external to people, the researcher must also choose methods, such as questionnaires or experiments that increase the objectivity of the study (Wellington, 2000). Aliaga and Gunderson (as cited in Muijs, 2004, p. 1) state that the nature of quantitative research is to explain “phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics)”.

The positivist mode of inquiry is in contrast to the interpretivist paradigm which depicts a world in which reality is socially constructed and makes comparisons with what goes on in different places. Interpretivists argue that the fundamental flaw of positivism is the assumptions made about scientific inquiry. Within the positivist paradigm theories are tested using scientific thinking and subsequently these theories are rejected or provisionally accepted. Gray (2004, p. 18) suggests that while science is focused on producing theoretical explanations it is not all on the foundation of observations. Science does not begin from observation, but from theory to make observations comprehensible. Additionally, Gray argues that no theory can simply be proved from multiple observations as it takes only one occurrence that disproves the theory to render the theory false. Interpretivists, on the other hand, look for culturally developed and historically situated explanation of the social life-world (Gray, 2004).

At the core of qualitative research is the idea that understanding about a phenomenon can be induced from the data as it is collected (Weathington et al., 2010). The qualitative researcher's aim is to look for the complexity of opinions, through the collection and analysis of stories and narratives, observations, sounds, pictures and other material, rather than the quantitative methodology of tapering meanings into a limited number of categories (Creswell, 2009). The purpose of positivism is to seek causal explanations and make predictions that can be generalised across populations, time and space. On the other hand, interpretivists aim to seek understanding of how participants construct the world around them (Borg & Gall, 1989; Wellington, 2000).

This current study has drawn its methodological orientation and maintains its framework from the positivist's framework but does not discard the idea of realism. The positivistic approach acknowledges that researchers cannot examine the world in which we live as impartial outsiders and therefore cannot be totally objective (Borg & Gall, 1989). Additionally, this approach accepts that there is the potential of an objective reality and that as quantitative researchers we should attempt to estimate and represent that reality as closely as possible, while acknowledging that our own subjectivity influences that reality.

The key concept of quantitative data, used in this current study, is numbers and therefore, the information collected about the world must be in numerical form. Subsequently, phenomena that do not exist in a quantitative mode must be collected in a qualitative mode and then statistically analysed. This is achieved through the development of data collection instruments, such as questionnaires, that can collect data on a wide range of phenomena (Borg & Gall, 1989).

The literature suggests that there are a number of limitations in using quantitative research methodology (Bryman, 2004). First, quantitative research methods are unable to differentiate between people and social organisations and the world of nature. By removing themselves from the research, quantitative researchers ignore the reality that people do interpret the world around them. A second limitation is that the measurement process may be inaccurate as the connection between measures developed and the concepts that they are supposed to be revealing may be assumed rather than authentic. Following on from this Bryman argues that when participants respond to an item on a questionnaire there is an assumption that respondents will interpret the question similarly. This is not always the case and sometimes the solution is to provide fixed-list answers which provide a solution to the quandary by ignoring it.

A third limitation of quantitative research methodology is the assumption that researchers rely on participants having the necessary knowledge to respond to items on a questionnaire or alternatively, having a sense that the items in the instrument are important to them in their everyday lives. This can be a limitation as quantitative researchers rely on administering research instruments to participants, such as questionnaires and structured interviews. Finally, considering the first and third limitation is the criticism that analysing the relationships between variables generates a fixed view of social life that is wholly independent of people's lives. Bryman (2004) argues that there is uncertainty as to whether the relationship produced between two variables has in fact been produced by people to whom it applies.

On the other hand, proponents of quantitative research methodology argue a number of limitations of qualitative research methodology which strengthen the use of their own research methods. Firstly, qualitative research methodology have been argued to be too subjective, in which findings often rely on the researcher's own position on what is noteworthy, as well as the close relationships which develop in the course of the study. Alternatively, quantitative researchers highlight that the formulation of the problem is explicitly stated in relation to the existing literature on the topic and key theoretical ideas Bryman (2004). Findings on qualitative research are also difficult to generalise across settings as it is nearly impossible to determine how one or two cases can be representative across all cases.

Critiques of qualitative research suggest that the methods employed are difficult to replicate. Unstructured methodology means that there are very few standard procedures to follow (Punch, 1998). Additionally, what the researcher decides to focus upon on is dependent on what strikes them as significant as well as the possibility that how a participant responds may be affected by the personal characteristics of the researcher (Bryman, 2004).

3.3 Sample design and procedures

The sampling process used in this study involved inviting all nine Tasmanian Catholic secondary colleges to participate in the study. Initially, permission to research Year 7 students in 2009 in Tasmanian Catholic colleges was granted through the Tasmanian Catholic Education Office (Appendix 1).

Permission to conduct research in individual schools was then sought from individual college principals. Letters were sent outlining the following:

- the purpose of the study;
- procedures to be followed;
- possible discomforts and risks;
- the responsibilities of the researcher;
- freedom of consent;

- the timeframe, and
- contact details, including the Ethics Complaints Officer.

A sample copy of the letter to principals can be found in Appendix 2. Seven of the nine invited college principals gave their approval for surveys to be administered in their colleges.

3.3.1 Profiles of participating schools

An overview of each participating college is outlined below.

COLLEGE (A)

College A is a K-10 college located in the south of Tasmania. It has an enrolment of approximately 900 students. The number of primary – secondary transitioning students in 2009 was 130.

COLLEGE (B)

College B is a 7-10 secondary college located in the south of Tasmania. It has an enrolment of approximately 550 students. The number of primary – secondary transitioning students in 2009 was 143.

COLLEGE (C)

College C is a 3-10 college located in the south of Tasmania. It has an enrolment of approximately 600 students. The number of primary – secondary transitioning students in 2009 was 145.

COLLEGE (D)

College D is a 7-12 college located in the north of Tasmania. It has an enrolment of approximately 1300 students. The number of primary – secondary transitioning students in 2009 was 180.

COLLEGE (E)\

College E is a K-12 college located in the south of Tasmania. It has an enrolment of approximately 750 students. The number of primary – secondary transitioning students in 2009 was 99.

COLLEGE (F)

College F is a 7-12 college located in the north of Tasmania. It has an enrolment of approximately 750 students. The number of primary – secondary transitioning students in 2009 was 160.

COLLEGE (G)

College G is a K-10 college located in the south of Tasmania. It has an enrolment of approximately 900 students. The number of primary – secondary transitioning students in 2009 was 130.

3.3.2 Participants

From the Early Transition Questionnaire, 898 student responses were received. 7% (n=64) of the responses were identified as rural students, transitioning from small rural schools and 93% (n=834) were classified as urban. Rural students were identified using the Tasmanian Government Submission to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education (1999, p. 15) which lists rural schools in Tasmania.

Additionally, 23% (n=203) of the respondents were identified as having transitioned from the primary campus of the same college and were labeled as internal transitioning students. Subsequently, 77% (n=695) of respondents were classified as external transitioning students.

For the Late Transition Questionnaire, 722 responses were received. Using the same criteria identified above, 7% (n=49) of respondents were identified as rural students, 93% (n=673) were classified as urban. Furthermore, 26% (n=189) of respondents were identified as

internal transitioning students and 74% (n=533) were classified as external transitioning students.

Comparable classifications, using the same procedures identified for the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires, were determined for the Parent Questionnaire. Of the 461 responses received, 6% (n=28) of parents were classified as rural and 94% (n=433) as urban. Internal transitioning parents were 24% (n=111) of responses and external transitioning students' parents made up 76% (n=350) of responses.

3.4 Development of instruments

The examination of the literature in Chapter 2 would indicate that in order to measure the expectations and realities of rural school students during the primary to secondary transition an instrument should:

- a. be relevant to the context of secondary schooling;
- b. be relevant to the context of both Catholic and non-Catholic schools;
- c. be generally relevant to the Tasmanian context;
- d. focus respondents' attention on individual schools;
- e. gather data in two phases – early and late transition;
- f. differentiate between rural and urban context, and
- g. differentiate between internal and external transitioning students.

The magnitude and nature of this study suggests survey questionnaires administered to transitioning students and their parents/caregivers would be the most appropriate method of data collection.

The limitations of conducting survey questionnaires to a large population, in terms of administration issues and response rates, were overcome by having the student surveys administered at schools. With permission from the Catholic Education Office, Tasmania and assistance and agreement from the principals of seven Catholic colleges throughout

Tasmania, the student questionnaires (both Early and Late Transition) were administered during school time.

Survey instruments that have been developed as part of research on the primary to secondary transition discussed in Chapter 2 were found to be insufficient for this particular study based on one or more of the criteria identified above. With this in mind, a new instrument was developed that would satisfy the aforementioned criteria.

Development of the surveys took a number of months. It involved the application of ideas from the literature, discussion with colleague teachers and refinement of the instruments by conducting a pre-trial and pilot study.

3.4.1 Survey instruments

(a) Scales

The issues significant to the primary to secondary transition as identified in the literature and the findings from prior research in this field were used to produce five major scales that would provide a valid sample of the differences between the expectations and realities of the primary to secondary transition for students from rural schools and students experiencing an internal transition, as well as the factors that contribute to the differences. The scales used were:

1. Organisational dimension
2. Academic dimension
3. Social dimension
4. Transition programs
5. Parental influence

Within these five scales a series of statements was developed. Table 3.1 provides a scale description and sample item from the Early Transition Questionnaire. Each scale identifies and measures an aspect of the primary to secondary transition which has been identified in previous research.

Table 3.1***Description and a Sample Item for Each Scale in the Early Transition Questionnaire***

Scale name	Description of scale	Sample item
Social dimension	Extent to which students anticipate a sense of belonging, ease of establishing new friends and importance of maintaining old friendships	High school is a place to make new friends.
Academic dimension	Extent to which students anticipate the ease of class work and homework, help from their parents and improvement in grades	Homework will be more difficult at high school.
Organisational dimension	Extent to which students anticipate finding their way around the secondary school, helpfulness of teachers and increased independence and responsibility	It is easy to get lost finding your way around high school.
Transition programs	Extent to which students judged the effectiveness of existing primary to secondary transition programs	The Year 6 into Year 7 programs helped make starting school less stressful.
Parental influence	The extent to which students had gathered prior knowledge about transition from parents or siblings	My parent/s have spoken to me about what to expect at high school.

Note Items were scored 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7, respectively, for the responses strongly disagree, disagree, tend to disagree, unsure, tend to agree, agree and strongly agree.

Not all the items on the questionnaires were worded positively. Some items were transformed during the analysis so that composite variables could be developed and tested.

Consideration was then given to the need to construct different varieties of the survey to suit the two sample groups – parent and student, the structure in which the responses should be

recorded, the order and grouping of items, and the instructions required to assist the respondents to complete the survey correctly.

(b) Survey items

The content of the questionnaires cover the research issues that have been specified in the research questions. The variables for each of the measures in the questionnaires have been drawn from past work on systematic school transitions. In other words, the items reflect the literature on what theories other researchers have held and what other research has been carried out within the five scales of this current study, which include the organisational, social and academic dimensions, parental influence and transition programs. Table 3.2 displays the survey items for the attitudinal statements in the survey and the corresponding findings in the literature from which the items were drawn.

Table 3.2

Survey Items From Parent Questionnaires as Identified in Findings from Related Literature

Survey item	Findings from related literature
1. Year 6 into Year 7 programs helped ease any concerns that my child had about starting high school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transition programs assist students to adapt to the new organisational structures but more strategies are required for the social and academic dimensions of transition (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Maute & Brough, 2002).• Transition programs that enable students to get a feel for their new environment are important but they need to be longer and/or more frequent (Graham & Hill, 2003).• Transition programs need to be prolonged past the first year of transition (Morgan & Hertzog, 2001).
2. The number of Year 6 into Year 7 programs need to be increased to help ease concerns about moving from primary school into high school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transition programs need to be longer and/or more frequent (Graham & Hill, 2003; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001).• Schools need to increase the number of transition strategies (Akos & Martin, 2003; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Graham & Hill, 2003; Schumacher, 1998).
3. Parental help with homework is important for academic success at high school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students who cope better with transition were those whose families were actively involved (Akos et al., 2005; Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Falbo et al., 2001; Paulson, 1994).
4. Ensuring that children are organised at school is essential for their overall success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Careful monitoring and organisation are important for success post-transition (Falbo et al., 2001).
5. Parents should talk to their children about what to expect at high school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Successful transition is associated with family involvement (Akos et al., 2005; Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Falbo et al., 2001; Paulson, 1994).

6. Making new friends is important for my child when starting high school.

- Transitioning students are anxious about keeping and making new friends following transition (Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Ashton, 2008; Blyth et al., 1978; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Diemert, 1992; Graham & Hill, 2003; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Longaretti, 2006; Maute & Brough, 2002; Odegaard & Heath, 1992; Pietarinen, 1998; Pratt & George, 2004; Weller, 2007).

7. Staff at the high school are approachable to discuss issues concerning my child's progress.

- Parents find secondary schools less personal and too bureaucratic (Bastiani, 1986).

8. I expect my child's grades and results will improve at high school.

- Transitioning students are anxious about keeping up with their school work, homework and new work demands (Akos, 2002; Anderson et al., 2000; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Cotterell, 1979; Longaretti, 2006; Maute & Brough, 2002; Measor & Woods, 1984; Pietarinen, 1998; Shacher et al., 2002).

9. My child feels confident that he/she will achieve well in their school work at high school.

- Transitioning students are anxious about keeping up with their school work, homework and new work demands (Akos, 2002; Anderson et al., 2000; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Cotterell, 1979; Longaretti, 2006; Maute & Brough, 2002; Measor & Woods, 1984; Pietarinen, 1998; Shacher et al., 2002).

10. My child feels confident that he/she will make new friends at high school.

- Transitioning students are anxious about making new friends following transition (Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Ashton, 2008; Blyth et al., 1978; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Diemert, 1992; Graham & Hill, 2003; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Longaretti, 2006; Maute & Brough, 2002; Odegaard & Heath, 1992; Pietarinen, 1998; Pratt & George, 2004; Weller, 2007).
-

Similarly, the items on the student questionnaires were drawn from findings of previous literature on systematic school transitions. Table 3.3 displays the survey items for the attitudinal statements in the surveys and the corresponding findings in the literature from which the items were drawn.

Table 3.3

Survey Items From Student Questionnaires as Identified in Findings from Related Literature

Survey item	Findings from related literature
1. I was excited about starting high school this year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transition causes anxiety but also excitement in pre-transition students (Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Graham & Hill, 2003).
2. It is easy to get lost finding your way around high school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transitioning students are anxious about getting lost at their destination secondary school (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Anderson et al., 2000; Ashton, 2008; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Diemert, 1992; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Johnstone, 2001, 2002; Measor & Woods, 1984; Odegaard & Heath, 1992; Pietarinen, 1998; Smith et al., 2008).
3. High school is a place to make new friends.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transitioning students are excited pre-transition about the prospect of making new friends post-transition (Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Ashton, 2008; Blyth et al., 1978; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Diemert, 1992; Graham & Hill, 2003; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Longaretti, 2006; Maute & Brough, 2002; Odegaard & Heath, 1992; Pietarinen, 1998; Pratt & George, 2004; Weller, 2007).
4. I won't know many people at high school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transitioning students are concerned pre-transition about having to make new friends following transition (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Diemert, 1992; Longaretti, 2006; Maute & Brough, 2002; Pietarinen, 1998; Pratt & George, 2004).
5. Teachers will be more strict than the teachers at primary school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transitioning students are concerned about their new teachers and teachers' expectations at the destination school (Arth, 1990; Brown & Armstrong, 1982; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Cotterell, 1979; Diemert, 1992; Measor & Woods, 1984).

6. Students are given more independence at high school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitioning students associate transition with growing up (Ashton, 2008; Blyth et al., 1978; Johnstone, 2002).
7. Students are given more responsibility at high school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitioning students associate transition with growing up (Ashton, 2008; Blyth et al., 1978; Johnstone, 2002).
8. Homework will be more difficult at high school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitioning students are concerned pre-transition about the amount of homework they will receive post-transition (Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Arth, 1990; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Maute & Brough, 2002; Odegaard & Heath, 1992; Pietarinen, 1998).
9. It is important to me that I am in the same classes as my friends.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitioning students are concerned pre-transition about being placed in classes where they are by themselves post-transition (Ashton, 2008; Howard & Johnson, 2004).
10. Many students from my primary school are going to the same high school as me.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students transitioning without peers are anxious about being lonely (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Diemert, 1992; Pietarinen, 1998; Pratt & George, 2004).
11. Having different teachers for different subjects will be good.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitioning students are excited about new teachers and new subjects post-transition (Akos, 2002; Ashton, 2008; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Graham & Hill, 2003; Odegaard & Heath, 1992).
12. New students get picked on by older students at high school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitioning students are concerned pre-transition about being bullied post-transition (Anderson et al., 2000; Arth, 1990; Ashton, 2008; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Cotterell, 1979; Odegaard & Heath, 1992; Pietarinen, 1998; Pratt & George, 2004).

13. My parent/s have spoken to me about what to expect at high school.

- A successful transition is associated with communication from parents (Akos et al., 2005; Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Falbo et al., 2001; Maute & Brough, 2002).
- Communication from parents often tends to be warnings rather than positive information which can cause further anxiety for students pre-transition (Arrowsafe & Irvin, 1992).

14. My parent/s help me with my homework at high school.

- Students who cope better with transition were those whose families were actively involved (Akos et al., 2005; Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Falbo et al., 2001; Paulson, 1994).

15. My grades and results will improve at high school.

- Transitioning students pre-transition expect their grades to improve following transition (Akos, 2002; Anderson et al., 2000; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Cotterell, 1979; Longaretti, 2006; Maute & Brough, 2002; Measor & Woods, 1984; Pietarinen, 1998; Shacher et al., 2002).

16. The Year 6 into Year 7 programs helped make starting school less stressful.

- Transition programs assist students to adapt to the new organisational structures but more strategies are required for the social and academic dimensions of transition (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Maute & Brough, 2002).
- Transition programs that enable students to get a feel for their new environment are important but they need to be longer and/or more frequent (Graham & Hill, 2003).

17. There needs to be more Year 6 into Year 7 programs before starting high school.

- Transition programs need to be longer and/or more frequent (Graham & Hill, 2003; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001).
- Schools need to increase the number of transition strategies (Akos & Martin, 2003; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Graham & Hill, 2003; Schumacher, 1998).

18. Older brothers and sister have talked to me about what to expect at high school.

- Transitioning students expectations pre-transition are often influenced by older siblings (Lucey & Reay, 2000).
-

(c) Form of survey

Given the different characteristics of the sample sub-populations in terms of age and exposure to the functioning of the school, it was deemed necessary to construct different forms of the survey for the parents and current transitioning students.

i. Parent survey

The basic format of the parents' questionnaire was adapted from Ticehurst and Veal (2000). It employed a range of techniques to collect three types of information: respondent characteristics, activities and behaviours, and attitudes and opinions.

To collect data about respondent characteristics, closed or pre-coded questions were used at the beginning of the survey. This was to obtain information about their child's gender and issues of rurality (location of primary school and distance travelled to get to secondary school).

A closed or pre-coded question was also used to collect information about the transition activities that their child had undertaken prior to the start of the new school year.

In order to collect information to measure their own and their child's attitudes and opinions about the move to secondary school, two formats were utilised. Firstly, respondents were asked to rank five items in order of importance that best reflected their child's excitement and concerns respectively about moving into secondary school. These responses are then quantified in the analysis.

The second measurement technique used was attitudinal statements. A series of statements was constructed and respondents were asked to indicate, using a Likert scale, the extent to which they agree or disagree with them.

The term 'my child' was used in the construction of the attitudinal statements in order to keep parents focused on their own child's expectations about the transition experience. For example, 'Year 6 into Year 7 programs helped ease any concerns that my child had ...'.

A seven point Likert scale was used to measure the parent attitudes and opinions. The *strongly disagree (SD)*, *disagree (D)*, *tend to disagree (TD)*, *unsure (U)*, *tend to agree (TA)*, *agree (A)* and *strongly agree (SA)* response categories were selected. These categories were placed at the top of each column to avoid confusion over the meanings of the numerical values.

ii. Student survey

The collection of student data needed to be completed in two phases – early and late transition. The early transition data was collected in February, while late transition data was collected in May. Subsequently two instruments needed to be developed in order to capture relevant data.

One of the challenges of the student surveys was in designing an instrument that could be used across different school contexts. During the design process, the issue of the terminology which different schools used when referring to transition or transition programs posed an initial concern. Terms such as orientation, taster and transition were used interchangeably across a variety of school contexts. To overcome this issue, the item on transition programs is referred to as ‘Year 6 into Year 7 programs’ in the questionnaire.

A further challenge was the length of the survey. Given that data needed to be collected post-primary, the survey had to be completed in a relatively short time frame but a comprehensive enough to allow a comparison of results. The significance of this decision is discussed in *section 3.4.1* (Survey instruments), b (Form of survey), v. (Refinement of the questionnaire), (a.) (Pre-trial study).

The final challenge in the development of the survey was the use of appropriate language in the structuring of the statements and questions. The repeated use of the pronoun ‘I’, for example, ‘I was excited about starting high school this year’ was used to refocus the respondent continually so that individual attitudes and data could be collected.

Both the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires included all scales identified above. However, the item on the type of transition activities undertaken at primary school was not repeated in the Late Transition Questionnaire. This was excluded as the data had already been collected during the first phase of data collection and no further information could be gathered.

Similarly to the parent surveys, closed or pre-coded questions were used to obtain data about characteristics of the individual and rurality, as well as the type of transition activities undertaken prior to transition (only in the Early Transition Questionnaire). These questions were located at the start of the questionnaires.

Two questions on both surveys required students to rank items in order of importance. These questions related to their level of excitement and apprehension about transition. In order to keep the process straightforward, there were only five items that needed to be ranked at each question.

A Likert scale was used to gather data about the respondent's general feelings towards the organisational, social and academic dimensions of the primary to secondary transition. Respondents recorded their responses to statements on a five point Likert scale – *disagree strongly (DS)*, *disagree (D)*, *no opinion*, *agree (A)* and *agree strongly (AS)*. Respondents marked the box that correlated with their attitudes towards these six items.

Similarly to the Parent Questionnaire, the student Early Transition and Late Transition Questionnaire had 18 items respectively that required respondents to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement to attitudinal statements. A seven point Likert scale was used to measure the student attitudes and opinions. The *strongly disagree (SD)*, *disagree (D)*, *tend to disagree (TD)*, *unsure (U)*, *tend to agree (TA)*, *agree (A)* and *strongly agree (SA)* response categories were selected. These categories were placed at the top of each column to avoid confusion over the meanings of the numerical values.

Both the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires had similar formats, with the exception of the item on transition programs as detailed above. However, the statements in the Late Transition Questionnaire, while constructed to measure responses to the five identified scales, were written to reflect the current post-transition situation. Table 3.2 displays the difference in wording of items for the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires for each of the scales. For example, an item on the organisational dimension scale has been constructed in the Early Transition Questionnaire to reflect the current conditions - 'It is easy to get lost finding your way around high school'. However, in the Late Transition Questionnaire the item was rewritten to reflect the post-transition situation - 'I still get lost finding my way around high school'.

Table 3.4

Differences in the Wording of Items in the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires

Scale name	Early Transition Questionnaire	Late Transition Questionnaire
Social dimension	High school is a place to make new friends.	I have made many new friends this year.
Academic dimension	Homework will be more difficult at high school.	Homework is more difficult at high school.
Organisational dimension	It is easy to get lost finding your way around high school.	I still get lost finding my way around high school.
Transition programs	The Year 6 into Year 7 programs helped making high school less stressful.	The Year 6 into Year 7 programs helped making high school less stressful.
Parental influence	My parent/s have spoken to me about what to expect at high school.	My parent/s talk to me about what is happening at my school.

iii. Instructions to respondents

Due to the size and scope of this study, it was necessary for each of the questionnaires to be self-administered. The instructions on both the student and parent surveys are simple and clearly explained.

Instructions are in bold text to make them stand out from each item on the questionnaire. Any additional information regarding instructions for each item has been placed in brackets at the end of the instruction. This has been done to give the respondent some further direction if he or she is unclear about the question. For example, in the student survey, respondents are given some further directions on how to rank items ('NOTE: Only use each number once and don't leave any spaces'). In the parent survey (question 4), parents are also advised that the item on annual household income is 'optional'.

iv. Order and grouping of items

All three survey instruments have a similar order and layout of items. Each survey begins with a number of simple questions. These are the pre-coded or closed questions. These questions are used to collect data about the characteristics of the respondent. However, the parent survey has an additional (and optional) question that asks parents to indicate their annual income.

A pre-coded or closed question is also asked at the start of the questionnaire in order to collect data concerning the type of transition activities undertaken prior to the commencement of secondary schooling. This question was not included in the student's Late Transition Questionnaire as indicated in the previous section.

In the student Early and Late Transition Questionnaires, a variety of measurement techniques were used to collect relevant data. Following the pre-coded or closed question section, respondents are asked to rank items in importance to them, use a five point Likert scale to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement to some general statements about the transition process, and then respond to more personal attitudinal statements, using a seven point Likert scale.

The Parent Questionnaire used a similar layout with the exception of the five point Likert scale to respond to more general questions on transition, which was omitted from the student questionnaire.

As all questionnaires are self-administered, each of the three surveys were laid out and printed in such a way that the respondents could follow all instructions easily and respond to all relevant questions appropriately.

v. Refinement of the questionnaires

a. Pre-trial

Having decided on the scales and the order and grouping of items, refinement of the questionnaire commenced. It was important that the items on the questionnaire were not

constructed in such a way that students might pre-empt a response which might confirm the obvious. Furthermore, items had to be structured so that respondents could give an authentic response.

The length of the student questionnaire was tested using an individual student respondent. The draft full version was administered. The respondent was advised about the purpose of the study and was encouraged to work his or her way through the survey at his or her own pace. The respondent was observed and encouraged to make comment during the completion of the questionnaire.

After ten to fifteen minutes the respondent began to make errors, such as skipping over items and not reading the questions carefully. Towards the end of the survey, the respondent was circling the *unsure* response more frequently than during the earlier part of the questionnaire. This indicated to the researcher a lack of interest or of understanding of the items by the respondent. It was decided to reduce the length of the survey to a duration of five to ten minutes.

vi. Pilot study

Following the pre-trial study, a pilot study was conducted using four Year 7 students and their parents in a local Catholic secondary school.

Parent surveys were distributed for self-administration. The questionnaires were accompanied by a Parent Information Sheet outlining the nature of the research project. Parents were told verbally about the purpose of the pilot study – to test the questionnaire's wording, sequencing and layout, as well as estimating the completion time. Parents were invited to comment on the items of the questionnaire, their clarity and suitability.

Student questionnaires were administered to twelve Year 7 students. Students were also given a copy of the Student Information Sheet. Following the administration of the questionnaire students were interviewed orally to explore any difficulties or ambiguities they may have experienced during the completion of the survey.

As a result of the pilot study, a number of minor changes were made. Firstly, in the student surveys (both early and late transition) the inclusion of the instruction ‘NOTE: Only use each number once and don’t leave any spaces’ to the two ranking items was added as there appeared to be some confusion with some students about how the ranking of items was achieved.

Secondly, the pilot study revealed that, depending on the school, the terms used to describe the Year 6 into Year 7 experience, prior to students’ arrival at their destination school varied significantly. With this in mind, the phrase ‘Year 6 into Year 7’ was used to replace other terms, such as ‘taster’, ‘orientation’ and ‘transition’ days.

The third change was condensing the layout of the surveys. It was decided to keep the student surveys to two double sided pages so that the questionnaire would appear to be more manageable for students. The same reasoning was behind keeping the parent survey to three pages in total.

Copies of the final versions of each survey are included in Appendix 4. Copies of the accompanying Student and Parent Information Sheets are included in Appendix 5 and 6 respectively.

3.5 Data collection procedures

3.5.1 Student surveys – Early Transition Questionnaire

A characteristic of the primary to secondary transition involves Year 6 students from numerous primary schools coming together to fashion the Year 7 cohort of a larger secondary school, which creates a layer of complexity for this current study in relation to the timing of data collection. It is important that the collection of data be as close to the pre-transition stage for students. Given the study was set across seven secondary colleges within the entire state of Tasmania, the first phase of data collection occurred in the initial days of secondary schooling, as it was deemed too unwieldy and almost impossible to identify every Year 6

student transitioning into Catholic secondary schools across the state, as well as maintaining participant privacy and confidentiality.

Once agreement to participate in the project was given by college principals, research packages were put together for individual colleges. Student Information Sheets were prepared for the Early Transition Questionnaire. This information sheet outlined the nature of the project, provided general information about confidentiality, when and where the survey would take place and what happens to the information, and informed potential respondents that participation was completely voluntary. Contact details of the researcher and supervisor, as well as the Ethics Complaints Officer, were also provided.

At the time of the administration of the Early Transition Questionnaire, the prepared student surveys and Student Information Sheets were left at the colleges for distribution. Individual colleges organised current Year 7 students to complete the survey during class time in the first days of the current school year. Arrangements were made with individual colleges so that completed questionnaires could be collected after the return deadline.

3.5.2 Parent Questionnaire

Similarly, Parent Information Sheets were developed as part of the packages sent to colleges. The format of this information sheet varied slightly from the information sheet sent to student participants. However, the information contained in the information sheet was similar, although the procedure for returning the questionnaire was outlined in the information sheet.

Parent Questionnaire packages were prepared for distribution. Each questionnaire was placed in a labelled envelope, accompanied by a Parent Information Sheet and a return envelope. At the completion of the student questionnaires, the colleges distributed the parent envelopes for students to take home.

Arrangements were made with individual colleges for a collection point so that completed questionnaires could be collected after the return deadline.

3.5.3 Student surveys – Late Transition Questionnaire

The data collection method used for the late transition phase of student surveys was similar to the collection methods used in the early transition phase. Packages, containing the Late Transition Questionnaires, were prepared for individual colleges and distributed so that questionnaires could be administered in the second week of May, 2009. The individual colleges had agreed to complete the student surveys during class time.

At the completion of the questionnaire, administration surveys were collected and arrangements made so that completed questionnaires could be collected.

3.6 Ethics

This current study has taken into account the many ethical issues that must be considered in order to respect the rights, values and desires of the participants. The key ethical areas that were addressed in this study include consent, privacy and confidentiality, protection from harm, and the consequences of participation and non-participation.

3.6.1 Consent

Consent was obtained at a number of different levels for this current research. Initial approval to undertake the research project was given by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) - approval numbers ECN-08-047 and ECN-09-082 (Appendix 3). Approval was then sought from the Tasmanian Catholic Education Office (Appendix 1). The principals of participating colleges (Appendix 2) and the participants themselves received full and accurate information regarding the study before their involvement. The purpose of the study and subsequent use of the collected data were outlined and participants were notified that they were free to withdraw at any time.

3.6.2 Privacy and confidentiality

The design of this study provided safeguards to protect the identities of all participants, as well as the colleges involved in the study. Participants were advised in their respective

information sheets not to put their name on the questionnaire form. All questionnaires were safely stored and will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

The colleges that have agreed to be involved in the study have also had their identity kept confidential. All colleges have been referred to in this study as College A, B, C, D, E, F or G.

3.6.3 Protection from harm

This current study involved the completion of self-administered questionnaires. Participation was voluntary. Respondents were free to withdraw at any time before or during the administration of the questionnaires. The rights of the participants were explained in writing in the Student and Parent Information Sheets (Appendix 5 and 6 respectively).

3.6.4 Consequences of participation and non-participation

As previously stated, participation in the study was voluntary and confidential. Students and their parents were advised in writing, through the respective information sheets, that if participants chose not to participate in the study there would be no effect upon their results.

3.7 Data organisation

The data collected from the three questionnaires (Early Transition, Parent and Late Transition) was coded for the following:

- gender;
- secondary college;
- primary school attended;
- rurality;
- transition activities;
- levels of excitement around key dimensions (organisational, social, academic and transition programs);
- levels of anxiety around key dimensions (organisational, social, academic and transition programs), and
- responses to attitudinal items – Likert scales.

The data from all three questionnaires was entered into a statistical analysis program (SPSS, version 17).

The next section outlines the validation procedures used for the Early Transition, Parent and Late Transition Questionnaires.

3.8 Validation procedures

Once the data was entered into SPSS, a check was conducted to ensure that no scores entered were out of range.

A number of procedures were then conducted to validate the data. This includes the formation of composite variables, assumption testing and difference testing.

3.8.1 Composite variables

It was anticipated that composite variables would be formed to represent the theoretical construct for the concept of increased independence/responsibility in the organisational dimension scale. The validity of the composite variables was estimated in terms of the homogeneity of the questionnaire items. This was achieved through inter-item correlations, item-total correlations and factor analysis. In this study, this was achieved through principal components analysis.

The reliability of each composite variable in the study was estimated using co-efficient alpha (Cronbach's alpha). This test compares variance in the item scores for each scale with the variance in the sum of those item scores, to determine the internal consistency of items within scale. The generally agreed upon lower limit for Cronbach's alpha is .70. However, according to Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson and Tatham (2006, p. 137) this may decrease to .60 in exploratory research, such as this current study.

3.8.2 Assumption testing

Each concept or variable underwent a number of tests to ensure all the scores were sampled from the same population and that for interval scales, the scores were normally distributed.

(a) Outliers

i. Multivariate outliers

Multivariate outliers (unusual pattern of responses across a range of different variables) were identified by using data from a set of variables. From these variables, the Mahalanobis distance was calculated for each case. Tabachnick and Fidell (1996, p. 94) state that the Mahalanobis distance (measure of distance based on correlations of variables) should be interpreted as a χ^2 statistic with the degrees of freedom equal to the number of IVs. A criterion of $p < .001$ is recommended to evaluate whether a case is judged to be a multivariate outlier. Multivariate outliers were excluded from any further analysis on the identified concept.

ii. Univariate outliers

Univariate outliers (those with extreme scores on a single variable) were identified by inspecting histograms and box-plots visually for the identified variable. Standard scores will be calculated for each respondent. Respondents displaying a standard score with an absolute value in excess of 3.29 ($p < .001$) were excluded from further analysis on the variable.

(b) Tests for normality of distributions of interval variables

To investigate the normality of the distribution of scores for each variable, the value of skew and kurtosis were calculated. To test whether the distribution's skew significantly deviated from that of a normal distribution, values for skew were divided by the standard error of the skew. This calculation yielded a z score, which was interpreted to be significant if it exceeded the absolute value of 3.29 ($p < .001$), for samples bigger than 300 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). Similar procedures were conducted for kurtosis. If z scores for skew were significant, attempts were made to transform the data.

3.8.3 Difference testing

To establish whether one group of respondents had statistically significantly different characteristics from another group in the study, a number of difference tests were conducted. In this study, these statistical tests included:

(a) Contingency Table Analysis

This method was chosen to determine whether a relationship between categorical variables was significant. Calculations for chi-square (χ^2) were interpreted as significant when the associate probability was less than .05 ($\alpha = .05$).

(b) Independent-samples *t*-test

This method of analysis was chosen to test relationships between a nominal (and dichotomous) variable and another variable which satisfied the assumption of normality. Levene's test for homogeneity of variance must not be significant ($p > .05$). The relationship between the two variables was significant when *t* was statistically significant ($p < .05$).

(c) Mann-Whitney *U* test

Mann-Whitney *U* tests were conducted to test the relationship between a nominal (and dichotomous) variable and an interval variable that failed to satisfy the assumption of normality. The result of the test was significant at $p < .05$.

(d) Paired-samples *t*-test

Paired-samples *t*-tests were conducted to make comparisons between groups at two different points in time (early and late transition). The results of the test are significant at $p < .05$.

(e) Wilcoxon signed-rank test

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test is equivalent to the paired-samples *t*-test but does not assume the assumption of normality has been met. The results of the test are significant at $p < .05$.

3.8.4 Effect size

Calculations of effect size have been used as a means to quantify differences between groups. In this study, effect size has been calculated as a means to support the statistical analysis when investigating the difference between rural or internal transitioning students' expectations and experiences, in particular Question 3 and Question 4. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), statistical significance on its own is no longer considered an acceptable index of effect. Using the formula outlined by Cohen et al. (2007, p. 521) effect size is:

$$\frac{(\text{mean of late transition} - \text{mean of early transition})}{\text{pooled standard deviation}}$$

Pooled standard deviation is calculated by the following formula:

$$\sqrt{\frac{(N_E - 1)SD_E^2 + (N_L - 1)SD_L^2}{N_E + N_L - 2}}$$

N_E = number of respondents of the Early Transition Questionnaire, N_L = number of respondents of the Late Transition Questionnaire, SD_E = standard deviation of the Early Transition Questionnaire, SD_L = standard deviation of the Late Transition Questionnaire.

This formula for effect size yields the statistic termed Cohen's d (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 521). In using Cohen's d , the following effects have been identified:

- 0 – 0.20 = weak effect
- 0.21 – 0.50 = modest effect
- 0.51 – 1.00 = moderate effect
- > 1.00 = strong effect

3.9 Statistical analysis methods

3.9.1 Student expectations of the primary to secondary transition

Question 1

Do the expectations of the primary to secondary transition differ between (a) rural and urban students, and (b) internal and external transitioning students?

To answer this question, data was analysed using a number of methods. Firstly, general levels of excitement about the primary to secondary transition were measured using an interval variable. Four univariate outliers were identified and excluded from further analysis for this variable. Assumption tests, for both focus groups, reported that the variable failed to satisfy the assumption of normality. Attempts to transform the variable failed and visual inspection of the histogram indicated the existence of a ceiling effect.

Mean and Median (measures of central tendency) and Standard Deviation (measure of dispersion) were reported. As the variable used to answer this question failed to satisfy the assumption of normality, Mann-Whitney *U* tests were conducted for difference testing between (a) rural and urban students, and (b) internal and external transitioning students.

Secondly, descriptive statistics for ordinal scales were utilised by calculating the frequencies, represented by percentages, of respondents falling into each category. Item 5 on the Early Transition Questionnaire asked respondents to rank in order from 1-5 (1 being the most important and 5 the least important) the items which most excite them about transition. The list was pre-determined and based on the current literature. The five items related to the social, academic and organisational dimensions of the primary to secondary transition. Contingency Table Analysis was then used to test the differences between the sub-groups on whom this study focused (rural and internal transitioning students).

Variables from the Early Transition Questionnaire were divided into five scales, which included the social, academic and organisational dimensions, parental influence and transition programs. The methodology involved in the analysis of the first four scales is

detailed below. The methodology of analysis for the transition program scale is addressed in *section 3.9.4*. On each of the variables associated with each scale, assumption testing occurred and mean scores, standard deviations and medians were reported. Finally, depending on the results of the tests for normality of distribution, either Independent-samples *t*-tests or Mann-Whitney *U* tests were conducted on each variable for each of the focus groups.

(a) Social dimension

Two themes were used to analyse student expectations around the social dimension of the primary to secondary transition – friendships and bullying.

i. Friendships

Six multivariate outliers (cases 118, 310, 315, 507, 849 and 851) were identified with a Mahalanobis score in excess of $\chi^2 = 16.266$, and were excluded from further analysis of the friendship theme in the social dimension of the student early transition data. Three variables were used to investigate the concept of friendship during the transition from primary to secondary school. These variables measured student expectations about the ease of making new friends, the view that secondary school is a place to establish new friendships and the importance of being placed in classes with existing friends at secondary school.

Following assumption tests the following transformations were made:

- Opinion 2 (Ease of making new friends at secondary school) - calculations of *z* scores for skew for both urban and external transitioning students on this variable were interpreted to be moderately negatively skewed. A square-root transformation (reflecting before and after the transformation) was applied to produce a new variable (opin2_rsqr_ref). Following the same general procedures, values for both skew and kurtosis of the transformed scores were found to be not significantly different from those of a normal distribution. The transformed variable (opin2_rsqr_ref) was used in all subsequent analyses to represent the concept of the ease of making new friends at high school.

- Opinion 9 (Secondary school is a place to establish new friendships) – six univariate outliers were identified and excluded from further analysis.

ii. Bullying

Two variables were used to explore the concept of bullying during the primary to secondary transition. These variables were drawn from questionnaire items around student perspectives that older students are friendly and that Year 7 students are bullied at secondary school.

The following transformations were made:

- Opinion 3 (Older students at secondary school are friendly) - z score calculations for skew on the variable used to measure the perspective that older students at secondary school are friendly were interpreted to have a moderate, negative skew for both urban and external transitioning students. Similar procedures, as detailed above, were completed and a new variable (opin3_rsqr) was formed and used in all subsequent analysis.

(b) Academic dimension

Three variables were used to collect data on the academic dimension. These variables included student expectations of the difficulty of academic work in secondary school, difficulty of homework in secondary school, and improvement in grades and results.

Eight multivariate outliers (cases 118, 313, 460, 698, 726, 790, 820 and 835) were identified with a Mahalanobis score in excess of $\chi^2 = 16.266$, and excluded from further analyses using this set of variables. After assumption tests, the following transformations were made:

- Opinion 1 (School work is harder at secondary school) - two univariate outliers were identified and excluded for the variable used to measure the anticipated difficulty of academic work in secondary school. Additionally, calculations of z scores for skew for this variable were interpreted to be significant for urban and external transitioning students. Similar procedures to those described in *section 3.10.2, (a)*, were applied and new variables (opin1_rsqr) were formed and used in subsequent analysis.

- Opinion 14 (Homework is more difficult) – seven univariate outliers were identified and excluded from further analysis.
- Opinion 21 (Grades and results will improve at secondary school) – two univariate outliers were identified and excluded from further analysis.

(c) Organisational dimension

Five variables were used to investigate student expectations about the organisational dimension of the transition from primary to secondary school. These variables included the helpfulness of teachers at the secondary school, the strictness of teachers at the secondary school, the anticipation of having a number of different teachers, getting lost, and increased independence and responsibility.

Nine multivariate outliers (cases 84, 118, 319, 440, 604, 698, 817, 828, and 849) were identified with a Mahalanobis score in excess of $\chi^2_5 = 20.515$, and were excluded from any further analyses. The following variables were transformed:

- Opinion 4 (Teachers at secondary school are helpful) – five univariate outliers were identified and excluded from further analysis. Square root transformations (reflecting before and after transformation) were also applied to this variable as z scores for skew had a moderate negative deviation from that of a normal distribution for external transitioning students. A new variable (opin4_rsqr_ref) was formed and used in subsequent analysis.
- Opinion 17 (Having many different teachers will be good) – eleven univariate outliers were identified and excluded from further analysis.
- In an attempt to develop a composite variable to represent the theoretical construct of ‘independence/responsibility’, the mean across Item18org and Item19org was calculated to form a new variable (indresp). Item-to-total correlations were greater than the criterion of .50, and inter-item correlations were greater than the criterion of .30. Principal components analysis reported that only one component was extracted with an eigenvalue greater than one and so unidimensionality was assumed. All items displayed loadings greater than the minimum criterion of .50. Coefficient (Cronbach) alpha for the two item scale was found to be poor ($\alpha = .64$). However, according to

Hair et al. (2006, p. 137), the generally agreed lower limit for Cronbach's alpha is .70, but it may decrease to .60 in exploratory research. Therefore, variable 'indresp' was used as the measure of independence/responsibility in the analysis.

This new composite variable presented four univariate outliers as well as a moderate negative skew for normality of distribution for external transitioning students and had to be transformed using procedures previously outlined. A new variable (inresp_rsq_ref) was developed and used in subsequent analysis on rurality.

(d) Parental influence

- Opinion 20 (Parents help with homework) - normality of distribution for external transitioning students presented a moderate, negative skew on the variable. Square-root transformation (reflecting before and after transformation) was applied and a new variable (opin20_rsq_ref) was used in subsequent analysis.

3.9.2 Student experiences of the primary to secondary transition

Question 2

Do the experiences of the primary to secondary transition differ between (a) rural and urban students, and (b) internal and external transitioning students?

Question 2 was answered using similar procedures to that identified in *section 3.9.1*. Data collected from the Late Transition Questionnaire was divided into five scales – social, academic and organisational dimensions, as well as parental influence and transition programs. Variables used to measure scales in the Late Transition Questionnaire were similar to those in the Early Transition Questionnaire. The methodology employed for the first four variables is described below. The analysis method for the Transition Program scale is outlined in *section 3.9.4*.

For each scale, assumption tests were conducted and descriptive statistics reported. Difference tests, including Contingency Table Analysis, Independent-samples *t*-test and Mann-Whitney *U* test, were then carried out for the variables used to measure each scale.

(a) Social dimension

As identified in *section 3.9.1*, (a), the social dimension was broken down into two themes – friendships and bullying.

i. Friendships

Twelve multivariate outliers (cases 40, 232, 284, 286, 295, 328, 341, 362, 403, 509, 666 and 679) were identified with a Mahalanobis score in excess of $\chi^2 = 16.266$ and excluded from further analysis on this theme.

- Opinion 2 (It has been easy making new friends) - nine univariate outliers were identified and excluded on this variable. Normality of distribution for urban students presented a substantial negative skew and a log transformation (reflecting before and after transformation) was achieved. A new variable (opin2_rln_ref) was used in subsequent analysis. Additionally, normality of distribution for external transitioning students presented a moderate negative skew and a square-root transformation (reflecting before and after transformation) was achieved. A new variable (opin2_rsqr_ref) was used in subsequent analysis.
- Opinion 9 (New friendships have been established) - nine univariates were identified and excluded on the variable used to measure students having made new friends.

ii. Bullying

No multivariate outliers were identified for this theme.

- Opinion 3 (Older students at secondary school are friendly) - normality of distribution for this variable had moderate negative skewness for both urban and external transitioning students. Square root transformations were applied (reflecting before and after the transformation) and two new variables (opin3_rsqr_ref) were developed and used in subsequent analysis.

(b) Academic dimension

The same variables used in *section 3.9.1*, (b) were used in this section. Three multivariate outliers were identified (cases 2, 149 and 406) with a Mahalanobis score in excess of $\chi^2 = 16.266$, and were excluded from further analysis on this scale. For each of the variables used

in this dimension, normality of distribution presented negative skews for some of the groups. The procedures for transformation are similar to those described above and each variable is outlined below:

- Opinion 1 (School work is harder) – urban and external transitioning students presented substantial negative skews. A log transformation was applied and a new variable (opin_rln_ref) was used.
- Opinion 14 (Homework is more difficult) – external transitioning students presented a moderate negative skew. A square-root transformation was applied and a new variable (opin14_rsqr_ref) was developed and used in analysis for internal and external transitioning students.
- Opinion 21 (Improvement in grades and results) - external transitioning students presented a moderate negative skew. A square-root transformation was applied and a new variable (opin21_rsqr_ref) was developed and used in analysis for internal and external transitioning students.

(c) Organisational dimension

Similar variables used in the analysis of data for the Early Transition Questionnaire for the organisational dimension (*section 3.9.1, (c)*) are used for the Late Transition Questionnaire. Twelve multivariate outliers were identified (cases 37, 40, 137, 244, 272, 284, 287, 302, 341, 406, 552 and 666) with a Mahalanobis score in excess of $\chi^2_5 = 20.515$, and excluded from further analysis on this scale.

Results of assumption tests and development of composite variables are detailed below:

- Opinion 4 (Teachers are helpful) – one univariate outlier was identified. Normality of distribution presented a moderate negative skew for urban and external transitioning students. A square-root transformation was applied and a new variable developed (opin4_rsqr_ref) which was used in all subsequent analysis.
- Opinion 17 (Different teachers has been good) – three univariate outliers identified and excluded. Normality of distribution presented a moderate negative skew for urban and external transitioning students. A square-root transformation was applied

and a new variable developed (opin17_rsqr_ref) which was used in all subsequent analysis.

- Opinion 12 and Opinion 13 (Independence and responsibility).

In an attempt to develop a composite variable to represent the theoretical construct of ‘independence/responsibility’, the mean across Opinion 12 and Opinion 13 was calculated to form a new variable (ind-resp). Item-to-total correlations were greater than the criterion of .50, and inter-item correlations were greater than the criterion of .30. Principal components analysis reported only one component was extracted with an eigenvalue greater than one and so unidimensionality was assumed. All items displayed loadings greater than the minimum criterion of .50. Coefficient (Cronbach) alpha for the two item scale was found to be acceptable ($\alpha = .726$). A new variable ‘ind-resp’ was used as the measure of independence/responsibility in the analysis.

This new composite variable presented two univariate outliers as well as a moderate negative skew for normality of distribution for external transitioning students and had to be transformed using procedures previously outlined. A new variable (ind_resp_rsqr_ref) was developed and used in subsequent analysis on internal and external transitioning students.

(d) Parental influence

- Opinion 19 (Parents talk to me about school) – urban and external transitioning students presented moderate negative skew. A square-root transformation was applied and a new variable (opin19_rsqr_ref) was developed.
- Opinion 20 (Parents help with homework) – urban and external transitioning students presented moderate negative skews. A square-root transformation was applied and a new variable (opin20_rsqr_ref) was developed.

3.9.3 Differences between early and late transition for rural and internal transitioning students

Question 3

What differences exist between expectation and reality for students (a) from small rural schools, and (b) experiencing an internal transition, within the scales of social, academic and organisational dimensions, and parental influence?

To investigate the differences between the expectations and experiences for rural and internal transitioning students in the four identified scales, Paired-samples *t*-tests or Wilcoxon signed rank tests were conducted between variables on the early and late Transition Questionnaires. *T*-tests for Paired-samples were used to investigate how things had changed for transitioning students, between early and late transition, when the variables had satisfied the assumption of normality. On the other hand, a Wilcoxon signed rank test was conducted when the variable failed to satisfy the assumption of normality.

Effect size was also calculated and reported for the variables measuring the scales of social, academic and organisational dimensions and parental influence for rural and internal transitioning students.

3.9.4 The effectiveness of existing transition programs

Question 4

What were the perspectives of the effectiveness of existing transition programs for (a) rural students, and (b) internal transitioning students?

To identify the types of transition programs undertaken by participants a pre-determined list, drawn from prior research (see *section 2.8*), was developed. Transitioning students were asked to indicate their involvement in each transition activity. The primary to secondary transition activities included:

- Year 7 Orientation Day;
- ‘preparation lessons’ at the high school;
- visits and talks by teachers from the high school to their primary school;

- interviews with the principal or other member of staff from the high school, and
- other (please state type of activity).

To analyse the data, frequency tables of respondents falling into each category (as represented by percentages) were developed.

Two variables from the Early Transition Questionnaire and Late Transition Questionnaire were used to analyse student perspective about the effectiveness of transition programs identified above. These variables measured students' perspectives about the effectiveness of existing programs in reducing anxiety about transition and their perspective as to whether more programs were needed.

Following assumption tests, Independent-samples *t*-test were conducted to determine the differences between rural and urban students' perspectives, and internal and external transitioning students' perspectives about the effectiveness of existing primary to secondary transition programs at both points in time.

Finally, Paired samples *t*-tests were conducted for both rural and internal transitioning students to investigate if perspectives of the effectiveness of transition programs changed from early transition to late transition.

3.9.5 Parents' perspectives of the transition process

Question 5

What are the differences in perspective of the transition process for parents of (a) rural and urban students, and (b) internal and external transitioning students?

Question 5 was answered using a variety of statistical analysis methods. Parents were asked to rank in order from 1-5 (1 being the most important and 5 the least important) the things their child was excited about pre-transition. A second list was generated and parents were asked to rank in order the things their child was most worried or concerned about before commencing secondary school. Frequency tables (percentages) of respondents falling into

each category were then established. Contingency Table Analysis was then conducted to establish significant relationships between the sub-groups on which the study focused.

Data analysis of the variables used to measure the three dimensions (social, academic and organisational) was then conducted. This included Independent-samples *t*-test and Mann-Whitney *U* test.

(a) Social dimension

Two variables were used to measure the social dimension. Five multivariate outliers (cases 108, 152, 204, 408 and 410) were identified with a Mahalanobis score in excess of $\chi^2 = 13.816$ and excluded from further analysis in this dimension. Following assumption tests the following adjustment was made:

- Opinion 6 (Making new friends is important at secondary school) - six univariate outliers were identified and excluded.

(b) Academic dimension

Three variables were used to measure the academic dimension. Eight multivariate outliers (cases 103, 108, 152, 176, 204, 408, 409 and 410) were identified with a Mahalanobis score in excess of $\chi^2 = 16.266$ and were excluded from further analysis. Procedures for transformation are described below:

- Opinion 3 (Parental help with homework is important for academic success) - calculations of *z* scores for skew for external transitioning students were interpreted to be moderately negatively skewed. A square-root transformation (reflecting before and after the transformation) was applied. The new variable (opin3_rsqr_ref) was used in all subsequent analysis.
- Opinion 8 (I expect my child's grades to improve at secondary school) - one univariate outlier was identified and excluded from further analysis on the variable parents expect their child's grades to improve at secondary school.
- Opinion 9 (My child feels confident that they will achieve academically well) - *z* scores for skew for urban students and external transitioning students were interpreted to be moderately negatively skewed. A square-root transformation (reflecting before

and after the transformation) was applied. The new variable (opin9_rsqr_ref) was used in all subsequent analysis.

(c) Organisational dimension

Two variables were used to measure organisational dimension. Four multivariate outliers (cases 49, 78, 370 and 459) were identified with a Mahalanobis score in excess of $\chi^2 = 13.816$ and excluded from further analysis. Following assumption tests the following adjustment was made:

- Opinion 4 (Ensuring children are organised at school is important for overall success) - two univariate outliers were identified and excluded.

(d) Transition programs

Two variables were used to measure the transition programs scale. Four multivariate outliers (cases 49, 51, 352 and 435) were identified with a Mahalanobis score in excess of $\chi^2 = 13.816$ and excluded from further analysis. Procedures for transformation are described below:

- Opinion 1 (Existing transition programs helped ease my child's concerns about transition) - tests for normality of distribution indicated a substantial negative skew. A log transformation (reflecting before and after the transformation) was conducted. The new variable (opin1_rln_ref) was used in all subsequent analysis for rurality on this variable.

3.10 Summary

The three surveys used in this study are new instruments used to measure student expectations and actual experiences of the primary to secondary transition, as well as parents' perspectives about their child's transition, for two key groups of students – rural and internal transitioning students.

As Chapter 2 illustrated, previous instruments used in transitional research for rural students have limitations in regard to this current, quantitative study. Therefore, new instruments had

to be developed. The Early Transition Questionnaire, Late Transition Questionnaire and Parent Questionnaire were developed from collegial views in the school environment and previous research in the area of primary to secondary transition. Scales and items were generated that were believed to be relevant to the transition process.

In the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires five scales were included. These were social, academic and organisational dimensions, transition programs and parental influence. Four scales were included in the Parent Questionnaire. These included the social, academic and organisational dimensions, as well as transition programs.

Data was collected from transitioning students from seven Tasmanian Catholic secondary schools in two phases. The first, on the first day of secondary school (n=898) and the second phase in May (n=722), after three months of starting secondary school, assessed if students' actual experience of the primary to secondary transition matched their expectations at the start of the process.

The Early Transition and Late Transition Questionnaires were both subjected to extensive statistical analysis and validation. Alpha reliability, assumption testing and a range of difference testing, including Contingency Table Analysis, Independent-samples *t*-tests, Mann-Whitney *U* tests, Paired-samples *t*-tests and Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were conducted on the data.

The Parent Questionnaire was developed to collect data from transitioning students' parents. It was collected during the first phase of data collection (n=461). The instrument was subjected to similar statistical analysis and validation procedures to those outlined above.

Validity and reliability have been demonstrated in relation to rural and urban students and internal and external transitioning students as two separate units of analysis for each of the three instruments. The data sets involving the two focus groups were used in assessing overall validity and reliability of each instrument at each phase of the data collection.

Interpretation of data in Chapter 4 is based upon three instruments that have satisfied extensive statistical investigation and which exhibit sound validity and reliability throughout.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings associated with the use of the Early Transition, Parent and Late Transition Questionnaires and addresses key research questions outlined in Chapter 1. These include:

1. Do the expectations of the primary to secondary transition differ between (a) rural and urban students, and (b) internal and external transitioning students?
2. Do the experiences of the primary to secondary transition differ between (a) rural and urban students, and (b) internal and external transitioning students?
3. What differences exist between expectation and reality for students (a) from small rural schools, and (b) experiencing an internal transition, within the scales of social, academic and organisational dimensions, and parental influence?
4. What were the perspectives of the effectiveness of existing transition programs for (a) rural students, and (b) internal transitioning students?
5. What are the differences in perspective of the transition process for parents of (a) rural and urban students, and (b) internal and external transitioning students?

Section 4.2 addresses the first question and reports general expectations of the transition process. The differences in student expectations, between rural and urban, and internal and external transitioning students, in four scales (social, academic, organisational dimension and parental influence) are tested and results from Contingency Table Analysis, Independent-samples *t*-tests and Mann-Whitney *U* tests are reported.

Section 4.3 deals with Question 2. Differences in the lived experiences of the primary to secondary transition between rural and urban students, internal and external transitioning

students are investigated within the four scales, identified in *section 4.2*. Relationships are tested using Independent-samples *t*-tests and Mann-Whitney *U* tests, and results are reported.

Question 3 is addressed in *section 4.4*. Comparisons between the expectations and lived reality of the primary to secondary transition are investigated. Effect sizes are calculated and *t*-tests for Paired-samples and Wilcoxon signed-rank tests are conducted to investigate any significant differences for rural students and internal transitioning students within the four scales, including social, academic and organisational dimensions, and parental influences.

Section 4.5 responds to Question 4 and details the types of transition programs undertaken during the primary to secondary transition process. Differences in student perspectives about the effectiveness of identified transition programs are tested using Independent-samples *t*-tests and results are reported for (a) rural and urban students, and (b) internal and external transitioning students.

Finally, effect size and Paired-samples *t*-tests are used to investigate rural and internal transitioning students' perspective of the effectiveness of these programs between early and late transition.

The final question, Question 5, is addressed in *section 4.6*. Results from statistical analysis on parents' perspectives of the primary to secondary transition process are reported within the scales of social, academic and organisational dimensions and transition programs. Differences between perspectives of rural and urban students' parents and internal and external transitioning students' parents are tested, using Independent-samples *t*-tests and Mann-Whitney *U* tests, and results reported.

Section 4.7 provides a summary from the analysis of data collected from the three instruments to address the five key research questions.

4.2 Student expectations of the primary to secondary transition

Question 1

Do the expectations of the primary to secondary transition differ between (a) rural and urban students, and (b) internal and external transitioning students?

This section reports the results of student expectations of the primary to secondary transition process from data gathered from the Early Transition Questionnaire, from a sample comprising 898 students, to answer Question 1. *Section 4.2.1* reports the results for rural and urban students. It includes results from a Mann-Whitney *U* test on the general levels of excitement around the primary to secondary transition process. Rankings and results are from Contingency Table Analysis, from pre-determined lists, of aspects of transition which most excite and concern students about commencing secondary school. *Section 4.2.1* also investigates, using Independent-samples *t*-tests or Mann-Whitney *U* tests, the expectations of the primary to secondary transition in four scales: social, academic and organisational dimensions, and parental influence.

Section 4.2.2 reports the results for internal and external transitioning students using similar processes described in *section 4.2.1*. Rankings and results from Contingency Table Analysis are presented on items which most excite or concern students about the primary to secondary transition. Furthermore, results from *t*-tests for Independent-samples or Mann-Whitney *U* tests are reported for four scales: social, academic and organisational dimensions and parental influence.

4.2.1 Rurality

(a) Levels of excitement and anxiety around the primary to secondary transition

To collect data about students' general levels of excitement around the primary to secondary transition, the variable measuring levels of student excitement about commencing secondary school were analysed. Mann-Whitney *U* tests were conducted using this variable as the dependent variable and rurality as the grouping variable respectively. Results are detailed below.

Mann-Whitney U test found that rural students, $Mdn = 6.00$, $M = 5.92$, $SD = 1.168$, report non-significant, higher levels of excitement about the prospect of starting secondary school than their urban peers, $Mdn = 6.00$, $M = 5.69$, $SD = 1.314$, $U = 23680.000$, $p > .05$. Both rural and urban students present high mean scores (more frequent than the response alternative, *tend to agree*) on this variable which suggests students are generally excited about the transition from primary to secondary school.

Students were asked to rank in order, from a pre-determined list generated from the research literature in *section 2.2*, aspects of transition which most excite them about starting secondary school, with 1 being the most important and 5 the least important. The rankings and results of Contingency Table Analysis to determine possible relationships between rurality and the transition aspects that students were most excited about before starting secondary school on the Early Transition Questionnaire are displayed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Rankings (%) and Contingency Table Analysis Results for Aspects of Transition that Most Excite Rural and Urban Students About Starting Secondary School

Item	Ranking (%)					Pearson Chi-Square value (χ^2)
	1	2	3	4	5	
Making new friends						
Rural	65	18.3	6.7	5	5	8.632*
Urban	46.1	24	14.6	7.2	8	
Having different teachers for different subjects						
Rural	3.3	23.3	18.3	20	35	3.528
Urban	8	17.6	23.6	19.7	31	
Learning new things						
Rural	20.3	23.7	30.5	16.9	8.5	5.068
Urban	22	28.3	18.6	20.9	10.1	
Doing practical subjects						
Rural	3.4	11.9	22	35.6	27.1	3.547
Urban	10	11.7	19.5	29.2	29.5	
Greater independence and responsibility						
Rural	6.8	22	23.7	23.7	23.7	2.719
Urban	14	18.4	23.9	22.6	21.1	

Note * $p < .05$ Rural, n=64 Urban, n=834

As displayed in Table 4.1, a significant relationship was found between rurality and the item, *Making new friends*. From the sample of rural students (n=65), 65% of students ranked this as the most exciting aspect of the primary to secondary transition, compared with 46.1% of urban students (n=834). No other significant relationships were found between rurality and the items identified from the research literature as exciting students about starting secondary school.

A similar procedure was followed to identify transitioning students' greatest concerns or worries about starting secondary school. Students were asked to rank in order, from a pre-determined list generated from the research literature in *section 2.2*, transition aspects which most worried or concerned them about starting secondary school, with 1 being the most important and 5 the least important. The rankings and results of Contingency Table Analysis to establish significant relationships between rurality and aspects of transition that students were most concerned or worried about before starting secondary school on the Early Transition Questionnaire are displayed in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Rankings (%) and Contingency Table Analysis Results for the Aspects of Transition that Most Concern or Worry Rural and Urban Students About Starting Secondary School

Item	Ranking (%)					Pearson Chi-Square value (χ^2)
	1	2	3	4	5	
Getting lost						
Rural	36.4	25.5	16.4	9.1	12.7	1.928
Urban	29.4	24.1	20.5	13.0	12.9	
More homework						
Rural	25.9	27.8	18.5	18.5	9.3	.500
Urban	27.6	25.5	19.8	16.2	10.9	
Being bullied						
Rural	13.0	18.5	20.4	24.1	24.1	.321
Urban	12.7	17.6	18.2	24.5	27.0	
Losing friends						
Rural	20.0	21.8	27.3	20.0	10.9	.461
Urban	22.6	22.1	23.8	21.2	10.3	
Having different teachers for each subject						
Rural	5.6	5.6	18.5	27.8	42.6	1.883
Urban	7.8	10.6	17.5	25.3	38.9	

Note * $p < .05$ Rural, n=64 Urban, n=834

Table 4.2 reveals that no significant relationships were identified between rural and urban students on the list of identified concerns. As can be seen from the rankings, there were similar percentage scores between the two groups for each identified item, indicating similar causes of potential anxiety. Both rural (36.4%) and urban (29.4%) students ranked getting lost as their highest ranked concern about the primary to secondary transition.

(b) Differences between rural and urban students on the scales of social, academic and organisational dimensions and parental influence

For the respondents of the Early Transition Questionnaire, the mean, median, standard deviation and results of *t*-test for Independent-samples or Mann-Whitney *U* test, for rural and urban students, for the variables representing the social, academic and organisational dimensions, and parental influence scales are reported in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Median and Standard Deviation) for Rural and Urban Students, and Results of Independent-Samples t-test or Mann-Whitney U Tests, for Variables Measuring the Scales of Social, Academic and Organisational Dimensions, and Parental Influence

Variable	M (Mdn)		SD		Difference test	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	<i>t</i>	<i>U</i>
SOCIAL DIMENSION						
Ease of making new friends	4.51	4.47	.321	.306	1.076	
Establish new friendships	5.86(6.00)	5.62(6.00)	.981	1.137		23204.500
In same class as friends	4.87(5.00)	4.73(5.00)	1.631	1.669		24827.000
Older students are friendly	4.49	4.44	.306	.294	1.360	
Year 7s are bullied	2.35	2.37	1.217	.918	.006	
ACADEMIC DIMENSION						
Academic work	4.61	4.54	.268	.272	1.738	
Homework	5.68(6.00)	5.56(6.00)	1.389	1.168		23183.000
Improvement in grades and results	5.60(6.00)	5.09(5.00)	1.185	1.158		19726.000*
ORGANISATIONAL DIMENSION						
Teachers - helpful	4.53(5.00)	4.25(4.00)	.649	.660		20336.000*
Teachers - strict	4.67(5.00)	4.73(5.00)	1.777	1.541		25045.500
Teachers - variety	5.52(6.00)	5.37(6.00)	1.260	1.164		22624.500
Lost	4.38(4.00)	4.08(4.00)	1.753	1.675		22862.500
Independence and responsibility	5.90(6.00)	5.82(6.00)	.804	.865		21933.500
PARENTAL INFLUENCE						
Parents talk to students	5.16(6.00)	4.83(5.00)	1.665	1.562		21542.500
Parents help with homework	4.33	4.21	1.814	1.534	.514	

Note ** $p < .0005$ * $p < .05$ Rural, n=64 Urban, n=834

i. Social dimension

Mean scores, displayed in Table 4.3, are generally higher for rural students than urban students in most of the variables used to measure the social dimension. Table 4.3 reports that rural students display slightly higher, but not statistically significant, ratings which show that they expect it to be easier to make new friends at secondary school than do their urban counterparts.

Similarly, rural students have higher, but not significant expectations that secondary school is a place to make new friends. Both groups present high mean scores (more frequent than the response alternative, *agree*) suggesting that most students expect to make new friends following transition. Furthermore, rural students also have higher, non-significant ratings of the perceived importance of being placed in the same classes as their friends making similar transitions to the secondary schools than have urban students.

Table 4.3 reports the results of Independent-samples *t*-test which found rural students present, non-significant higher ratings of expected friendliness of older students than do urban students following the transition to secondary school. An Independent-samples *t*-test on the variable used to measure rural students' expectations that Year 7 students are bullied at secondary school reports Levene's test to be significant ($p < .05$) and so equal variance could not be assumed. Subsequently, rural students were found to have non-significant lower ratings of the expectation that Year 7 students are bullied at secondary school than did their urban peers, as displayed in Table 4.3. Both rural and urban students report low mean scores (less frequent than the response alternative, *unsure*), indicating low levels of anticipation that Year 7s are bullied at secondary school.

ii. Academic dimension

Mean scores on the three variables displayed in Table 4.3 indicate that, overall, rural students have higher ratings for the variables used to investigate the academic dimension than urban students undergoing similar transitions to secondary school. A Mann-Whitney *U* test found that rural students ($Mdn = 6.00$) report significantly higher ratings of expectation that their grades and results would improve at secondary school than did urban students ($Mdn = 5.00$).

Rural students, as indicated in Table 4.3, report non-significantly higher ratings of expected difficulty of academic work, as well as the expectation that homework would be more difficult at secondary school than did their urban peers. Rural and urban students report high mean scores (more frequent than the response alternative, *tend to agree*), indicating both rural and urban students anticipate an improvement in their grades and results following transition.

iii. Organisational dimension

As indicated by Table 4.3, the Mann-Whitney *U* test found only one variable to have significant difference between rural and urban students within the organisational dimension. Rural students (*Mdn* = 5.00) report significantly higher ratings of the expectation that teachers will be helpful at the secondary school than did urban students (*Mdn* = 4.00). This corresponds with the result which found urban students have higher, non-significant, expected ratings that teachers at the secondary school are stricter than the teachers at primary school. Both rural and urban students report non-significant, similar, high mean scores (more frequent than the response alternative, *tend to agree*) on the expectation that it would be good to have a variety of teachers at secondary school, which suggests a common, positive view of this aspect of transition.

As displayed in Table 4.3, rural students have non-significant higher ratings that they expect to get easily lost at secondary school than have urban students. Additionally, rural students have non-significant, higher ratings of expectations that they will have greater independence and responsibility at secondary school than have urban students. Both groups report high mean scores (more frequent than the response alternative, *tend to agree*), on this variable, as well as positive levels of anticipation about the increased independence and responsibility, post-transition, for both rural and urban students.

iv. Parental influence

As displayed in Table 4.3, no significant relationships were reported on the variables used to measure parental influence on the primary to secondary transition. Rural and urban students mean scores were around the response option *tend to agree*, suggesting a clear possibility

that their parents had spoken to them about what to expect at secondary school. Mann-Whitney U tests found no significant differences between rural and urban students' ratings on this variable.

Furthermore, Independent-samples t -test reported no significant differences between rural and urban students on the variable measuring students' expectations that their parents would help them with homework. Mean scores for both rural and urban students are around the response option *unsure* indicating uncertainty about this item on the questionnaire.

4.2.2 Internal and external transition

(a) Levels of excitement and anxiety around the primary to secondary transition

To collect data about students' general levels of excitement around the primary to secondary transition, the variable used to measure levels of student excitement about commencing secondary school was analysed. Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted using this variable as the dependent variable and type of transition as the grouping variable respectively. Results are detailed below.

On the same variable, the Mann-Whitney U test reports that internal transitioning students, $Mdn = 6.00$, $M = 5.61$, $SD = 1.190$, have significantly lower ratings of excitement about commencing secondary school than do external transitioning students, $Mdn = 6.00$, $M = 5.73$, $SD = 1.336$, $U = 63501.500$, $p < .05$. Both internal and external transitioning students present high mean scores (more frequent than the response alternative, *tend to agree*) indicating that the primary to secondary transition is considered an exciting process for most students, despite the significant difference between the two groups.

Students were asked to rank in order, from a pre-determined list generated from the research literature in *section 2.2*, aspects of transition which most excited them about starting secondary school, with 1 being the most important and 5 the least important. Contingency Table Analysis was also conducted on the same items to see if there were significant relationships between internal and external transitioning students. These results, as well as the rankings, are reported in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Rankings (%) and Contingency Table Analysis Results for the Aspects of Transition that Most Excite Internal and External Transitioning Students About Starting Secondary School

Item	Ranking (%)					Pearson Chi-Square value (χ^2)
	1	2	3	4	5	
Making new friends						
Internal	34.8	23.2	18.8	11	12.2	22.560*
External	51.1	23.8	12.7	5.9	6.6	
Having different teachers for different subjects						
Internal	12.7	18.2	23.2	19.3	26.5	9.380
External	6.3	18	23.2	19.9	32.7	
Learning new things						
Internal	24.3	30.4	18.8	19.3	7.2	3.221
External	21.2	27.3	19.6	21	10.8	
Doing practical subjects						
Internal	7.8	13.2	19.4	25.6	33.3	4.259
External	10	11.1	19.7	30.9	28.2	
Greater independence and responsibility						
Internal	20.6	14.4	19.4	25	20.6	113.277*
External	11.5	19.8	25.2	22	21.5	

Note * $p < .05$ Internal, n=203 External, n=695

Table 4.4 reveals that there were significant relationships between the type of transition undertaken and the items, *Making new friends* and *Greater independence and responsibility*. From the sample of internal transitioning students (n=203), 34.8% ranked the item, *Making new friends* as the most exciting aspect of the primary to secondary transition, compared with 51.1% of external transitioning students (n=695). Additionally, 20.6% of internal

transitioning students ranked *Greater independence and responsibility* as their number one choice compared with 11.5% of external transitioning students.

Contingency Table Analysis was also conducted on the same list of items to see if there were significant relationships between internal and external transitioning students. These results and rankings are reported in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

Rankings (%) and Contingency Table Analysis Results for the Aspects of Transition that Most Concern or Worry Internal and External Transitioning Students Starting Secondary School

Item	Ranking (%)					Pearson Chi-Square value (χ^2)
	1	2	3	4	5	
Getting lost						
Internal	19.6	31.3	22.9	10.1	16.2	17.116*
External	32.9	22.2	19.5	13.6	12.0	
More homework						
Internal	34.8	22.5	17.4	15.2	10.1	6.230
External	25.4	26.6	20.3	16.6	11.0	
Being bullied						
Internal	10.1	15.2	21.3	23.6	29.8	4.009
External	13.5	18.4	17.5	24.7	26.0	
Losing friends						
Internal	26.4	20.2	21.3	24.7	7.3	6.148
External	21.3	22.6	24.8	20.0	11.2	
Having different teachers for each subject						
Internal	9.6	10.7	16.9	26.4	36.5	1.742
External	7.1	10.1	17.8	25.2	39.9	

Note * $p < .05$ Internal, n=203 External, n=695

Table 4.5 reports a significant relationship between internal and external transitioning students on the item, *Getting lost*, as the transition aspect which most worried or concerned students about starting secondary school. 32.9% of external transitioning students identified this as their greatest concern, compared with 19.6% of internal transitioning students. This may indicate internal transitioning students' familiarity with the secondary school layout.

(b) Differences between internal and external transitioning students on the scales of social, academic, organisational dimensions and parental influence

For the respondents of the Early Transition Questionnaire, the mean, median, standard deviation and difference test results from Independent-samples *t*-test or Mann-Whitney *U* tests, for internal and external transitioning students, for the variables representing the social, academic and organisational dimensions, and parental influence scales are displayed in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6

Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Median and Standard Deviation) for Internal and External Transitioning Students, and Results of Independent-Samples t-test or Mann-Whitney U Tests, for Variables Measuring the Scales of Social, Academic and Organisational Dimensions, and Parental Influence

Variable	M (Mdn)		SD		Difference test	
	Internal	External	Int.	Ext.	<i>t</i>	<i>U</i>
SOCIAL DIMENSION						
Ease of making new friends	4.44	4.48	.305	.307	-1.195	
Establish new friendships	5.39(6.00)	5.71(6.00)	1.166	1.106		57445.500**
In same class as friends	4.82(5.00)	4.72(5.00)	1.621	1.680		66920.000
Older students are friendly	4.36	4.46	.279	.295	-4.516**	
Year 7s are bullied	2.48	2.34	.875	.953	1.793	
ACADEMIC DIMENSION						
Academic work	4.46	4.57	.246	.275	-5.211**	
Homework	5.22(5.00)	5.67(6.00)	1.240	1.148		54111.000**
Improvement in grades and results	4.87(5.00)	5.21(5.00)	1.106	1.173		57856.000**
ORGANISATIONAL DIMENSION						
Teachers - helpful	4.68	4.72	.257	.255	-1.879	
Teachers - strict	4.29(4.00)	4.85(5.00)	1.486	1.556		54380.500**
Teachers - variety	5.41(6.00)	5.37(6.00)	1.131	1.183		66545.000
Lost	3.87(4.00)	4.17(4.00)	1.588	1.703		62247.000*
Independence and responsibility	5.78(6.00)	5.84(6.00)	.905	.848		58760.500
PARENTAL INFLUENCE						
Parents talk to students	5.52(5.00)	4.95(5.00)	1.685	1.523		59608.000*
Parents help with homework	6.03	6.12	.408	.416	-2.901*	

Note ** $p < .0005$ * $p < .05$ Internal, n=203 External, n=695

i. Social dimension

As indicated in Table 4.6, the Mann-Whitney U test found a statistically significant difference between the ratings for internal and external transitioning students on two variables measuring the social dimension. Internal transitioning students report a significantly lower rating of the expectation that secondary school is a place to make new friends than those students experiencing an external transition. The mean scores presented for both groups of students were high (more frequent than the response alternative, *tend to agree*), suggesting students have high expectations about the potential to make new friends post-transition.

Table 4.6 also reports that Independent-samples t -test found internal transitioning students have significantly lower ratings of the expectation that older students are friendly at the secondary school, than did their external transitioning peers. Internal transitioning students also report non-significantly higher ratings that Year 7 students are bullied at the secondary school than did external transitioning students. However, both groups of students had low mean scores (less frequent than the alternative response, *unsure*), suggesting both internal and external transitioning students have low expectations that Year 7 students are bullied following transition from primary school.

Mann-Whitney U tests report that internal transitioning students had higher, but not significant, ratings on the importance of being placed in the same classes as their friends from primary school. Additionally, Independent-samples t -test report internal transitioning students presented lower, but not significant, ratings of the expected ease of making new friends at secondary school than their external transitioning peers.

ii. Academic dimension

Across all variables used to measure the academic dimension, internal transitioning students record significantly lower mean scores than those of external transitioning students, as seen in Table 4.6. The Independent-samples t -test found that external transitioning students report significantly higher ratings of expected difficulty of academic work at secondary school than did internal transitioning students.

The Mann-Whitney U test found that external transitioning students ($Mdn = 5.00$) have significantly higher ratings of expected improvement in grades at secondary school than did internal transitioning students ($Mdn = 4.00$). Additionally, internal transitioning students ($Mdn = 5.00$) had significantly lower ratings that homework would be more difficult at secondary school than their external transitioning peers ($Mdn = 6.00$).

iii. Organisational dimension

Table 4.6 displays significant differences between internal and external transitioning students on two variables. The Mann-Whitney U test found that internal transitioning students ($Mdn = 4.00$) had significantly lower expectations that teachers at secondary school would be more strict than did their external transitioning peers ($Mdn = 5.00$). Additionally, internal transitioning students ($Mdn = 4.00$) report significantly lower ratings of the expectations that they will easily get lost at secondary school than external transitioning students ($Mdn = 4.00$).

Both rural and urban students report high mean scores (more frequent than response alternative, *tend to agree*) on the variables measuring the expectation that it would be good to have a variety of teachers and that students are given more independence and responsibility at secondary school. This suggests that most transitioning students have positive expectations about these two items.

iv. Parental influence

Across both variables, used to measure parental influence on the expectations of students during the primary to secondary transition, external transitioning students report significantly higher ratings than internal transitioning students, as displayed in Table 4.6. The Mann-Whitney U test found internal transitioning students ($Mdn = 5.00$) had significantly lower ratings for their parents informing them about what to expect at secondary school than external transitioning students ($Mdn = 5.00$).

An Independent-samples t -test found that internal transitioning students also report significantly lower ratings of the expectation that parents would help them with their

homework than their external transitioning peers. Both groups of students report high mean scores (more frequent than the response alternative, *agree*), suggesting that both internal and external transitioning students felt positive that their parents would give them assistance with homework if necessary.

4.3 Student experiences of the primary to secondary transition

Question 2

Do the experiences of the primary to secondary transition differ between (a) rural and urban students, and (b) internal and external transitioning students?

Section 4.3 investigates the lived reality of the primary to secondary transition in four scales – social, academic and organisational dimensions, and parental influence from data collected from the Late Transition Questionnaire. The organisation of this section is similar to *section 4.2* and for each scale the differences between rural and urban, and internal and external transitioning students are reported. *Section 4.3.1* reports descriptive statistics (mean, median and standard deviation) and results of *t*-tests for Independent-samples or Mann-Whitney *U* tests for rural and urban transitioning students. *Section 4.3.2* also reports descriptive statistics (mean, median and standard deviation) and results of *t*-tests for Independent-samples or Mann-Whitney *U* tests for internal and external transitioning students.

4.3.1 Rurality

(a) Differences between rural and urban students on the scales of social, academic, organisational dimensions, and parental influence

For the respondents of the Late Transition Questionnaire, the mean, median, standard deviation and results of a *t*-test for Independent-samples or a Mann-Whitney *U* test, for rural (n=49) and urban (n=673) students, for the variables representing the social, academic and organisational dimensions, and parental influence scales, are reported in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7

Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Median and Standard Deviation) for Rural and Urban Students, and Results of Independent-Samples t-test or Mann-Whitney U Tests, for Variables Measuring the Scales of Social, Academic and Organisational Dimensions, and Parental Influence

Variable	M (Mdn)		SD		Difference test	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	<i>t</i>	<i>U</i>
SOCIAL DIMENSION						
Ease of making new friends	4.59	4.63	.338	.293	-1.017	
Establish new friendships	6.06(6.00)	6.15(6.00)	1.111	.998		15109.500
In same class as friends	5.04(5.00)	5.07(5.00)	1.817	1.578		15395.500
Older students are friendly	4.48	4.42	.309	.294	1.290	
Year 7s are bullied	1.57	1.61	.355	.313	-.831	
ACADEMIC DIMENSION						
Academic work	5.36	5.31	.476	.417	.684	
Homework	5.47(6.00)	5.34(6.00)	1.529	1.440		15307.500
Improvement in grades and results	5.10(6.00)	5.07(5.00)	1.623	1.343		15610.000
ORGANISATIONAL DIMENSION						
Teachers - helpful	4.60	4.59	.294	.265	.245	
Teachers - strict	5.12(5.00)	4.86(5.00)	1.563	1.574		14729.000
Teachers - variety	6.52	5.49	.384	.353	.512	
Lost	2.33(2.00)	2.44(2.00)	1.625	1.471		14854.500
Independence and responsibility	5.86(6.00)	5.81(6.00)	.968	.914		15853.000
PARENTAL INFLUENCE						
Parents talk to students	6.41	6.23	.440	.428	2.864*	
Parents help with homework	6.20	6.19	.523	.439	.212	

Note ** $p < .0005$ * $p < .05$ Rural, n=49 Urban, n=673

i. Social dimension

Table 4.7 indicates that no significant relationships were found for variables measuring the social dimension on the Late Transition Questionnaire. Difference testing found that rural students display slightly lower, but not statistically significant, ratings for *it was easy to make new friends at secondary school* than their urban counterparts. Similarly, rural students have lower, but not significant ratings for *secondary school is a place to establish new friendships*. Rural students also have lower, non-significant, ratings for *it has been important to me that I am in the same classes as my friends* than urban students.

Both rural and urban students present high mean scores on the three variables associated with friendships. High mean scores (more frequent than response alternative, *agree*) for the variable measuring *the ease of making new friends* and *new friendships have been established* suggests that new social connections were experienced post-transition.

Table 4.7 indicates that generally, there is very little difference between the mean scores of rural and urban students on both variables used to measure student experiences about bullying. Independent-samples *t*-tests found that rural students had non-significantly, higher ratings of the actual friendliness of older students than urban students. Rural students also reported non-significantly, lower ratings that Year 7 students are bullied at secondary school than their urban peers. Both rural and urban students report low mean scores that Year 7 students are bullied (less frequent than the response alternative, *disagree*) indicating limited exposure to actual bullying experiences post-transition.

ii. Academic dimension

Mean scores on the three variables displayed in Table 4.7 indicate that, overall, rural students have higher, but not significant, ratings of responses in the areas used to investigate the academic dimension than urban students undergoing similar transition to secondary school. The Independent-samples *t*-test found that rural students report non-significantly higher ratings of actual difficulty of academic work at secondary school than do urban students.

Mann-Whitney *U* tests report that rural students have non-significantly, higher ratings that *homework is actually more difficult and their grades and results have improved at secondary school* than did urban students. Mean scores for both rural and urban students, on all three variables are high (more frequent than response alternative, *tend to agree*), suggesting transitioning students find both schoolwork and homework more difficult but believe their grades and results have improved since transition.

iii. Organisational dimension

As indicated by Table 4.7, no significant differences were found between rural and urban students on any of the variables used to measure the organisational dimension for the Late Transition Questionnaire. The Independent-samples *t*-test found rural students report non-significant higher ratings for *teachers are helpful at the secondary school* than urban students. Rural students also report higher mean scores for *it is good to have a variety of teachers at secondary school* than do urban students.

Mann-Whitney *U* tests report that rural students (*Mdn* = 5.00) have higher ratings for *teachers are stricter at secondary school* than do their urban peers (*Mdn* = 5.00). Furthermore, rural students have non-significant higher ratings for *expectations that they have greater independence and responsibility at secondary school* than urban students.

Additionally, both rural and urban students report non-significant, low mean scores that they still get lost at secondary school, suggesting transitioning students have successfully managed to find their way around their new environment.

iv. Parental influence

For the variables measuring student perspectives about the role their parents play during the primary to secondary transition, *t*-tests for Independent-samples were conducted and found one significant difference between rural and urban students, as shown in Table 4.7. Rural students present a significantly higher mean score on the variable measuring students' perspective parents talk to them about experiences at secondary school than urban students.

Mean scores for both rural and urban students were high (more frequent than response alternative, *agree*) indicating that students felt parents discuss the transition with them.

An Independent-samples *t*-test found no significant difference for the variable measuring students' perspective that parents help with homework since transition. Again, mean scores for both rural and urban students were high (more frequent than response alternative, *agree*) suggesting parents give them assistance with homework when required.

4.3.2 Internal and external transition

(a) Differences between rural and urban students on the scales of social, academic and organisational dimensions, and parental influence

For the respondents of the Late Transition Questionnaire, the mean, median, standard deviation and results of the *t*-test for Independent-samples or the Mann-Whitney *U* test, for internal (n=189) and external (n=533) transitioning students, for the variables representing the social, academic and organisational dimensions, and parental influence scales are reported in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8

Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Median and Standard Deviation) for Internal and External Transitioning Students, and Results of Independent-Samples t-tests or Mann-Whitney U Tests, for Variables Measuring the Scales of Social, Academic and Organisational Dimensions, and Parental Influence

Variable	M (Mdn)		SD		Difference test	
	Internal	External	Int.	Ext.	<i>t</i>	<i>U</i>
SOCIAL DIMENSION						
Ease of making new friends	4.59	4.64	.294	.296	-2.048*	
Establish new friendships	5.89(6.00)	6.23(6.00)	1.095	.957		39015.000**
In same class as friends	5.23(5.00)	5.02(5.00)	1.494	1.626		45610.500
Older students are friendly	4.38	4.45	.287	.294	-3.356*	
Year 7s are bullied	1.63	1.60	.315	.316	1.087	
ACADEMIC DIMENSION						
Academic work	5.21	5.35	.405	.421	-3.863**	
Homework	6.37	6.45	.452	.430	-2.094*	
Improvement in grades and results	6.32	6.35	.414	.410	-.742	
ORGANISATIONAL DIMENSION						
Teachers - helpful	4.56	4.60	.260	.268	-1.934	
Teachers - strict	4.51(4.00)	5.00(5.00)	1.634	1.534		39778.500**
Teachers - variety	6.47	6.50	.348	.357	-.815	
Lost	2.21(2.00)	2.51(2.00)	1.335	1.523		43053.000*
Independence and responsibility	6.54	6.56	.312	.308	-.950	
PARENTAL INFLUENCE						
Parents talk to students	6.15	6.27	.396	.439	-3.314*	
Parents help with homework	6.10	6.22	.426	.447	-3.312*	

Note ** $p < .0005$ * $p < .05$ Internal, n=189 External, n=583

i. Social dimension

As indicated in Table 4.8, difference tests found statistically significant differences between the ratings for external and external transitioning students on two variables. Independent-samples *t*-test found internal transitioning students present a significantly higher rating for *it was easy to make new friends at secondary school* following transition than external transitioning students.

Furthermore, Mann-Whitney *U* test found that external transitioning students (*Mdn* = 6.00) had significantly higher ratings for *new friendships were established* than internal transitioning students (*Mdn* = 6.00). Mean scores for internal and external transitioning students were high (more frequently than response alternatives, *tend to agree* and *agree*, respectively), suggesting that the experience of establishing new friendships had been positive.

Internal transitioning students had higher, but not significant, ratings for *it was important to be placed in the same classes as their friends from primary school*, as indicated in Table 4.8. Mean scores on this variable, for both groups of students, were high (more frequent than the response alternative, *tend to agree*), indicating that transitioning students placed high value on having been placed in the same classes as their friends during the transition process.

Table 4.8 reports the results of Independent-samples *t*-tests indicating that internal transitioning students have significantly lower ratings for the perspective *older students are friendly at the secondary school*, than did their urban peers. Internal transitioning students also report non-significantly higher ratings for *Year 7 students are bullied at the secondary school* than did external transitioning students, although the reported mean scores for this variable are low for both internal and external transitioning students, suggesting transitioning students do not feel that bullying is a major concern following transition.

ii. Academic dimension

Across all variables used to measure the academic dimension, internal transitioning students' record lower mean scores than those of external transitioning students, as seen in Table 4.8.

Independent-samples *t*-tests found that external transitioning students report significantly higher ratings for *academic work at secondary school is more difficult* than did internal transitioning students. External transitioning students also report significantly higher mean scores for *homework is more difficult* than internal transitioning students.

Table 4.8 also displays that external transitioning students have non-significantly higher ratings for *there has been an improvement in grades since the transition to secondary school* than did the internal transitioning students. Mean scores for both groups, on all variables are high, suggesting that students find schoolwork and homework a challenge, but feel their grades have improved since the transition to secondary school.

iii. Organisational dimension

Table 4.8 indicates significant differences between internal and external transitioning students on two variables. Mann-Whitney *U* tests found that external transitioning students (*Mdn* = 5.00) report significantly higher mean scores for *teachers are more strict at secondary school* than internal transitioning students (*Mdn* = 4.00). Additionally, external transitioning students (*Mdn* = 2.00) have significantly higher ratings for *they still get lost at secondary school* than internal transitioning students (*Mdn* = 2.00). However, both groups report low mean scores on this variable (less frequent than response alternative, *disagree*), suggesting that getting lost is no longer a major concern for transitioning students.

The Independent-samples *t*-test found that rural students report non-significant lower mean scores on the other variables used to measure the organisational dimension, as shown in Table 4.8. These variables include students' experiences of helpful teachers, having a variety of teachers and increased independence and responsibility. Mean scores for both groups are high (more frequent than the response alternative, *agree*) on all three variables which suggest that students have had positive experiences with teachers and experienced greater independence and responsibility post-transition.

iv. Parental influence

Independent-samples *t*-tests found significant differences between internal and external transitioning students on both variables measuring parental influence, as indicated in Table 4.8. Internal transitioning students reported a significantly lower mean score than urban students on the variable measuring their perspective that parents talk to them about what happens at secondary school. Mean scores for both internal and external transitioning students are high (more frequent than the response alternative, *agree*), suggesting that both groups of students perceive high levels of communication with their parents post-transition.

Additionally, Table 4.8 shows internal transitioning students presented a significantly lower mean score on the variable measuring parental help with homework than external transitioning students, investigated by a *t*-test for Independent-samples. However, mean scores were also around the response option *agree*, indicating a positive response to this item by both internal and external transitioning students.

4.4 Differences between early and late transition for rural and internal transitioning students

Question 3

What differences exist between expectation and reality for students (a) from small rural schools, and (b) experiencing an internal transition, within the scales of social, academic and organisational dimensions, and parental influence?

Section 4.4 explores the differences between the expectation and reality of the primary to secondary transition for rural and internal transitioning students in the four scales identified in *section 4.2* and *section 4.3*. From the final sample of 722 students (rural students, $n=49$, and internal transitioning students, $n=189$), mean scores, medians and standard deviations are reported for the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires for each of the four scales. Effect size and results of Paired-samples *t*-tests or Wilcoxon signed-rank tests are reported as measures of the disparity between the expectations and experience of the primary to secondary transition for rural and internal transitioning students. Effect sizes are calculated

by subtracting the means for each variable on the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires and dividing this by the pooled standard deviation (Cohen et al., 2007). See *section 3.8.4* for details of the formulas used to calculate pooled standard deviation and effect size. *Section 4.4.1* reports the results of these tests for rural students, while *section 4.4.2* presents the results for internal transitioning students.

4.4.1 Rurality

For the rural respondents (n=49) of the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires, the mean, median, standard deviations, effect size and results of Paired-samples *t*-test or Wilcoxon signed-rank test, for the variables representing the scales of social, academic and organisational, and parental influence are reported in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9

Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Median and Standard Deviation) for the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires for Variables Measuring the Scales of Social, Academic and Organisational Dimensions, and Parental Influence, Effect Size (d) and Results of t-tests for Paired-Samples or Wilcoxon signed-rank (z) Tests for Differences Across Rural Students' Transition

Variable	M (Mdn)		SD		Effect size		Difference test	
	ET	LT	ET	LT	d	t	z	
SOCIAL DIMENSION								
Ease of making new friends	4.51	4.59	.319	.338	0.24	-1.316		
New friendships established	5.86	6.06	.981	1.111	0.19	-1.171		
Same classes as friends	4.87(5.00)	5.04(5.00)	1.631	1.817	0.10			-.029
Older students are friendly	4.49	4.48	.306	.309	0.03	.548		
Year 7s are bullied	2.38	1.57	1.175	.355	0.88	4.321**		
ACADEMIC DIMENSION								
Academic work	4.00	5.36	.736	.476	2.13	-10.826**		
Homework	5.71	5.47	1.258	1.529	0.17	.799		
Improvement in grades	5.53	5.10	1.226	1.623	0.30	.429		
ORGANISATIONAL DIMENSION								
Teachers - helpful	4.53	4.60	.649	.294	0.13	-.738		
Teachers - strict	4.78	5.12	1.794	1.563	0.20	-.986		
Teachers - variety	5.53	6.52	1.324	.384	0.96	-5.574**		
Lost	4.33(4.00)	2.33(2.00)	1.638	1.625	1.23			-4.312**
Independence/responsibility	5.87	5.85	.806	.999	0.02	.112		
PARENTAL INFLUENCE								
Parents talk to me	5.22	6.41	1.687	.440	0.91	-4.794**		
Parents help with h/work	4.24	6.20	1.843	.523	1.37	-7.190**		

Note ** $p < .0005$ * $p < .05$ Rural, n=49 ET=Early Transition, LT=Late Transition

i. Social dimension

Table 4.9 found no significant differences between rural students' expectations and experiences of measures of friendship in the social dimension scale for the primary to secondary transition. For each of the three identified variables, there were increases in reported mean scores and standard deviations, on each of the variables, from early to late transition for rural students. For all variables the reported mean scores are high, indicating positive expectations and experiences of the perceived ease of making and establishing new friendships, and the importance of being in the same classes as their friends, post-transition.

The effect size for the variable measuring the ease of making new friends was modest $0.21 < d < 0.50$ (Cohen et al., 2007) although *t*-test for Paired-samples found no significant difference between early and late transition, as shown in Table 4.9. The effect sizes for the other two friendship variables, including the establishment of new friends and perceived importance of being in the same classes as their friends, were reported as weak, $d < 0.20$ (Cohen et al., 2007). However, the variable measuring the perceived importance of being in the same classes as friends failed to satisfy the assumption of normality and was subjected to a Wilcoxon signed rank test to investigate differences between early and late transition.

The Paired-samples *t*-test found a significant difference between the expectation and reality of one variable measuring bullying as a concept of the social dimension, as shown in Table 4.9. Rural students report significantly lower mean scores, post-transition of the perspective that Year 7s were bullied at secondary school than they had anticipated pre-transition. This variable was found to have a moderate effect size, $0.51 < d < 1.0$, (Cohen et al., 2007), supporting the findings of the statistical analysis found by the *t*-test.

No significant difference was found between students expectation and experience on the variable measuring the friendliness of older students at secondary school, as displayed in Table 4.9. The effect size is weak, $d < 0.20$, (Cohen et al., 2007), which complements the findings from the Paired-samples *t*-test on this variable.

ii. Academic dimension

The Paired-samples *t*-test found a significant difference between rural students' expectations and realities on one variable used to measure the academic dimension, as shown in Table 4.9. Rural students report a significantly higher mean score for *school work is more difficult* post-transition than expected pre-transition. This variable was also found to have a strong effect size, $d > 1.00$, (Cohen et al., 2007), which substantiates the results from the *t*-test.

On the other two variables presented in Table 4.9, no significant differences were found between the expectation and reality of the difficulty of homework and improvement in grades post-transition. There was a decrease in the reported mean from the Early Transition Questionnaire to the Late Transition Questionnaire for both variables. At both points in time, the mean scores are more frequent than the *tend to agree* response on the questionnaires, which indicates the expectation of difficult homework and an improvement in grades have become a reality. While the effect size of the item, *improvement in grades* ($d = 0.30$), was found to have a modest effect, $0.21 < d < 0.50$, (Cohen et al., 2007), it is smaller in size than the difference between mean scores at early and late transition which confirms the difference is not substantial.

iii. Organisational dimension

Two significant differences were found on variables measuring the organisational dimension, between early and late transition for rural students, as shown in Table 4.9. The Paired-samples *t*-test found a significant increase in mean scores for the perspective that having a variety of teachers is a positive aspect of transition from early to late transition. The effect size was moderate $0.51 < d < 1.00$ (Cohen et al., 2007).

A significant decrease in reported means was also found from early to late transition on the variable measuring *getting lost at secondary school*, as investigated by Wilcoxon signed rank test and shown in Table 4.9. The normality of distribution failed to meet the assumption of normality for rural students on the Late Transition Questionnaire, necessitating the use of the Wilcoxon signed rank test. The effect size for this variable was moderate $0.51 < d < 1.00$ (Cohen et al., 2007), supporting these results.

No other significant differences were found on the variables measuring other aspects of the organisational dimension, as displayed in Table 4.9. Mean scores for the perspective of greater independence and responsibility, at both early and late transition are high (more frequent than the response alternative, *tend to agree*), suggesting high expectations and actual experiences of this aspect of transition. Effect sizes were all found to be in the weak range $d < .20$ (Cohen et al., 2007).

iv. Parental influence

Table 4.9 indicates that significant differences were found on both variables measuring parental influence during the primary to secondary transition. Rural students report a significant increase from early to late transition of their perspectives that parents talk to them about secondary school, as investigated by *t*-test for Paired-samples. Mean scores increased from around the response option *tend to agree* to more frequent than the response alternative *agree*. Furthermore, the effect size was moderate, $0.51 < d < 1.00$ (Cohen et al., 2007) supporting the statistical significance found from the *t*-test.

The Paired-samples *t*-test also found a significant increase, from early to late transition, on the variable measuring students' perspectives that parents would help with homework. At the early transition phase students' mean score was around the response option *unsure* and increased to more frequent than the response alternative *agree* at the late transition phase. The effect size was also found to be strong, $d > 1.00$ (Cohen et al., 2007).

4.4.2 Internal and external transition

For the internal transitioning respondents ($n=189$) of the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires, the mean, median and standard deviations, effect sizes and results of the Paired-samples *t*-test or Wilcoxon signed-rank test, for the variables measuring the scales of social, academic and organisational dimensions, and parental influence, are reported in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10

Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Median and Standard Deviation) for the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires for Variables Measuring the Scales of Social, Academic and Organisational Dimensions, and Parental Influence, Effect Size (d) and Results of t-tests for Paired-Samples or Wilcoxon signed-rank (z) Tests for Differences Across Internal Transitioning Students' Transition

Variable	M (Mdn)		SD		Effect size	Difference test	
	ET	LT	ET	LT	d	t	z
SOCIAL DIMENSION							
Ease of making new friends	4.44	4.59	.305	.294	0.50	-5.278**	
New friendships established	5.39	5.89	1.166	1.095	0.44	-3.898**	
Same classes as friends	4.82	5.23	1.621	1.494	0.26	-1.848	
Older students are friendly	4.36	4.37	.279	.288	0.004	-.621	
Year 7s are bullied	2.48	1.63	.875	.315	1.28	12.254**	
ACADEMIC DIMENSION							
Academic work	3.58	5.21	.748	.406	2.69	-24.794**	
Homework	5.20	5.15	1.251	1.538	0.04	.328	
Improvement in grades	4.83	6.32	1.088	.414	1.79	-16.914**	
ORGANISATIONAL DIMENSION							
Teachers - helpful	4.53	4.60	.649	.294	0.14	-.738	
Teachers - strict	4.78	5.12	1.794	1.563	0.20	-.986	
Teachers - variety	5.53	6.52	1.324	.384	1.00	-5.574**	
Lost	4.33(4.00)	2.33(2.00)	1.638	1.625	1.23		-4.312**
Independence/responsibility	5.87	5.85	.806	.999	0.02	.112	
PARENTAL INFLUENCE							
Parents talk to me	4.42	6.15	1.677	.396	1.67	-13.405**	
Parents help with h/work	6.03	6.08	.410	.433	0.12	-1.076	

Note ** $p < .0005$ * $p < .05$ Internal, n=189 ET=Early Transition, LT=Late Transition

i. Social dimension

Table 4.10 indicates that two significant differences were found for variables measuring friendship between early and late transition, for internal transitioning students. The Paired-samples *t*-test found a significant increase in internal transitioning students' ratings between their expectations and experiences on the variables *it is easy to make new friends at secondary school* and *new friendships would be established* and the reality, post-transition. Mean scores for both early and late transition on these two variables are high (more frequent than response alternative, *agree*) suggesting positive expectations and experiences about these items.

The effect sizes for the two variables, with statistically significant differences discussed above, were all in the modest range, $0.21 < d < 0.50$, (Cohen et al., 2007). This suggests that the differences described for the two friendship variables above are valid, yet modest in strength.

For the last variable, the importance of being in the same classes as friends, the *t*-test for Paired-samples found no significant difference between expectation and reality for internal transitioning students. Mean scores for both the early and late transition response were nearly 5, or close to the *tend to agree* option, indicating a moderate level of importance for this item. The effect size was also in the modest range, $0.21 < d < 0.50$, (Cohen et al., 2007), but smaller than the difference between early and late transition responses which supports the *t*-test results finding the difference not to be significant.

The Paired-samples *t*-test found a significant difference between internal transitioning students' expectation and experience that Year 7s are bullied with the transition to secondary school as indicated in Table 4.10. At the early transition phase, the internal transitioning students' reported mean was less frequent than the response option *no opinion*. However, at the late transition phase, the reported mean was less frequent than the response alternative, *disagree*, for the same variable. This variable was also found to have a strong effect size, $d > 1.00$, (Cohen et al., 2007), reflecting a strong difference between expectation and reality for

internal transitioning students about bullying and complements the results from the Paired-samples *t*-test.

No significant difference was found on internal transitioning students' perspective that older students at the secondary school are friendly following transition, as displayed in Table 4.10. The reported mean for both early and late transition is high (more frequent than the response alternative, *agree*), suggesting that internal transitioning students expected and experienced the friendliness of older members of the school during the transition process. The effect size is very weak, $d < 0.20$, (Cohen et al., 2007), which substantiates the findings from the Paired-samples *t*-test on this variable.

ii. Academic dimension

Table 4.10 reveals that the Paired-samples *t*-test found significant differences between early and late transition on two variables measuring the academic dimension for internal transitioning students. Firstly, there was a significant increase in mean scores on the variable measuring the difficulty of school work at secondary school from early to late transition. The effect size was found to be strong, $d > 1.00$ (Cohen et al., 2007), confirming the significant difference found from *t*-tests for Paired-samples.

Secondly, the variable measuring improvement in grades was also found to increase significantly from early to late transition for internal transitioning students, as shown in Table 4.10. This variable also presented a strong effect size, $d > 1.00$ (Cohen et al., 2007), supporting the results from the Paired-samples *t*-test.

No significant difference was found on the variable measuring the difficulty of homework between early and late transition. Calculations for effect size were also weak, $d < 0.20$ (Cohen et al., 2007) between the two points in time. Although mean scores for both early and late transition were high (more frequent than the response alternative, *tend to agree*), suggesting high levels of expectation and experience, there is an improvement in grades post-transition for internal transitioning students.

iii. Organisational dimension

Two significant differences were found on variables measuring the organisational dimension, between early and late transition, for internal transitioning students, as shown in Table 4.10. The *t*-test for Paired-samples found a significant increase from early to late transition for the perspective that having a variety of teachers is a good aspect of the transition to secondary school. Mean scores increased from more frequent than the response alternative *tend to agree* at the early transition phase to more frequent than the response option *agree* for the late transition stage. Furthermore, the effect size, $d = 1.00$, is on the upper boundary of the moderate range, $0.51 < d < 1.00$ (Cohen et al., 2007), indicating a moderate to strong effect and supporting the significant difference found by the *t*-test.

A significant difference was also found on the variable measuring students' perspectives about getting lost during transition, as indicated in Table 4.10. The distribution of scores for internal transitioning students on the Late Transition Questionnaire failed to meet the assumption of normality. A Wilcoxon signed rank test was conducted to investigate the differences between early and late transition on this variable. A significant decrease was found between early ($Mdn = 4.00$) to late ($Mdn = 2.00$) transition. The effect size was strong, $d > 1.00$ (Cohen et al., 2007) and supports the results from the Wilcoxon signed rank test.

No significant differences were found on the other three variables measuring the organisational dimension. Table 4.10 shows high mean scores (more frequent than the response alternative, *tend to agree*) for the expectation and reality of greater independence and responsibility post-transition. The effect size for each of these variables was in the weak range, $d < 0.20$ (Cohen et al., 2007) which complements the results from *t*-tests.

iv. Parental influence

Table 4.10 displays the results from Paired-samples *t*-tests for the variables measuring parental influence. A significant increase was found on mean scores between early and late transition of internal transitioning students' perspectives that parents talk to them about secondary school. The effect size was in the strong range, $d > 1.00$ (Cohen et al., 2007)

confirming the *t*-test results of the existence of significant differences between expectation and reality.

Mean scores for both early and late transition on the perspective that parents help with homework was high (more frequent than the response alternative, *agree*), suggesting high expectations and actual experience of this aspect of transition. The effect size was in the weak range, $d < 0.20$ (Cohen et al., 2007) and the Paired-samples *t*-test found no significant difference between early and late transition.

4.5 The effectiveness of existing transition programs

Question 4

What were the perspectives of the effectiveness of existing transition programs for (a) rural students, and (b) internal transitioning students?

Section 4.5.1 and *section 4.5.2* explore the type of primary to secondary transition programs undertaken by rural and urban students, and internal and external transitioning students respectively. For each of the activities identified on the Early Transition Questionnaire frequency tables are reported. The difference in perspectives of the effectiveness of existing transition programs for rural and urban and internal and external transitioning students are investigated using *t*-tests for Independent-samples. Paired-samples for *t*-tests and effect size are then used to explore the perspective of the effectiveness of existing transition programs between early and late transition for rural and internal transitioning students.

Two variables were used to measure the effectiveness of primary to secondary transition programs. These variables measured the perceived usefulness of existing transition programs and students' perspectives of the need for more transition programs prior to the commencement of secondary school. These are the dependent variables used in the statistical analysis below.

4.5.1 Rurality

(a) Types of transition programs

The frequency of involvement in primary to secondary transition activities, identified in the Early Transition Questionnaire, by rural and urban students is displayed in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11

Descriptive Statistics (Frequency) for Types of Primary to Secondary Transition Programs for Rural and Urban Students

Transaction activity	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
Year 7 Orientation Day	93.8	89.6
'Practice lessons'	21.9	28.2
Visits and talks from secondary teachers	31.3	42.1
Interview with principal or other staff member	73.4	57.9
Other	7.8	9.5

Note Rural, n=64 Urban, n=834

It is evident from Table 4.11 that, of the five identified transition programs in the Early Transition Questionnaire, Orientation Days were identified as the most frequently undertaken transition activity by transitioning students – both rural and urban. Table 4.11 shows 93.8% of rural students and 89.6% of urban students indicated they had been involved in Orientation Days. Table 4.11 also reports that interviews with either the secondary college principal, or other members of the secondary school were also a common activity for rural students. 73.4% of rural students attended interviews, compared with 57.9% of urban students.

The least undertaken transition activity identified in the survey was the *other* choice, with 7.8% of rural students and 9.5% of urban students indicating this item. Respondents were asked to state the type of *other* activity. Generally, respondents described these activities as school tours or peer support days with students from the secondary college.

(b) Effectiveness of transition programs

Student perspectives of the effectiveness of existing transition programs were measured during both phases of data collection. Effectiveness in this section of the study refers to how useful students perceived existing transition programs to be in assisting the transition from primary to secondary school. The mean, standard deviation and Independent-samples *t*-test results for the variables representing the effectiveness of transition programs for rural and urban students, from the Early Transition Questionnaire and the Late Transition Questionnaire are reported in Table 4.12

Table 4.12

Descriptive Statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) and Results of Independent-samples t-tests for Variables Measuring the Effectiveness of Transition Program Between the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires for Rural and Urban Students

Variable	Early Transition Questionnaire			Early Transition Questionnaire		
	M	SD	<i>t</i>	M	SD	<i>t</i>
Transition programs helpful						
Rural	6.34	.454	1.092	6.27	.503	.859
Urban	6.27	.409		6.21	.441	
More transition programs needed						
Rural	4.57	1.584	1.426	4.69	1.895	1.178
Urban	4.24	1.496		4.40	1.640	
<i>Note **$p < .0005$ *$p < .05$</i>						
			Early transition – Rural, n=64	Urban, n=834		
			Late transition – Rural, n=49	Urban, n=673		

The results of Independent-samples *t*-tests, as indicated in Table 4.12, report no significant relationships exist between rural and urban students on the variables used to measure the effectiveness of existing transition programs in the Early Transition Questionnaire or Late Transition Questionnaire.

On the Early Transition Questionnaire, for the variable used to rate the usefulness of existing transition programs in helping to make starting secondary school less stressful for students,

Levene’s test was found to be significant and therefore equal variance could not be assumed. Rural students report lower, but not significant, ratings than urban students on this variable. For late transition, rural students also reported non-significant, higher ratings for *existing programs were helpful for transition into secondary school*. Mean scores for both groups, for both points in time, were high (more frequent than the response alternative, *agree*), suggesting high levels of satisfaction with the existing transition programs.

Rural students reported higher, but non-significant, ratings for *more transition programs are needed before starting secondary school*, as displayed in Table 4.12, at early transition. Additionally, rural students presented non-significant, higher ratings of the perspective that more transition programs were needed to help ease the transition process.

The Paired-sample *t*-test was conducted to examine scores on variables, used to measure the effectiveness of existing transition programs for rural students, at two points in time – early and late transition. The *t*-test results are reported in Table 4.13.

Table 4.13
Reported Mean and Standard Deviation for the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires for Variables Measuring the Effectiveness of Transition Programs, Effect Size (d) and Results of t-test for Paired-Samples for Rural Students

Variable	M		SD		d	t
	ET	LT	ET	LT		
Existing programs were helpful for transition	6.34	6.27	.454	.503	0.15	.859
More transition programs needed	4.37	4.69	1.590	1.895	0.19	-1.141

Note ** $p < .0005$ * $p < .05$ Rural, n=49 ET=Early Transition, LT=Late Transition

Table 4.13 displays the reported mean and standard deviation for each variable used to measure the effectiveness of transition programs for rural students at both stages of data collection, investigated by Paired-samples *t*-tests. For the variable used to measure the

effectiveness of existing transition programs, there is a slight, non-significant, deterioration in the perceived effectiveness of programs to help ease anxiety during transition for those students who constitute the research sample. The effect size was also in the weak range, $d < 0.20$ (Cohen et al., 2007), supporting the results from the t -test.

Rural students sampled in this study also had a non-significant increase in the reported mean for the perspective that more transition programs are needed to assist the primary to secondary transition process from early transition to late transition. As shown in Table 4.13, mean scores for rural students, at both the early and late transition stage, were around the response option *unsure*, suggesting uncertainty about the necessity of increased transition programs. The effect size was in the weak range, $d < 0.20$ (Cohen et al., 2007), supporting the results from the t -test.

4.5.2 Internal and external transition

(a) Types of transition programs

The frequency of involvement in primary to secondary transition activities, identified in the Early Transition Questionnaire, by internal and external transitioning students, is displayed in Table 4.14.

Table 4.14

Descriptive Statistics (frequency) for Types of Primary to Secondary Transition Programs for Internal and External Transitioning Students

Transaction activity	Internal (%)	External (%)
Year 7 Orientation Day	95.6	88.2
'Practice lessons'	38.4	24.6
Visits and talks from secondary teachers	53.2	37.8
Interview with principal or other staff member	28.1	68.1
Other	6.9	10.1

Note Internal, n=203 External, n=695

Year 7 Orientation Day was a popular transition activity for both internal and external transitioning students, as indicated in Table 4.14. 95.6% of internal transitioning students and 88.2% of external transitioning students undertook this activity. Table 4.14 also shows that 68.1% of external transitioning students attended interviews at the secondary school, compared with 28.1% of internal transitioning students. This can be attributed to internal transitioning students already being enrolled at the college.

(b) Effectiveness of transition programs

Similarly to the procedures in *section 4.5.1*, student perspectives of the effectiveness of existing transition programs were measured during both phases of data collection. The mean, standard deviation and Independent-samples *t*-test results for the variables representing the effectiveness of transition programs for internal and external transitioning students, from the Early Transition Questionnaire and the Late Transition Questionnaire, are reported in Table 4.15.

Table 4.15

Descriptive Statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) and Results of Independent-Samples t-test for Variables Measuring the Effectiveness of Transition Program on the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires for Internal and External Transitioning Students

Variable	Early Transition Questionnaire			Late Transition Questionnaire		
	M	SD	<i>t</i>	M	SD	<i>t</i>
Transition programs helpful						
Internal	6.31	.415	2.268*	6.27	.424	2.019*
External	6.26	.410		6.20	.452	
More transition programs needed						
Internal	4.23	1.516	-.439	4.45	.119	.266
External	4.27	1.501		4.41	.072	

Note ** $p < .0005$ * $p < .05$ Early transition – Internal, n=203 External, n=695
Late transition – Internal, n=189 External, n=533

Table 4.15 reports that there were significant differences between internal and external transitioning students' ratings on the variable used to measure the effectiveness of existing programs, investigated by the *t*-test for Independent-samples. For both the Early Transition Questionnaire and Late Transition Questionnaire, internal transitioning students present higher mean scores, at both points in time, than did external transitioning students for the variable used to measure the helpfulness of existing programs in the primary to secondary transition.

For the variable used to measure students' perspective that more transition programs are needed, both internal and external transitioning students present similar mean scores of perspective of the need for more programs to help ease the transition into secondary school. As shown in Table 4.15, the differences between the two groups, at both the early and late transitions, are not significant, as investigated by an Independent-samples *t*-test.

Effect size was calculated and Paired-sample *t*-tests were conducted to examine mean scores on variables, used to measure the effectiveness of existing transition programs for internal transitioning students, at two points in time – early transition and late transition. The *t*-test results are reported in Table 4.16.

Table 4.16

Reported Mean and Standard Deviation for the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires for Variables Measuring the Effectiveness of Transition Programs, Effect Size (d) and Results of t-test for Paired-samples for Internal Transitioning Students

Variable	M		SD		<i>d</i>	<i>t</i>
	ET	LT	ET	LT		
Existing programs were helpful for transition	6.31	6.27	.404	.424	0.10	.998
More transition programs needed	4.23	4.45	1.465	1.636	0.14	-1.501

Note ***p*<.0005 **p*<.05 Internal, n=189 ET=early Transition, LT=Late Transition

Table 4.16 displays the reported mean and standard deviation for each variable used to measure the perceived effectiveness of transition programs for internal transitioning students between early and late transition. For the variable used to measure the effectiveness of existing transition programs Independent-samples *t*-test found a slight, non-significant, deterioration in the effectiveness of programs to help ease anxiety during transition for those students who constituted the research sample, from early to late transition. The effect size was also in the weak range, $d < 0.20$ (Cohen et al., 2007), supporting the *t*-test result.

Table 4.16 indicates that the *t*-test for Paired-samples found internal transitioning students sampled in this study had a non-significant increase, from early to late transition, in their perspective that more transition programs are needed to assist the primary to secondary transition process. The mean scores at both the early and late transition stage were around the response option *unsure* suggesting a level of uncertainty by internal transitioning students of the need for more transition programs.

4.6 Parents' perspectives of the transition process

Question 5

What are the differences in perspective of the transition process for parents of (a) rural and urban students, and (b) internal and external transitioning students?

Section 4.6 explores parents' perspectives of their child's expectations about the primary to secondary transition in four scales – social, academic and organisational dimensions, and transition programs. For each scale the differences between rural and urban, and internal and external transitioning students' parents' perspectives are reported. *Section 4.6.1* reports the results for parents of rural and urban students. A Contingency Table Analysis on items, drawn from pre-determined lists, reports the transition aspects that their children were most excited and anxious about, respectively, pre-transition. Results from *t*-tests for Independent-samples or Mann-Whitney *U* tests, used to investigate differences between perspectives of parents of rural and urban students on the four scales, are also reported. *Section 4.6.2* reports

similar results, as those identified in *section 4.6.1*, for differences between internal and external transitioning students' parents.

4.6.1 Rurality

(a) Excitement and anxiety about the primary to secondary transition

On the Parent Questionnaire, respondents were asked to rank in order, from pre-determined lists generated from the research literature in *section 2.4*, aspects of transition about which their child was most excited and anxious before pre-transition. These lists were similar to the lists on the student Early Transition Questionnaire.

The rankings and results of Contingency Table Analysis to establish potential relationships between rurality, and the aspects of transition which most excited and concerned their child before starting secondary school, are displayed in Tables 4.17 and Table 4.18 respectively.

Table 4.17

Rankings (%) and Contingency Table Analysis Results for the Aspects of Transition that Most Excite Rural and Urban Students About Starting Secondary School, as Identified by Parents

Item	Ranking (%)					Pearson Chi-Square value (χ^2)
	1	2	3	4	5	
Making new friends						
Rural	34.6	38.5	7.7	11.5	7.7	6.082
Urban	28.6	22.3	22.8	14.9	11.4	
Having different teachers for different subjects						
Rural	3.8	3.8	15.4	26.9	50.0	2.025
Urban	8.6	10.1	13.7	24.3	43.3	
Learning new things						
Rural	46.2	30.8	11.5	0	11.5	6.815
Urban	35	27.7	17.8	14.2	5.3	
Doing practical subjects						
Rural	3.8	15.4	34.6	30.8	15.4	4.248
Urban	12.9	19.8	21.1	26.9	19.3	
Greater independence and responsibility						
Rural	11.5	11.5	30.8	30.8	15.4	3.323
Urban	15.2	19.8	24.6	19.5	20.8	

Note * $p < .05$ Rural, n=28 Urban, n=433

As reported in Table 4.17, there were no significant relationships between rurality and any of the identified items that may cause excitement pre-transition for students, as identified by parents. Generally, parents of both rural and urban students identified the items, *making new friends* and *learning new things* as the aspects their child was most excited about during the primary to secondary transition.

Table 4.18

Rankings (%) and Contingency Table Analysis Results for the Aspects of Transition that Most Concern or Worry Rural and Urban Students About Starting Secondary School, as Identified by Parents

Item	Ranking (%)					Pearson Chi-Square value (χ^2)
	1	2	3	4	5	
Getting lost						
Rural	51.9	25.9	7.4	11.1	3.7	8.401
Urban	29.8	22.3	19.7	13.5	14.8	
More homework						
Rural	14.8	25.9	29.6	22.2	7.4	2.959
Urban	28.4	26.1	22.2	15.8	7.5	
Being bullied						
Rural	14.8	22.2	22.2	14.8	25.9	2.925
Urban	12.7	16.8	16.5	29.5	24.5	
Losing friends						
Rural	18.5	25.9	22.2	18.5	14.8	.493
Urban	23.6	22.9	23.4	17.1	13.0	
Having different teachers for each subject						
Rural	0	0	18.5	33.3	48.1	5.931
Urban	4.9	12.2	18.7	23.9	40.3	

Note * $p < .05$ Rural, n=28 Urban, n=433

Similarly, no significant relationships between rurality and the items listed that may cause anxiety, pre-transition, were reported by parents, as displayed in Table 4.18. Parents of all students ranked the item, *getting lost*, as the aspect which most concerns their transitioning child. Both rural and urban parents rank, *having different teachers for different subjects*, as the item causing the least amount of anxiety for their child during transition.

(b) Social, academic and organisational dimensions, and transition programs

For the respondents of the Parent Questionnaire, the mean, median and standard deviation and results of the Independent-samples *t*-test or the Mann-Whitney *U* test, for rural and urban students' parents, for the variables representing the scales of social, academic and organisational dimensions, and transition programs, are displayed in Table 4.19.

Table 4.19

Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Median and Standard Deviation) for Parents of Rural and Urban Transitioning Students, and Results of the Independent-samples t-test or Mann-Whitney U tests, for Variables Measuring the Scales of Social, Academic and Organisational Dimensions, and Transition Programs

Variable	M (Mdn)		SD		Difference test	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	<i>t</i>	<i>U</i>
SOCIAL DIMENSION						
Importance of making new friends	6.36(6.00)	6.08(6.00)	.678	.824		4831.000
Establish new friendships	7.32	7.32	.378	.452	-.005	
ACADEMIC DIMENSION						
Academic success	5.44(5.00)	5.31(5.00)	1.121	.1110		5286.500
Help with homework	5.89(6.00)	5.43(6.00)	1.166	1.420		4760.500
Improvement in grades and results	6.50	6.48	.373	.347	.302	
ORGANISATIONAL DIMENSION						
Being organised	6.68(6.00)	6.51(6.00)	.476	.654		5247.000
Staff are approachable	5.86(6.00)	6.05(6.00)	1.008	1.025		5150.000
TRANSITION PROGRAMS						
Transition programs eased concerns	7.03	7.17	.594	.546	-1.205	
More programs needed	5.07(5.00)	4.70(5.00)	1.662	1.685		4976.000

Note ***p*<.0005 **p*<.05 Rural, n=28 Urban, n=433

i. Social dimension

Table 4.19 reports that no significant differences between parents of rural and urban students were found on the variables measuring the social dimension. Parents of rural students ($Mdn = 6.00$) report higher, non-significant ratings of the importance of making new friends at secondary school than do the parents of urban students ($Mdn = 6.00$), investigated by the Mann-Whitney U test. Mean scores are high (more frequent than the response alternative, *agree*), suggesting high levels of perceived importance that their child will make new friends.

The Independent-samples t -test, as shown in Table 4.19, found both groups of parents reported similar, non-significant mean scores of the perspective that their child has confidence that they will make new friends at secondary school. Mean scores are very high, around the response option *strongly agree*, suggesting high levels of expectation that their child will develop friendships post-transition.

ii. Academic dimension

As Table 4.19 depicts, no significant relationships were reported between rurality and parents' perspectives of the academic dimension during the primary to secondary transition. Mann-Whitney U tests found similar ratings ($Mdn = 5.00$) for both rural and urban students' parents that they expect their child to succeed academically post-transition. The median score is high (more frequent than the response alternative, *tend to agree*), indicating positive expectations for this variable.

The Mann-Whitney U test also found similar ratings ($Mdn = 6.00$) for both groups of parents that they would help their child with homework if necessary, as shown in Table 4.19. Median scores were high (more frequent than the response alternative, *agree*), suggesting positive responses to this item of their child's transition.

Finally, the Independent-samples t -test found no significant differences between rural and urban students' parents on the variable measuring the expectation that their child's grades and results would improve following transition to secondary school. Table 4.19 indicated the mean scores for both groups of parents are high, around the response option *agree*,

suggesting high levels of anticipation that there would be an improvement in their child's academic progress.

iii. Organisational dimension

As Table 4.19 depicts, no significant relationships were reported between rurality and parents' perspective of the organisational dimension during the primary to secondary transition, investigated by Mann-Whitney *U* tests. Parents of rural students report slightly higher, but not significant, ratings that helping to organise their child is essential for overall success, than do parents of urban students. Parents present high medians (*Mdn* = 6.00), indicating their high level of awareness of this item.

The Mann-Whitney *U* test found that parents of urban students (*Mdn* = 6.00) report non-significant, higher ratings of the perspective that staff are approachable to discuss issues concerning their child's progress at secondary school, than do parents of rural students (*Mdn* = 6.00). As Table 4.19 shows, responses by both groups of parents were high, around the response option *agree*, suggesting their positive attitudes towards the availability of staff to discuss issues concerning their child.

iv. Transition programs

As Table 4.19 depicts, no significant relationships were reported between rurality and parents' perspective of the effectiveness of transition programs during the primary to secondary transition, as investigated by the Independent-samples *t*-test and Mann-Whitney *U* test. Parents of rural students report slightly lower, but not significant, mean scores that existing transition programs helped ease their child's concerns about starting secondary school, than do parents of urban students.

Parents of urban students (*Mdn* = 6.00) reported non-significant, lower ratings of the perspective that there needs to be more transition programs before students commence secondary school than did parents of rural students (*Mdn* = 6.00). As shown in Table 4.19, ratings from both rural and urban students' parents were around the response option *tend to*

agree, suggesting a parental perspective that more programs may have been beneficial for their child's primary to secondary transition process.

4.6.2 Internal and external transition

(a) Excitement and anxiety about the primary to secondary transition

Contingency Table Analysis was also conducted on the same items, identified in the Early Transition Questionnaire for students, to investigate significant relationships between the aspects of transition and internal and external transitioning students, as perceived by their parents. The rankings and results of the analysis are reported in Table 4.20 for the items which most excite their child and in Table 4.21 for the things which may cause anxiety for their child during the primary to secondary transition.

Table 4.20

Rankings (%) and Contingency Table Analysis Results for the Aspects of Transition that Most Excite Internal and External Transitioning Students About Starting Secondary School, as Identified by Parents

Item	Ranking (%)					Pearson Chi-Square value (χ^2)
	1	2	3	4	5	
Making new friends						
Internal	17.5	16.5	25.2	22.3	18.4	21.462*
External	32.7	25.5	20.8	12.3	8.8	
Having different teachers for different subjects						
Internal	14.6	14.6	15.5	21.4	34.0	13.459*
External	6.3	8.2	13.2	25.5	46.9	
Learning new things						
Internal	40.2	28.4	13.7	9.8	7.8	4.136
External	34.3	27.7	18.6	14.5	5.0	
Doing practical subjects						
Internal	18.6	19.6	20.6	20.6	20.6	6.653
External	10.4	19.5	22.3	29.2	18.6	
Greater independence and responsibility						
Internal	9.8	20.6	24.5	25.5	19.6	4.442
External	16.7	18.9	25.2	18.6	20.8	

Note * $p < .05$ Internal, n=111 External, n=350

Table 4.20 reports the existence of significant relationships, as investigated by Contingency Table Analysis, between the type of transition undertaken (internal or external) and two items from the pre-determined list of things which excite students, pre-transition, as identified by

parents. From the sample, 32.7% of external transitioning students' parents highly ranked the item, *make new friends at secondary school*, compared with 17.5% of internal transitioning students' parents. However, 29.2% of internal transitioning students' parents ranked the item, *having different teachers for each subject*, as their child's first or second item which most excites them about starting secondary school, compared with 14.5% of external transitioning students' parents.

Table 4.21

Rankings (%) and Contingency Table Analysis Results for the Aspects of Transition that Most Concern or Worry Internal and External Transitioning Students About Starting Secondary School, as Identified by Parents

Item	Ranking (%)					Pearson Chi-Square value (χ^2)
	1	2	3	4	5	
Getting lost						
Internal	25.3	21.2	18.2	14.1	21.2	6.456
External	33.1	22.9	19.1	13.1	11.8	
More homework						
Internal	37.0	28.0	16.0	13.0	6.0	8.300
External	24.5	25.5	24.8	17.2	8.0	
Being bullied						
Internal	9.0	16.0	20.0	30.0	25.0	2.446
External	14.0	17.5	15.9	28.0	24.5	
Losing friends						
Internal	20.2	21.2	20.2	17.2	21.2	7.799
External	24.3	23.6	24.3	17.3	10.5	
Having different teachers for each subject						
Internal	7.1	14.1	27.3	25.3	26.3	14.461*
External	3.8	10.5	16.0	25.3	45.4	

Note * $p < .05$ Internal, n=111 External, n=350

As displayed in Table 4.21, Contingency Table Analysis found only one significant relationship between items which cause worry or concern about transition and the type of transition undertaken, as identified by parents. 45.4% of external transitioning students' parents rated the item, *having different teachers for each subject*, as the lowest ranked worrying or concerning item, compared with 26.3% of internal transitioning students' parents.

(b) Social, academic and organisational dimensions and transition programs

For the respondents of the Parent Questionnaire, the mean, median, standard deviation and results of the Independent-samples *t*-test or the Mann-Whitney *U* test for internal and external transitioning students' parents, for the variables representing the scales of social, academic and organisational dimensions, and transition programs, are displayed in Table 4.22.

Table 4.22

Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Median and Standard Deviation) for Parents of Internal and External Transitioning Students, and Results of Independent-samples t-test or Mann-Whitney U Tests, for Variables Measuring the Scales of Social, Academic and Organisational Dimensions, and Transition Programs

Variable	M (Mdn)		SD		Difference test	
	Internal	External	Int.	Ext.	<i>t</i>	<i>U</i>
SOCIAL DIMENSION						
Importance of making new friends	5.83(6.00)	6.18(6.00)	.814	.802		13642.500**
Establish new friendships	7.23	7.35	.435	.448	-2.462*	
ACADEMIC DIMENSION						
Academic success	5.17(5.00)	5.36(5.00)	1.132	.1.100		16682.500
Help with homework	6.48(6.00)	6.46(6.00)	.409	.453	.373	
Improvement in grades and results	6.45	6.49	.377	.338	-.984	
ORGANISATIONAL DIMENSION						
Being organised	6.52(6.00)	6.52(6.00)	.636	.645		5150.000
Staff are approachable	6.03(6.00)	6.04(6.00)	1.041	1.020		1826.000
TRANSITION PROGRAMS						
Transition programs eased concerns	7.23	7.13	.572	.540	1.676	
More programs needed	6.99	6.95	.572	.575	.709	

Note ** $p < .0005$ * $p < .05$ Internal, n=111 External, n=350

i. Social dimension

Difference testing, as shown in Table 4.22, found significant differences between the type of transition undertaken and parents' perspectives about the social dimension of the primary to secondary transition. The Mann-Whitney *U* test found external transitioning students' parents (*Mdn* = 6.00) have significantly higher ratings for the importance of making new

friends at secondary school than do parents of internal transitioning students ($Mdn = 6.00$). Median scores were high, around the response option *agree*, suggesting both groups of parents have high expectations that their child will make new friends, post-transition.

Additionally, Table 4.22 shows that the *t*-test for Independent-samples found external transitioning students' parents report a significantly higher mean score for their perspective that their child has confidence that they will make new friends at secondary school. Mean scores are very high, around response option *strongly agree*, indicating positive anticipations that their child will develop new friendship networks following transition.

ii. Academic dimension

Difference tests found no significant relationships were identified between the type of transition undertaken and parents' perspectives of the academic dimension, as displayed in Table 4.22. The Mann-Whitney *U* test found external transitioning parents ($Mdn = 5.00$) reported slightly higher, but non-significant, ratings on the variable that they expect their child to achieve well at secondary school than did parents of internal transitioning students ($Mdn = 5.00$).

Furthermore, Independent-samples *t*-tests found no significant differences between parents of internal and external transitioning students, and the variables measuring their perspective that they will help with homework and that their child's grades and results will improve following transition. Responses were high (more frequent than the response alternative, *agree*) for both variables, suggesting positive expectations of these two aspects of transition.

iii. Organisational dimension

As reported in Table 4.22, Mann-Whitney *U* tests found no significant differences between the type of transition undertaken and the two variables used to measure the organisational dimension, as indicated by parents. Similar scores ($Mdn = 6.00$) were calculated between the two groups on the variables used to measure parents' perspective of the importance of being organised for overall success at secondary school and that staff at the secondary school are approachable to discuss issues concerning their child's progress. Ratings were high (more

frequent than the response alternative, *agree*) for both variables, indicating high levels of expectation of these two aspects of transition.

iv. Transition programs

Independent-samples *t*-tests found no significant differences between the type of transition undertaken and the two variables used to measure the transition program scale, as indicated by parents and shown in Table 4.22. Parents of internal transitioning students had a slightly higher, but not significant, mean score for the perspective that existing transition programs helped ease their child's concerns about starting secondary school, as well as the view that more transition programs are needed, than parents of external transitioning students. Mean scores for both groups of parents, on both variables, are very high, around the response option *strongly agree*, suggesting parents of both internal and external transitioning students perceive the existing programs were useful in helping ease anxiety during the transition process, but more programs are necessary to help make the primary to secondary transition easier.

4.7 Summary

This chapter has addressed the five key research questions. *Section 4.2* reported and discussed the expectations of the primary to secondary transition process for rural and urban students and internal and external transitioning students. *Section 4.3* reported and discussed the experiences of the primary to secondary transition process for rural and urban students and internal and external transitioning students. *Section 4.4* detailed the differences between early and late transition for rural and internal transitioning students. *Section 4.5* detailed the perceived effectiveness of existing transition programs. Finally, *section 4.6* reported results of parents' perspectives of the primary to secondary transition for their children.

Three instruments were used to gather quantitative data on the primary to secondary transition. Firstly, a sample of 898 students was used to gather data on students expectations pre-transition using the Early Transition Questionnaire. Secondly, data on the experiences of transition was collected from a sample of 722 students using the Late Transition

Questionnaire. Finally, parents' perspectives of the primary to secondary transition were gathered from a sample of 461 parents using the Parent Questionnaire.

Factor, reliability and validity tests were performed for each instrument in order to confirm the usefulness of results obtained from them. Statistical testing, investigated by Contingency Table Analysis, Independent-samples *t*-tests or Mann-Whitney *U* tests were used to determine differences between rural and urban, internal and external transitioning student expectations and experiences of transition, as well as parents' perspectives of the process. Furthermore, Paired-samples *t*-tests or Wilcoxon signed rank tests were conducted to investigate differences between expectations and experiences of the primary to secondary transition for rural and internal transitioning students. Effect sizes were calculated to help substantiate differences found through statistical testing.

Statistical testing in *section 4.2* showed only a few significant differences between rural and urban students' expectations about the transition to secondary school, including anticipation in improvement of grades and the perspective that teachers would be helpful at secondary school. However, many significant differences were found between internal and external transitioning students on variables measuring the social, academic, organisational dimensions and parental influence scales.

In *section 4.3* rural and urban students were found to have only one significant difference on the data collected for the Late Transition Questionnaire. This included the variable measuring the perspective that parents talk to them about what is happening at secondary school. On the other hand, significant differences were found between internal and external transitioning students on all scales in the Late Transition Questionnaire. Internal transitioning students presented lower response rates on variables measuring their experiences of making new friends, that school work and homework are harder, teachers are stricter than those at primary school and that their parents talk to them about their experiences at secondary school, as well as helping them with homework.

Section 4.4 investigated differences between the expectations and experiences of the primary to secondary transition. Statistical testing, confirmed by the calculation of effect size, found significant differences for rural transitioning students on a number of variables in all four scales. Significant differences between rural students' expectation and reality were found in areas of bullying, difficulty of school work, getting lost, having a variety of teachers and the influence of their parents. Internal transitioning students had significant differences between expectation and experiences on variables measuring all four scales. The difference between expectation and experience were found in the areas of friendships, bullying, difficulty of school work and improvement in grades, having a variety of teachers, getting lost and communication with parents.

No significant differences were found in *section 4.5* between rural and urban students on the effectiveness of existing transition programs. Furthermore, no significant difference was found between rural students perspectives of transition programs between pre- and post-transition. However, significant differences were found between internal and external transitioning students on the effectiveness of current transition programs, at both early and late transition phases, whereby external transitioning students present significantly lower ratings.

Finally, rural and urban parents presented no significant differences in their perspectives of the primary to secondary transition process. Parents of both groups of students had high ratings that their child would make new friends, achieve well, that they would assist their child with homework and organisation. On the other hand, significant differences were found between parents of internal and external transitioning students on variables measuring the social dimension. External transitioning students' parents had higher ratings that their child would make new friends post-transition. Parents of both internal and external transitioning students also present high mean scores of the perspective that their child would make new friends, achieve well, that they would assist their child with homework, as well as organisation following transition.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION - RURALITY

5.1 Introduction

This study investigates the expectations and lived experiences of the primary to secondary transition for students from small rural primary schools in Tasmania. Chapter Five discusses the primary to secondary transition for students identified as rural. Three new instruments, entitled the Early Transition Questionnaire, Late Transition Questionnaire and Parent Questionnaire, were used to collect data. Student data was collected in two phases. The first phase data was collected from students (n=898) using the Early Transition Questionnaire, of which 7% (n=64) of respondents were identified as rural students. The second phase involved students responding to the Late Transition Questionnaire (n=722), of which 7% (n=49) of respondents were identified as rural students. This data was used to compare and contrast student expectations and experiences of the primary to secondary transition with urban students, and to investigate the differences between expectations and experiences for rural students.

Parent data was collected from participants (n=461) using the Parent Questionnaire, of which 6% (n=28) of participants were identified as parents of rural students. This data was used to make transition comparisons with parents of urban students. Outcomes from this study provide insight into the levels of excitement and apprehension experienced by rural students prior to transition, whether these expectations are realised, the role parents play in the transition process and the effectiveness of existing transition programs.

This chapter reviews the specific questions posed in the research to see whether outcomes associated with the study have been achieved. The research questions are treated in order of their presentation in Chapter One. These include an investigation of the differences between rural and urban students' expectations about the primary to secondary transition (*section 5.2*), investigation of the lived experiences for rural and urban students (*section 5.3*), investigation

between the expectations and lived experiences of the primary to secondary transition (*section 5.4*), exploration of the effectiveness of existing transition programs (*section 5.5*), and investigation of parents' perspectives of the transition process for rural and urban students (*section 5.6*).

5.2 Differences between the expectations of the primary to secondary transition for rural and urban students.

Past research reveals that school transitions are associated with both feelings of anxiety and excitement (Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Ashton, 2008; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Graham & Hill, 2003; Lucey & Reay, 2000; Odegaard & Heath, 1992; Pietarinen, 1998; Smith, Akos, Lim & Wiley, 2008; Weller, 2007). To determine if there were any significant differences between the expectations of the primary to secondary transition for rural and urban students, the following question was asked:

***Do the expectations of the primary to secondary transition differ between
(a) rural and urban students?***

Respondents to the Early Transition Questionnaire (n=898) included transitioning students, of which 7% (n=64) were identified as rural students. Rural and urban students report no significant differences in their general levels of excitement about commencing secondary school (*section 4.2.1(a)*). Both rural and urban students present high ratings of their general levels of excitement, which suggests rural and urban students express greater feelings of excitement, rather than anxiety, about commencing secondary school.

The Early Transition Questionnaire was developed to measure student expectations of the primary to secondary transition. Student expectations of transition within the four scales, which include social, academic and organisational dimensions, as well as parental influence, are discussed under separate sub-headings below.

5.2.1 Social dimension

Previous research and literature associates school transition with the commencement of adolescence (Pietarinen, 1998; Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman & Midgley, 1991). Adolescence is a time of identity formation in which individuals are searching for self-identity which may lead to a pre-occupation with appearance and group identity (Groundwater-Smith, Mitchell & Mockler, 2007). Peer comparisons are common and cliques are at their most influential at this time (Akos, Queen & Lineberry, 2005). These characteristics of adolescence help to give some insight into the potential difficulties transitioning students may have navigating the social aspects of transition.

Comparisons of mean scores for the early transition stage demonstrate no significant differences between rural and urban students on the friendship measures. Both rural and urban students present high mean scores that they expect it to be easy to make new friends post-transition and that secondary school is viewed as a place to establish new friendships (Table 4.3). These results were confirmed by the results of Contingency Table Analysis (Table 4.1) in which *making friends* was the most highly ranked item, by both rural and urban students, as the item which most excite students about starting secondary school. This suggests both rural and urban students have high levels of confidence in their ability to form new social connections following transition.

These findings corroborate past research on student expectations of school transition in which the prospect of new friendships was an aspect of transition which many students were positively anticipating. Regardless of the stage at which the school transition occurs, such as an elementary to middle school transition, middle to high school transition or primary to secondary transition, the research indicates that school transition is associated with positive feelings regarding the development of new friendships. In the elementary to middle school transition, Odegard and Heath (1992) found that two thirds of students transitioning from elementary to middle school in their study sample were looking forward to expanding their circle of friends, in particular students sharing a common interest. Additionally, Akos (2002) found the prospect of making friends as the most frequently mentioned positive aspect of starting middle school. Similarly, Akos and Galassi (2004) found that making new friends

one of the top attractions of students undertaking the elementary to middle school transition, as well as the middle to high school transition. Blyth, Bush and Simmons (1978), Maute and Brough (2002) and Smith, Akos, Lim and Wiley (2008) also found that transitioning students undertaking a middle to high school transition were looking forward to expanding their social networks.

In the primary to secondary transition, Chedzoy and Burden (2005) found that transitioning students rate highly the making of new friends (24%), as a positive expectation of transition, behind new lessons or subjects (25%). Furthermore, 89 per cent of Year 6 students in Graham & Hill's (2003) study report positive expectations about the possibility of making new friends post-transition. In Pietarinen's (1998) study, transitioning rural students viewed transition from primary to secondary school as an opportunity to meet new friends.

While transitioning students appear to possess high levels of confidence in their ability to make new friends following transition, findings from this study suggest that they are also concerned about the possibility of losing existing friendships. Rural and urban students present similar ratings that losing friends is a concern during the transition to secondary school (Table 4.2). Similar findings emerged in previous studies in which transitioning students reported anxiety over the possibility of losing friends (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Longaretti, 2006; Maute & Brough, 2002; Measor & Woods, 1984; Pietarinen, 1998) and not knowing anyone following transition (Graham & Hill, 2003). Studies also found that students highly value transitioning with peers (Pratt & George, 2004) or that they need to have an opportunity to communicate with friends following transition (Diemert, 1992).

Transitioning students, regardless of rurality, present casual attitudes towards being placed in the same classes as friends pre-transition (Table 4.3). This attitude may be reflective of high levels of confidence in their ability to form new social networks following transition as indicated in previous research literature (Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Graham & Hill, 2003; Odegaard & Heath, 1992; Pietarinen, 1998). On the other hand it may corroborate earlier studies which indicate that transitioning students are optimistic about the opportunity to expand social environments (Pietarinen, 1998; Smith et

al., 2008) or the possibility of making a fresh start in their new school environment following transition (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Weller, 2007).

Rural and urban students in this study report little concern about becoming a victim of bullying following transition. Both groups of students report low mean scores that they will be bullied following transition and high mean scores on the measure that older students will be friendly at the secondary school (Table 4.3). Furthermore, these findings were supported by the results from Table 4.2 in which students ranked the prospect of being bullied as a lesser concern than other identified items on the questionnaire. These findings are in contrast to other studies which found transitioning students expressing concern and anxiety over the prospect of being bullied following transition (Arth, 1990; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Cotterell, 1979; Graham & Hill, 2003; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Johnston, 2001; Measor & Woods, 1984; Pietarinen, 1998; Pratt & George, 2004).

Without further research into this aspect of concern for transitioning students, it is difficult to speculate on the reasons for this difference. However, it is important to note the existence of other research investigating the expectations of transitioning students which does not highlight the prospect of bullying as a major concern pre-transition, mirroring findings from this current study (Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Brown & Armstrong, 1982, 1986; Diemert, 1992; Maute & Brough, 2002; Smith et al., 2008). Furthermore, other studies have reported that students undertaking a school transition view the process as an opportunity to start again (Chedzoy & Burden, 2008; Weller, 2007) or to escape the bullying already experienced prior to transition (Lucey & Reay, 2000). These differences in findings between the different existing research and this current study indicate the need for further investigation into this aspect of the social dimension during transition.

5.2.2 Academic dimension

Transitioning students expect the level of school work to get more difficult and the amount of homework to increase following the transition from primary to secondary school. High mean scores on this measure indicate strong feelings towards these items for both rural and urban students (Table 4.3). These findings corroborate previous research which has identified

academic aspects of school transition as major concerns for students pre-transition. Existing literature reports pre-transitioning students anticipate a more demanding academic environment (Diemert, 1992; Longaretti, 2006; Measor & Woods, 1984; Pietarinen, 1998; Pratt & George, 2004; Shacher, Suss & Sharan, 2002), expect an increase in the amount of homework (Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Odegaard & Heath, 1992) and an increase in the difficulty of school work (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001), and are concerned about getting good grades and taking tests (Akos, 2002; Maute & Brough, 2002) following transition.

In terms of academic achievement rural students have significantly higher levels of expectation that their grades and results will improve following the transition to secondary school than do urban students (Table 4.3). Further research is required to establish reasons for this difference in expectations between rural and urban students but previous research on transitioning rural students describes secondary schools, in comparison with rural primary schools, to be characterised by the following:

- a more impersonal, more formal, more evaluative and more competitive environment (Pietarinen, 1998, p. 9);
- performance oriented (Alspaugh, 1998a, p. 20);
- timetabled driven (Corby, 2003, p. 1), and
- a place where students have greater academic responsibility (Reynolds, 2005, p. 6).

While these features of secondary schools identified in the literature suggest differences in academic approaches to schooling, it is not a proposal as to why significant differences are found between rural and urban students' expectations on this aspect of transition. These identified characteristics may provide a useful starting point for further research in this area of school transition for rural students.

Furthermore, Contingency Table Analysis found no significant differences on the two academic items in which students were asked to rank in order of importance the aspects of transition they considered to be the most exciting (Table 4.1). *Learning new things* was ranked the second highest item, behind *making new friends*, and the most exciting aspect of

transition. This result supports findings from previous studies which found the prospect of learning new things as an exciting aspect of transition (Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Graham & Hill, 2003; Smith et al., 2008). However, doing practical subjects was not reported to be a highly ranked item for this cohort, exciting neither rural nor urban students pre-transition. Graham & Hill (2003) found the possibility of doing practical subjects to be a positive anticipation pre-transition in their study but other research on student expectations of the transition process has not identified this item in the literature.

5.2.3 Organisational dimension

The current study suggests that rural students have a different view of the relationship between student and teacher, and the role of the secondary school teacher than do urban students, pre-transition. Rural students report significantly higher ratings for the expectation that teachers at secondary school will be helpful, than do their urban peers (Table 4.3). Previous studies on rural schooling indicate rural, primary school students view school as a partnership between all stakeholders (Cocklin, 1999, p. 4; Johnstone, 2001, p. 2), and a place where connections with a core teacher are nurtured (Reynolds, 2005, p. 6). Subsequently students develop high levels of self-concept and self-responsibility (Fan & Chen, 1999). The findings from this study support findings from previous studies identified above, and suggest rural students may have higher expectations of the role of the teacher in secondary school, than do urban students at the pre-transition stage.

Rural and urban students expect having a variety of teachers to be a positive aspect of the transition to secondary school. Mean scores were high, but not significant, for this item on the questionnaire, indicating similar perspectives between rural and urban students (Table 4.3). This aspect of transition also appears on two questionnaire items asking students to rank aspects of transition which excite them, as well as concern them respectively. The item, *having different teachers for different subjects*, was the lowest ranked item for both rural and urban students on the list of transition aspects which most excites students about transition (Table 4.1). Interestingly, the same item was found to be on the list of concerning aspects about transition, in which rural and urban students ranked this item the lowest of choices listed in the questionnaire (Table 4.2).

Overall, these findings suggest very similar viewpoints, between rural and urban students, in which having a variety of teachers is not strongly viewed as an item causing a great deal of concern (Table 4.1) or excitement (Table 4.2) for pre-transitioning students. Previous research has found the possibility of having different teachers for different subjects can be a positively viewed aspect of the impending transition (Odegaard & Heath, 1992). Alternatively, studies have found that students report having different teachers for different subjects to be a real cause for concern (Johnstone, 2001, 2002; Pratt & George, 2004). Additionally, other research found students to report concern about other aspects of secondary school teachers following transition, and include the different teachers they will have (Morgan & Hertzog, 2001); the type of teacher-student relationship that will develop (Diemert, 1992); and whether teachers would be stricter than primary school teachers (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Cotterell, 1979; Measor & Woods, 1984).

A major concern of pre-transitioning students, both rural and urban, is the expectation that they will get lost at the secondary school following transition. Mean scores on this variable were high indicating firm expectations about this item from both rural and urban students. These findings were supported by the results of the Contingency Table Analysis (Table 4.2) in which over half of rural (61.9%) and urban (53.5%) students ranked the item, *getting lost*, as either the first or second greatest concern about the primary to secondary transition. The possibility of getting lost has been identified in the existing literature as a major concern for transitioning students (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Brown & Armstrong, 1982, 1986; Graham & Hill, 2003; Johnstone, 2002; Pietarinen, 1998; Smith et al., 2008). Additionally, the size and complexity of school grounds also emerges in existing literature as a major transition concern and may be associated with students' anxiety over getting lost following transition (Diemert, 1992; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Johnstone, 2001; Measor & Woods, 1984; Odegaard & Heath, 1992; Pratt & George, 2004).

Increased independence and responsibility are associated with school transitions for both rural and urban students pre-transition. High mean scores on these variables indicate similar opinions about this facet of transition, which appears not to be linked to the notion of rurality (Table 4.3). This corroborates previous research (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Ashton, 2008;

Blyth, Bush & Simmons, 1978; Lucey & Reay, 2000; Pietarinen, 1998; Smith et al., 2008) which found the prospect of increased freedom and a sense of growing up as a highly anticipated feature of transition. In contrast, other studies have found that school transition can lead to uncertainty about new social status and the role of students as the youngest members of the new school environment (Graham & Hill, 2003; Pratt & George, 2004).

5.2.4 Parental influence

Rural students report higher mean scores than urban students for the perspective that parents act as informants about the transition to secondary school prior to pre-transition (Table 4.3). While no significant differences were found between rural and urban students on this measure, the rural students' mean scores support previous research which found that rural schooling is often viewed as a partnership between students, parents and the school (Cocklin, 1999; Johnstone, 2001; Pietarinen, 1998). It may also reflect the role parents play in the wider aspect of their child's secondary education. Previous research (Arrowsafe & Irvin, 1992; Lucey & Reay, 2000) found that parents act as informants during transition. However, this is often associated with warnings, rather than positive information about transition.

Additionally, no significant differences were found between rural and urban students on the measure *parents would help them with homework following transition* (Table 4.3). Mean scores suggest that both groups of students have no expectations about the assistance that they may receive from their parents. Previous research has not examined student expectations of parents during the transition process but existing literature has found that students cope better with transition when parents help with homework (Baker & Stevenson, 1986), monitor progress (Falbo, Lein & Amador, 2001), or are involved in their child's schooling (Akos, Queen & Lineberry, 2005).

These findings address the first question: *Do the expectations of the primary to secondary transition differ between (a) rural and urban students?* Findings suggest that rural and urban students have very similar expectations about the transition to secondary school. Both groups present high ratings that they expect to make new friends, achieve well academically, have greater independence and responsibility, and are looking forward to having a variety of

teachers post-transition. Rural and urban students also present comparable expectations that homework will be hard, finding their way around the secondary school will be a challenge and that they generally don't expect to be bullied at secondary school. However, two significant differences were found between the perspectives of rural and urban students pre-transition and include rural students reporting higher levels of expectations they will achieve better grades and results following transition to secondary school than do urban students. Additionally, rural students present higher levels of expectation that teachers at the secondary school will be helpful than do urban students.

5.3 Difference between the experiences of the primary to secondary transition for rural and urban students

As found in previous studies on the primary to secondary transition, students may cope better or worse than anticipated pre-transition (Akos, 2002, 2004; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Graham & Hill, 2003; Pietarinen, 1998; Smith et al., 2008). To investigate the differences between the lived realities of the transition from primary to secondary school for rural and urban students, the following question was asked:

*Do the experiences of the primary to secondary transition differ between
(a) rural and urban students?*

A sample of Year 7 students (n=722), consisting of 49 rural students (7%) and 673 urban students, responded to the Late Transition Questionnaire. Four scales, *social, academic and organisational dimension, as well as parental influence* were used to measure the lived realities of the transition from primary to secondary school for students. Each of the scales has been used in the discussion below.

5.3.1 Social dimension

Post-transition, both rural and urban students in this study manage the social aspect of transition with apparent ease and no significant differences were found between the two groups (Table 4.7). On all measures of friendship, mean scores were high indicating student

satisfaction that new friendships were established at the secondary school, a common perspective secondary school is a place to make new friends and similar views that being in the same classes as friends is important during the transition process. These findings have been found in previous research on school transitions which found students cope better with the social aspects of school transition than they expected pre-transition (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Graham & Hill, 2003; Smith et al., 2008), and that they are more positive about school as things became more familiar (Brown & Armstrong, 1986).

However, other studies have found establishing friendships is more difficult than anticipated pre-transition. Akos (2002) found making friends a challenge for transitioning students during the transition process. The importance of being nice and getting along, as well as meeting and choosing new friends was advice given by students having already undertaken transition (Akos 2004). This suggests that developing friendships requires some level of planning and preparation rather than occurring naturally. Additionally, Pietarinen (1998) found the development of new peer groups to be a challenge for rural students, but the rural students in this current study report a high level of ease in establishing new friendships. To investigate the difference in findings between this study and Akos' (2002, 2004) and Pietarinen's studies for rural students, exploration into the development of friendships for transitioning students during the transition process needs further consideration and investigation.

Additionally, there were no significant differences between rural and urban students on the two variables used to measure bullying at secondary school (Table 4.7). Both rural and urban students in this cohort present high mean scores that older students at the secondary school are friendly. This indicates a positive experience with students' interactions between transitioning students and older students following transition. Comparably, both groups of students had similar low ratings on the measure of being bullied at secondary school (Table 4.7). This finding implies that very low levels of bullying were experienced by Year 7 students in this study, both rural and urban, following transition. These findings need further investigation, in particular during the early months of transition, as they appear to be somewhat at odds with other studies which found that:

- feelings of victimisation increased following transition, especially for males (Berliner, 1993);
- levels of bullying and aggression following transition increase but then decrease (Pellegrini & Long, 2002), and that
- bullying is a major concern for some students post-transition (Akos, 2002; Mitman & Parker, 1982).

5.3.2 Academic dimension

Following transition, students (both rural and urban) found school work to be harder than primary school and homework to be more difficult (Table 4.7). These findings complement previous research which also found persisting concerns around the academic aspect of transition. Existing research has found that post-transition students report homework and school work to be difficult following transition (Akos, 2002, 2004; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Graham & Hill, 2003; Mitman & Packer, 1982). Alternatively, Chedzoy and Burden (2005) found the academic aspect of transition much easier than anticipated pre-transition which is in contrast to the studies identified above. This finding is contrary to the study by Chedzoy and Burden's which found students perceive school work at the secondary school to be too easy and repetitive of primary school work.

Transitioning students in this study all report a perceived improvement in grades and results following transition (Table 4.7). High mean scores and non-significant differences between rural and urban students suggest similar perspectives from all transitioning students. Interestingly, these perspectives are at odds with findings of previous studies investigating transition and academic achievement and may reflect the disparity between perspective and reality for students at this stage of the transition process. Existing research and literature indicate an association between school transitions and academic achievement loss (Alspaugh, 1998a, 1998b; Alspaugh & Harting, 1995; Benner & Graham, 2009; Cotterell, 1986; Galton, Morrison & Pell, 2000; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999) while anxiety over grades, homework, teachers and understanding content has been reported by transitioning students in earlier studies (Phelan, Cao & Davidson, 1992). The differences identified between student

perspectives of improvement in academic achievement and actual achievement necessitates more extensive investigation into this aspect of transition for both rural and urban students.

5.3.3 Organisational dimension

Following transition, rural and urban students in this study appear to have confirmed their expectation of teachers being stricter at secondary school than at primary school but report an enjoyment of having a variety of teachers post-transition. Statistical tests found no significant differences between rural and urban students on these measures (Table 4.7). Previous studies have also found that post-transition students are still concerned about the strictness of their teachers (Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Mitman & Packer, 1982), and are concerned about the repercussions of being late to class (Akos, 2002), as well as identifying the importance of knowing and following the school rules post-transition (Akos, 2004). Johnstone (2001) also reports that pre-transition concerns associated with the number of teachers at the secondary school are quickly overcome post-transition.

Existing research also identifies the shift in the student-teacher relationship, from that previously experienced in the primary school, to be a concern for transitioning rural students (Cocklin, 1999; Pietarinen, 1998). Following transition, other studies have found students to report increased feelings of anonymity (Blyth et al., 1978; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005). Existing research and literature into middle schooling and the primary to secondary transition also attest to the importance of providing school environments that develop a sense of belonging and identity to overcome feelings of anonymity and disengagement (Akos, Hamm, Mack & Dunaway, 2007; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Cormack, 1986; Galassi & Akos, 2007; Osterman, 2000). Subsequently, this current research and findings from existing research indicate teachers to be a persisting concern for students post-transition. Research into students' perspectives of the role teachers play in the transition process requires further investigation.

Getting lost in the new secondary school environment is a very real concern for transitioning students but it is quickly overcome following transition (Table 4.7). While no significant differences exist between rural and urban students on this measure of the organisational

dimension of transition, these findings support the existing research and literature which present similar findings (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Cocklin, 1999; Graham & Hill, 2003; Mitman & Packer, 1982; Smith et al., 2008). Additionally, getting lost and navigating their way around the new school environment has been identified in some research as one of the most difficult aspects of transition (Akos, 2002, 2004). Furthermore, Akos (2004) suggests that while these concerns are quickly overcome post-transition, administrators and teachers should not dismiss the importance of providing effective strategies to ease this procedural concern during the transition process as the concerns are very real and memorable.

Post-transition students in this current study associate moving into secondary school with increased independence and responsibility. No significant differences were found between rural and urban students on these measures which may indicate a common feeling among transitioning students (Table 4.7). This finding corroborates other studies which found transitioning students to associate school transition with a sense of independence and responsibility (Akos, 2002; Gillison, Standage & Skevington, 2008). Blyth et al. (1978) found feelings of increased independence and responsibility to be associated with demands from teachers to act more maturely and plan for the future. However, Pietarinen's (1998) study on rural students' transition found students to be dissatisfied that they no longer have a role in the decision-making and planning processes at their new school. Pietarinen's findings suggest that rural students may not associate transition with independence and responsibility in all areas of transition. Results from this study do not support this suggestion and further investigation is warranted, in particular to examine the differences in findings between the two studies.

The findings from this current study, suggesting an association between feelings of increased independence and responsibility, may be challenged by findings from some other studies focusing on transition and they may require further investigation. For example, studies have associated transition with decreases in self-esteem (Berliner, 1993; Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-Ford & Blyth, 1987; Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman & Midgley, 1991)

although Hirsh and Rapkin (1987) found general self-esteem to be unchanged during the transition period, but a decline in the quality of school life was reported.

5.3.4 Parental influence

Rural students, in this study, report significantly greater levels of communication with parents about issues in the secondary school than do urban students (Table 4.7). While no direct link between these findings and findings from previous research is made, the existing literature suggests parents play an important role in student adjustment during the transition process. The existing research suggests parental involvement in schooling (Akos et al., 2005; Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Crosnoe, 2009; Falbo et al., 2001; Paulson, 1994; Worsley, 1986) and talking positively about transition (Arrowsafe & Irvin, 1992; Lucey & Reay, 2000) may result in better adjustment outcomes for students.

Furthermore, no differences were found between rural and urban students on the measure that parents help with homework. Mean scores were high for both groups, suggesting parents are readily available to assist with homework post-transition (Table 4.7). While no link has been made between parental help with homework and experiences of transition in this study, previous research has found parental help with homework (Baker & Stevenson, 1986) and regular monitoring (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts & Fraleigh, 1987; Falbo et al., 2001; Paulson, 1984) is associated with increased levels of academic adjustment and achievement following school transition.

These findings address the second research question: *Do the experiences of the primary to secondary transition differ between (a) rural and urban students?* Findings suggest that rural students generally have similar experiences of transition to urban students, in particular the ease in which new social connections are made, experiences of bullying, the increase in difficulty of school work and homework, finding teachers to be stricter at secondary school and easily overcoming concerns of getting lost in the secondary school. While statistical tests found rural students to communicate more with parents about issues of school, urban students also report high levels of communication with parents.

5.4 Differences between early and late transition for rural students

To investigate whether rural students' expectations of moving from primary school to secondary school are realised the following question was posed:

What differences exist between expectation and reality for students (a) from small rural schools, within the scales of social, academic, organisational dimensions, and parental influence?

To examine the differences between expectations and experiences of transition for rural students (n=49) statistical tests, including a Paired-samples *t*-test and a Wilcoxon signed rank tests were conducted. These results were supported by the calculation of effect size (Cohen's *d*) for the differences between expectation and experience of the primary to secondary transition. The differences between rural students' expectation and reality, in each of the four scales are discussed below.

5.4.1 Social dimension

Rural students, in this study, had similar ratings of expectation and experiences on the measures in the social dimension scale. Within the concept of friendship, rural students present mean scores, pre-transition, which indicate high expectations of making new friends post-transition (Table 4.9). Results from statistical tests on the Late Transition Questionnaire suggest that rural students' expectations were realised following transition. These findings support previous studies of the primary to secondary transition for rural students in which rural students identify making new friends as a pre-transition challenge (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Johnstone, 2001; Pietarinen, 1998) or view it as a positive anticipation of the transition process (Akos, 2002). Cocklin (1999) found rural students in the study to report making friends following transition much easier than expected pre-transition.

Students also present similar ratings of the expectation and experience of the importance of being in the same classes as their friends, and older students at the school are friendly (Table 4.9). These ratings were around the response options *unsure* and *tend to agree*, which

suggests these items were not great areas of excitement or concern prior to or following transition. However, Johnstone (2002) indicates that rural students transitioning with a peer report low levels of concern about this aspect of the social dimension during the primary to secondary transition.

A Paired-samples *t*-test found a significant difference between the expectation and reality of student perspective that Year 7s are bullied (Table 4.9). Students present a significant deterioration from early to late transition on this measure. The statistical significance was supported by the calculation of effect size ($d = .88$) which was found to have a moderate effect (Cohen et al., 2007). These results confirm previous research which found that:

- pre-transition rural students are concerned about the prospect of being bullied post-transition (Akos, 2002; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Johnstone, 2001, 2002; Pietarinen, 1998);
- post-transition rural students don't identify being bullied as an issue (Cocklin, 1999; Johnstone, 2001; Pietarinen, 1998), and that
- reports of victimisation initially increase but then decrease following transition (Pellegrini & Long, 2002).

However, in contrast, Akos (2002) found students in the study to report persistent concerns about bullying and about older students following transition. More research is required to further investigate the difference in findings between this current study and other studies on bullying during the transition to secondary school.

5.4.2 Academic dimension

T-tests for Paired-samples found a significant difference for one measure of the academic dimension (Table 4.9). A significant increase in student perspective that school work is harder between early and late transition was reported. This result is supported by the calculation of effect size, $d = 2.13$, which was found to have a strong effect. These findings support previous research which found that:

- rural students are concerned about keeping up academically (Akos, 2002; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Pietarinen, 1998);

- students experience academic achievement loss post-transition (Alspaugh, 1998a, 1988b; Alspaugh & Harting, 1995);
- doing well in class is a persistent concern of rural students post-transition (Akos, 2002), and that
- access to services and resources, such as libraries, is limited for rural students and may have implications for their academic achievement (Cheers, 1987; Fan & Chen, 1999; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000; Johnstone, 2001; National Board of Employment, Education & Training, 1991).

While no significant differences were found for the remaining two measures on the academic dimension scale, rural students present high ratings of the expectation and experience that homework would be more difficult and their grades and results would improve following transition to secondary school (Table 4.9). Interestingly, Akos (2002) and Johnstone (2002) found rural students to express concerns about homework pre-transition, but these concerns were not identified as persistent concerns by Akos (2002) post-transition.

5.4.3 Organisational dimension

Two measures of the primary to secondary transition in the organisational dimension were found to have significant differences between expectations and experiences for rural students (Table 4.9). Firstly, a Paired-samples *t*-test found rural students present a significant increase in mean scores, from early to late transition, of the perspective that having a variety of teachers is a positive aspect of transition. At the early transition stage, rural students report ratings around the response option *tend to agree*, while at the late transition stage rural students' mean scores were more frequent than the response alternative *agree*. This statistically significant difference was supported by the calculation of effect size, $d = 0.96$ (Cohen et al., 2007), which was found to be moderate in strength. These findings suggest that rural students in this cohort, while not overly concerned about the prospect of moving away from a teaching model which, in general, has a core teacher at its centre, find the actual experience of multiple teachers to be a positive aspect of transition.

These results support contemporary research on transition for rural students, which found pre-transition rural students identify the increase in the number of teachers as a positive aspect of transition (Akos, 2002). However, Johnstone (2002) found students to identify the possibility of changing classes as a concern. Pre-transition concerns about the number of teachers and classes, which rural students will have, are quickly overcome post-transition (Akos, 2002; Johnstone, 2001).

One aspect of transition identified in the literature concerning rural students post-transition is the change in the student-teacher relationship. This aspect of transition is not addressed in this current study directly but may need to be considered in future research on school transition for rural students. The shift in the student-teacher relationship in the secondary school environment is identified as a concern for rural students in existing research post-transition (Cocklin, 1999; Pietarinen, 1998), as they do not feel a part of the decision making and planning processes experienced in primary school. In rural primary schools, previous studies suggest that rural students feel more connected with teachers because primary schools develop strong links in the local community (Fischer, 1995; Johnstone, 2001; Pietarinen, 1998) and decisions usually involve key stakeholders, while smaller class sizes provide opportunities for individual instruction and flexible teaching practices (Pietarinen, 1998). A move to a secondary school environment, which has been described in literature as more impersonal and performance oriented (Alspaugh, 1998a; Pietarinen, 1998), may lead to feelings of disconnectedness with teachers and be cause for concern of rural students post-transition.

Secondly, a few months after becoming familiar with the new school environment, rural students no longer identify becoming lost as a major concern of transition. Rural students report a significant decrease in mean scores from early transition to late transition (Table 4.9). This statistically significant decrease in ratings was confirmed by the calculation of effect size ($d = 1.23$) which was found to have a strong effect (Cohen et al., 2007). These results indicate rural students quickly overcome anxiety and concerns about finding their way around the new school environment following transition.

These findings support other studies on rural transition which found rural students identify the prospect of getting lost at the new school a major concern pre-transition (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Johnstone, 2001; Pietarinen, 1998). Although Cocklin (1999) and Johnstone (2001) found that while the physicality of the new environment was initially overwhelming, it was quickly overcome post-transition. While findings from this current study and findings from previous research (Cocklin, 1999; Johnstone, 2001) report rural students to quickly overcome concerns about getting lost post-transition, Akos (2002) found students in his study to report persistent concerns about getting lost following transition.

Paired-samples *t*-tests did not find any significant differences between expectation and experiences for rural students on any other aspects of the organisational dimension measured in the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires (Table 4.9). Similar ratings were found between early and late transition on variables measuring students' perspectives that teachers would be helpful following transition, teachers are stricter at secondary school and there is greater independence and responsibility post-transition. Results from statistical testing on these measures were confirmed by effect size, which calculated each difference to be weak in effect, $d < 0.20$ (Cohen et al., 2007). This result suggests, that for these measures on the organisational dimension, rural students' expectations were realised.

5.4.4 Parental influence

T-tests for Paired-samples found significant differences between expectations and experiences on both variables measuring aspects of the parental influence scale (Table 4.9). Rural students report an increase in ratings from early transition (more frequent than the response alternative, *tend to agree*) to late transition (more frequent than the response alternative, *agree*) on the variable measuring students' perspective *parents talk to them about secondary school*. This difference was confirmed by the calculation of effect size, $d = 0.91$ (Cohen et al., 2007), which was found to have a moderate effect.

Additionally, a significant increase in mean scores was found between expectation and experience of students' perspective of parental help with homework post-transition (Table 4.9). At the early transition phase students present a mean score (around the response option,

unsure) for this variable. However, at late transition students report a higher mean score (more frequent than the response alternative, *agree*), suggesting a difference between rural students' expectations and experience about the assistance they would receive with homework. These results were substantiated by effect size, $d = 1.37$ (Cohen et al., 2007), which was calculated to have a strong effect.

These findings address the third research question: *What differences exist between expectation and reality for students (a) from small rural schools within the scales of social, academic and organisational dimensions, and parental influence?* Findings suggest rural students perceive school work to be much harder following transition than they anticipated pre-transition; students believe that having a variety of teachers is a positive aspect of transition than anticipated pre-transition, and rural students report that parents communicate with them more about school and help them with homework more than expected pre-transition. On the other hand, statistical tests and calculation of effect size found rural students experience lower levels of bullying than anticipated pre-transition and anxiety about finding their way around the new school environment is quickly overcome following transition.

5.5 Perceived effectiveness of existing transition programs

To investigate the effectiveness of existing transition programs, from a student perspective, the following question was posed:

What were the perspectives of the effectiveness of existing transition programs for (a) rural students?

Within this current study transitioning students, both rural and urban, undertook a variety of transition activities (Table 4.11). Orientation days were the most frequent activity recorded with 93.8% of rural students and 89.6% of urban students involved in this activity. Interviews with the principal, or other member of staff from the secondary school, were also highly rated with 73.4% of rural students and 57.9% of urban students recording their involvement.

Other activities identified include visits and talks from secondary teachers, practice lessons and school tours.

Independent-samples *t*-tests found that, on the variable used to measure the usefulness of transition programs in easing anxiety during the primary to secondary transition, there were no significant differences between rural and urban students during early or late transition (Table 4.12). Both rural and urban students present high ratings on the measure *existing transition programs were useful for transition* which suggests students perceive, in this study, very little adjustment to existing transition programs is necessary.

On the second measure of the necessity of more transition programs, both rural and urban students report no significant differences for either group at both the early and late transition phase (Table 4.12). At the early and late transition stages, mean scores were around the response option, *unsure*, suggesting that both rural and urban students have no strong opinions about the necessity for more transition programs.

Paired-samples *t*-tests found no significant difference for rural students between early and late transition on either of these two measures (Table 4.12). Rural students present a slight deterioration in perspectives (during the two data collection phases), that existing transition programs were helpful, as well as a non-significant increase in mean scores of student perspective (over the data collection period) that more transition programs are necessary. These results are supported by the calculation of effect size, which for both measures were found to have a weak effect, $d < 0.20$ (Cohen et al., 2007).

Rural and urban students in this study found existing transition programs acceptable for navigating their way through the initial transition phase (Table 4.12). These results support Graham and Hill's (2003) and Howard and Johnson's (2004) findings, in which participants report existing transition programs to be useful and requiring no modifications. However, Graham and Hill suggest that identified transition programs in their study are only preparation programs and attention needs to be given to the next phase of transition. The findings from this study would support this finding for the reasons are detailed below.

Contemporary literature and research into the primary to secondary transition for rural students indicates three key categories of transition concerns (Akos & Galassi, 2004). These categories, which have been included in the framework for this study, include the social, academic and organisational dimensions. Akos and Galassi (2004) state transition programs should be developed around these three dimensions.

The transition activities undertaken in this current study, which include orientation days, school tours, interviews and visits from staff from the secondary school, can be identified as meeting the organisational aspects of transition. While addressing the organisational concerns of transitioning students is an essential part of transition programming, the social and academic concerns must also be considered. Akos and Galassi (2004) suggest that programs must be well timed throughout the transition process and, once organisational and social concerns are addressed, strategies addressing the academic aspects of transition should be implemented. This finding has been supported by this current study which found academic concerns, such as difficulty of school work and homework, to be persistent post-transition (Table 4.12). Similar findings have also been presented in previous research (Akos, 2002, 2004; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Benner & Graham, 2009; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Graham & Hill, 2003; Mitman & Packer, 1982).

Developing a sense of belonging has emerged in current research and literature as being central to transition programming (Akos, 2007; Akos, Hamm, Mack & Dunaway, 2007; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Gillison et al., 2008; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Osterman, 2000). Belonging is identified in the literature as a basic need that must be met in order for students to have positive experiences at school (Galassi & Akos, 2007; Osterman, 2000). Transition programs focusing on the concept of belonging should also be included in transition programs for rural students, especially for those students transitioning without peers.

Within this current study, a Paired-samples *t*-test, a Wilcoxon signed-rank test and the calculation of effect size for variables used to measure the social, academic and organisational dimensions for rural students between the two data collection periods (early

and late transition), found significant differences in a number of the three dimensions (Table 4.9). Within the social dimension, there is a significant deterioration in the mean scores between pre- and post-transition measuring rural students' perspectives of being bullied at secondary school. Within the academic dimension, rural students present a significant increase in mean scores from early to late transition reporting academic work to be harder than primary school. Finally, within the organisational dimension, rural students present a significant deterioration that rural students still get lost finding their way around their new environment and a significant increase in ratings of student perspective that it is good to have a variety of teachers following transition.

The results from statistical analysis and calculation of effect size indicate that the organisational concerns anticipated by rural students during the primary to secondary transition are quickly alleviated (Table 4.9). Adjustment to the new physical layout, as well as an increase in the number of teachers, were major pre-transition anxieties for rural students identified in the research literature (Johnstone, 2001; Pietarinen, 1998). In this study, these concerns were shown to be quickly overcome post-transition. It is within the other dimensions, such as the increased demands on students' academic achievement and navigating the complex social systems of secondary schools, in which schools need to make long-term transition adjustments. These findings support earlier research which found transition programs need to incorporate strategies focusing on all three dimensions and the interventions need to be well timed (Akos & Galassi, 2004).

Given the extensive research on primary to secondary transition, but the smaller amount of research in a rural Australian context, secondary schools should anticipate concerns of transitioning students as they move into this new complex environment. This research supports the work of Akos and Galassi (2004) and Graham and Hill (2003) and recommends transition programs for rural students need to be ongoing. Initially, transition programs should focus on concerns within the organisational dimension to familiarise students with the physical layout of the secondary school and develop social connections with others, as well as focusing on the organisational procedures of secondary school life. Following the initial

transition period, programs should be designed with interventions which support and sustain rural students' academic achievement and social networks.

These findings address the fourth question: *What were the perspectives of the effectiveness of existing transition programs for (a) rural students?* Findings suggest that rural students perceive existing transition programs, including orientation days, interviews, practice lessons and tours, to be sufficient for transition to secondary school. However, contemporary research, and findings from Question 3 (see *section 5.4*) of this study, suggest that while transition programs address organisational aspects of transition, long-term programs are necessary to accommodate sustainable academic and social achievement at secondary school.

5.6 Parents' perspectives of the transition process

Parents play a critical role in the education of their children (Akos, Queen & Lineberry, 2005; Arrowsafe & Irvin, 1992; Bastiani, 1986; Crosnoe, 2009; Falbo, Lein & Amador, 2001; Lucey & Reay, 2000; Paulson, 1994). To better understand the way students undertake the transition to secondary school the following question was asked:

What are the differences in perspective of the transition process for parents of (a) rural and urban students?

Previous research on school transition has found that parents perceive the primary to secondary transition to be a relatively successful period in their child's schooling. Worsley's (1986) study report that parents perceive transition to be successfully completed for their transitioning child and Howard and Johnson (2004) found parents to be satisfied with the transition process undertaken in their study. However, Akos and Galassi (2004) found that parents report a number of concerns around school transitions. These concerns involve the social aspects of making new friends and fitting in, academic aspects of achievement and performance and organisational aspects of coping with the pressures of secondary school life. There were 461 respondents on the Parent Questionnaire, of which 6% (n=28) were identified as parents of rural students. Four scales from the Parent Questionnaire were used to

measure parents' perspectives of the transition process and include the social, academic and organisational dimensions, and transition programs. Each of these scales is discussed below.

5.6.1 Social dimension

Parents of rural and urban students have high expectations that their children will make new friends at secondary school. Statistical analysis on measures from the Parent Questionnaire indicate no significant differences between rural and urban parents (Table 4.19). Parents also perceive their children to be excited about the prospect of making new friends at secondary school. Contingency Table Analysis found making new friends to be an aspect of transition which most excites their child about transitioning to secondary school. Rural parents (34.6%) and urban parents (28.6%) identified this as their child's most exciting aspect of transition.

The findings from this current study need further investigation in light of findings of earlier studies which highlight the important role parents play in the expectations and experiences of transition. Within the social dimension of transition, existing research suggests that parents play a considerable role in the way students view the transition process. Arrowsafe and Irvin (1992), Johnstone (2001) and Lucey and Reay (2000) found parents to positively or negatively influence student expectations about transition. When parents discuss transition from a negative perspective, including warnings about potential behaviours at the secondary school, students may become concerned or worried. Additionally Falbo, Lein and Amador (2001) suggest that involvement in schooling, such as monitoring of socialisation progress and promoting and creating, where necessary, desirable peer networks, may help students adjust to secondary school.

5.6.2 Academic dimension

During the early transition phase parents expect students to achieve academic success as well as an improvement in grades and results following transition. While no significant differences were found between parents of rural and urban students on these measures, high mean scores reflect strong, positive views about these academic aspects of schooling (Table 4.19).

No significant differences were found between parents of rural and urban students' rankings for *their child will be academically successful* and *offering homework assistance if necessary following transition to secondary school*. Mean scores on these measures are high, which suggests positive expectations about these aspects of the academic dimension, post-transition (Table 4.19).

Further research is needed to make associations between parents' expectations at the early transition stage and findings of previous research to investigate whether parent expectations about academic achievement become a reality post-transition. Existing research found links between academic success and careful monitoring of progress and assistance by parents (Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Crosnoe, 2009; Dornbusch et al., 1987; Falbo et al., 2001; Paulson, 1994). While not directly linked to the findings of this current study, these findings may be useful in identifying strategies to be evaluated in future research.

Contingency Table Analysis also found no significant differences exist between parents of rural and urban students when ranking in order of importance, the aspects of transition which most excites (Table 4.17) or concerns (Table 4.18) their child pre-transition. Items were drawn from a fixed list which matched the list given to students in the Early Transition Questionnaire. Interestingly, both rural and urban parents identified, *learning new things*, as the highest ranked aspect of transition which excited students about moving into secondary school. This is in contrast to the student rankings in which the item, *making new friends*, was ranked the most exciting aspect of transition. While further investigation is required to examine the differences between students and parents, it may be suggested that students are generally more concerned about the social aspects of transition, while parents are generally focused upon academic issues.

5.6.3 Organisational dimension

Parents of rural and urban students present similar ratings for *being organised is important for success at secondary school* and *staff are approachable at the secondary school* (Table 4.19). No significant differences were found between parents of rural and urban students on these measures. More research is required to further investigate expectations and actual

experiences of transition as perceived by parents in the organisational dimension of secondary schooling; an earlier study found parents to be overwhelmed by secondary school structures. Bastiani (1986) found parents in the study to be challenged by the numerous differences between primary and secondary schools' organisational structures. Parents of transitioning students found the secondary school organisation to be too impersonal and bureaucratic and are frustrated by the way in which communication occurs with more than one teacher and through various means of making contact.

Contingency Table Analysis indicates that parents perceive the item, *getting lost*, as the most concerning aspect of transition (Table 4.18). Rural parents (51.9%) and urban parents (29.8%) identified this as the highest ranked issue which concerns their child during transition. Parents, both rural and urban, also present similar views that transition is a time for greater independence and responsibility. Rural parents (11.5%) and urban parents (15.2%) report the item, *greater independence and responsibility*, as the aspect of transition which most excite their children.

5.6.4 Transition programs

No significant differences were found between parents of rural and urban students on the transition program measures (Table 4.19). Parents report positive ratings for *existing transition programs helped in easing student concerns about the transition process*. These findings corroborate earlier research which found parents to be satisfied with the effectiveness of transition programs undertaken by their children (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Worsley, 1986). However, without the means to compare the types of transition programs conducted in this study it is difficult to draw on previous research to support these findings.

However, parents perceive the need for more transition programs to assist students through the primary to secondary transition process. While no significant differences were found between parents of rural and urban students on this measure, mean scores were around the response option *tend to agree*, which indicates parents to be moderately firm about the need for additional programs (Table 4.19). This finding requires further investigation to see which

aspects of transition parents perceive to be necessary to provide better transition support for students.

These findings address the fifth and final research question: *What are the differences in perspective of the transition process for parents of (a) rural and urban students?* No significant differences of expectation about transition between parents of rural and urban students in any of the scales, including social, academic and organisational dimensions, and transition programs, were found in this study. Mean scores for all variables in each scale were high, which suggests parents, both rural and urban, have high levels of expectation that students will establish new social networks and achieve well academically. Parents perceive students to be anxious about navigating their way around the new secondary school environment, which is supported by the findings from the analysis of student data on the Early Transition Questionnaire in *section 5.2.3*. Finally, parents report high levels of satisfaction with current transition programs. They indicate they are sufficient to meet their child's transition needs but also indicate a perspective that transition programs could be enhanced to meet transition needs.

5.7 Summary

This chapter considered the results from data collected on the Early Transition Questionnaire, the Late Transition Questionnaire and the Parent Questionnaire to investigate the expectations and experiences of transition from primary school to Catholic secondary school for rural students in Tasmania. This chapter reviewed each of the research questions outlined in Chapter 1, to examine whether the outcomes of the study had been achieved.

Section 5.2 investigated the differences between rural and urban students' expectations about the primary to secondary transition. Findings suggest that rural and urban students, in this study, have similar expectations about transition to secondary school. Both student groups present high ratings of early transition for *expectations of making new friends, achieving well academically, greater independence and responsibility and are looking forward to having a variety of teachers post-transition*. Rural and urban students also present comparable

expectations that homework will be hard, finding their way around the school will be a challenge and they generally don't expect to be bullied at secondary school.

Section 5.3 explored the lived realities of the transition for rural and urban students. Findings suggest that rural students, in this study, generally have similar experiences of transition to urban students, in particular within the social, academic and organisational dimensions of transition. While statistical tests suggest rural students communicate more with their parents about issues of school, urban students also report high levels of communication, suggesting the need for further investigation into this difference.

Section 5.4 investigated the differences between expectation and reality in the social, academic and organisational dimensions, and parental influence scale, of the primary to secondary transition for rural students. Findings suggest that rural students, in this cohort, perceive lower levels of expectation than the reality of harder school work at secondary school, believe having a variety of teachers is a positive aspect of transition, and that parents communicate with them about school, as well as help them with homework more than expected pre-transition. On the other hand, statistical tests and calculation of effect size found rural students experience lower levels of bullying than anticipated pre-transition and finding their way around the new school environment was quickly overcome following transition.

Section 5.5 explored students' perspective of the effectiveness of transition programs. Findings suggest that rural students, in this study, perceive existing transition programs, including orientation days, interviews, practice lessons and tours to be sufficient for transition to secondary school. However, contemporary research, and findings from Question 3 (see *section 5.4*) of this study, suggests that while transition programs address organisational aspects of transition, long-term programs are necessary to accommodate sustainable academic and social achievement at secondary school.

Finally, *section 5.6* investigated parents' perspectives of the transition process for rural and urban students. Findings report no significant differences of expectation about transition

between parents of rural and urban students in any of the scales, including social, academic and organisational dimensions, and transition programs. Mean scores for all variables in each scale were high, which suggests parents, both rural and urban, have high levels of expectation that students will establish new social networks and achieve well academically. Parents identified students to be anxious about navigating their way around the new environment, which is supported by the findings from the analysis of student data on the Early Transition Questionnaire in *section 5.2.3*. Finally, parents report high levels of satisfaction with current transition programs and indicate that they are sufficient to meet their child's transition needs, although findings show that parents also indicate the need for additional on-going programs to support transition.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION – INTERNAL TRANSITION

6.1 Introduction

This study investigates the expectations and lived experiences of students during the transition from primary school to Catholic secondary school in Tasmania. This chapter discusses the results of this study for students identified as undertaking an internal transition. Three new instruments, entitled the Early Transition Questionnaire, Late Transition Questionnaire and Parent Questionnaire were used to collect data. Student data was collected in two phases. The first phase data was collected from students (n=898) using the Early Transition Questionnaire, of which 23% (n=203) of respondents were identified as internal transitioning students. The second phase involved students responding to the Late Transition Questionnaire (n=722), of which 26% (n=189) of respondents were identified as internal transitioning students. This data was used to compare and contrast student expectations and experiences of the primary to secondary transition with external transitioning students, and investigate differences between expectations and experiences for internal transitioning students.

Parent data was collected from participants (n=461) using the Parent Questionnaire of which 24% (n=111) of participants were identified as parents of internal transitioning students. This data was used to make transition comparisons with parents of external transitioning students. Outcomes from this study provide insight into the levels of excitement and apprehension experienced by internal transitioning students prior to transition, whether these expectations are realised post-transition, the role parents play in the transition process and their perspective of the effectiveness of existing transition programs.

This chapter reviews the specific questions posed in the research to see whether outcomes associated with the study have been achieved. The research questions are treated in order of their presentation in Chapter One. These include an investigation of the differences between

internal and external transitioning students' expectations about the primary to secondary transition (*section 6.2*), an investigation of the lived experiences for internal and external transitioning students (*section 6.3*), an investigation of the similarities and differences between the expectations and lived experiences of the primary to secondary transition (*section 6.4*), exploration of the perceived effectiveness of existing transition programs (*section 6.5*), and an investigation of parents' perspectives of the transition process for internal and external transitioning students (*section 6.6*).

6.2 Differences between the expectations of the primary to secondary transition for internal and external transitioning students.

School transitions is identified in the literature as being associated with feelings of anxiety and excitement (Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Ashton, 2008; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Graham & Hill, 2003; Lucey & Reay, 2000; Odegaard & Heath, 1992; Pietarinen, 1998; Smith, Akos, Lim & Wiley, 2008; Weller, 2007). To determine if there were any significant differences between the expectations of the primary to secondary transition for internal and external transitioning students, the following question was posed:

*Do the expectations of the primary to secondary transition differ between
(b) internal and external transitioning students?*

The Early Transition Questionnaire was developed to measure student expectations of the primary to secondary transition. At the early transition stage, internal transitioning students report significantly lower ratings of excitement about commencing secondary school than did urban students. Student expectations of transition within the four scales, including social, academic and organisational dimensions, as well as parental influence, are discussed under separate sub-headings below.

6.2.1 Social dimension

Statistical analysis found only one significant difference between internal and external transitioning students on the friendship measures of the social dimension scale (Table 4.6).

External transitioning students present significantly higher expectations that new friendships would be established post-transition than did internal transitioning students. While no previous research exists in this area of internal transitioning students, it would be reasonable to suggest that, in many instances, internal transitioning students would be undertaking similar transitions as their friends from primary school, given they have automatic enrolment for secondary schooling and may not have the sense of urgency of external transitioning students about the need to establish new friendships pre-transition.

Previous research and literature on student expectations of school transitions have found that students, in general, find the prospect of making new friends a positive anticipation of transition (Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Blyth, Bush & Simmons, 1978; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Graham & Hill, 2003; Maute & Brough, 2002; Odegaard & Heath, 1992; Pietarinen, 1998; Smith, Akos, Lim & Wiley, 2008). However, these studies do not differentiate between students undertaking an internal or external primary to secondary transition, which necessitates the need for further research into the transition process for this particular group of students.

These findings also support results from *section 4.2.2(a)* in which Contingency Table Analysis found significant differences between internal and external transitioning students on *what most excites students about starting secondary school* (Table 4.4). External transitioning students (51.1%) ranked the item, *making new friends*, as the item which most excites students about starting secondary school, compared with internal transitioning students (34.8%), indicating different levels of excitement about this aspect of transition between the two groups of students.

High mean scores were reported for both internal and external transitioning students on the measure of making new friends post-transition, which suggests that students have high levels of expectation that new friendships could be developed (Table 4.6). These findings support previous research identified above, in which the possibility of making new friends was a major expectation following transition to secondary school (Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Blyth, Bush & Simmons, 1978; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Graham & Hill, 2003;

Maute & Brough, 2002; Odegaard & Heath, 1992; Pietarinen, 1998; Smith, Akos, Lim & Wiley, 2008).

Internal and external transitioning students report a similar relaxed attitude towards the perceived importance of being placed in the same class as friends post-transition (Table 4.6). This may indicate high levels of confidence in their ability to develop new social connections following transition. Previous studies also present similar findings in which students are positive about developing friendships (Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Graham & Hill, 2003; Odegaard & Heath, 1992; Pietarinen, 1998). Additionally, students may be optimistic about the opportunity to expand social environments (Pietarinen, 1998; Smith et al., 2008) or make a fresh start at the secondary school (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Weller, 2007).

Internal transitioning students do not expect older students at the secondary school to be as friendly as do external transitioning students expect post-transition. Statistical analysis reveals the difference between internal and external transitioning students to be significant (Table 4.6). Without previous research to corroborate these findings, it may be suggested that internal transitioning students would have had previous interactions, during their primary education, with many students already at the secondary school and may be basing their responses on previous experiences, either positive or negative.

All students in this study do not report the prospect of being bullied as a major concern in the transition from primary to secondary school. Internal and external transitioning students report low mean scores on the measure of being bullied post-transition (Table 4.6). These findings are supported by the results in *section 4.2.2(a)*, in which internal and external transitioning students displayed similar rankings for the item, *being bullied*, as a major concern of transition. Internal transitioning students (53.4%) and external transitioning students (50.7%) ranked being bullied as one of the least two items causing concern pre-transition (Table 4.5).

These findings are in contrast to some primary to secondary transition studies exploring issues of bullying during the primary to secondary transition (Arth, 1990; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Cotterell, 1979; Graham & Hill, 2003; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Johnston, 2001; Measor & Woods, 1984; Pietarinen, 1998; Pratt & George, 2004). However, other studies of student expectation have not identified the prospect of being bullied as a major concern for transitioning students pre-transition (Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Brown & Armstrong, 1982, 1986; Diemert, 1992; Maute & Brough, 2002; Smith et al., 2008). The difference in findings between previous studies and findings from this study, highlights the importance of further research into this aspect of transition for students.

6.2.2 Academic dimension

Statistical analysis conducted on the measures of the academic dimension scale for the primary to secondary transition found significant differences between internal and external transitioning students on all three measures. Internal transitioning students report significantly lower expectations that school work and homework will be more difficult post-transition than external transitioning students (Table 4.6). Without prior research in this area to draw upon, these findings may suggest internal transitioning students view transition as simply a natural step up into the next learning stage, rather than a leap into a completely different educational environment.

However, mean scores for both internal and external transitioning students are high (more frequent than the response alternative, *agree*), suggesting that both groups of students have high expectations that school work and homework would be difficult following transition (Table 4.6). These findings support the results from *section 4.2.2(a)* in which students were asked to rank in order the most concerning issues about the transition to secondary school (Table 4.5). Over half of internal transitioning students (57.3%) and external transitioning students (52%) ranked the item, *more homework*, as one of the two most concerning aspects of transition. These findings support previous research and literature in which transitioning students anticipate a more demanding academic environment (Diemert, 1992; Longaretti, 2006; Measor & Woods, 1984; Pietarinen, 1998; Pratt & George, 2004; Shacher, Suss & Sharan, 2002), expect an increase in the amount of homework (Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi,

2004; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Odegaard & Heath, 1992) and an increase in the difficulty of school work (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001), and are concerned about getting good grades and taking tests (Akos, 2002; Maute & Brough, 2002).

External transitioning students report significantly higher expectations that their grades and results will improve following transition, than did internal transitioning students (Table 4.6). External transitioning students present a high mean score (more frequent than the response alternative, *agree*), while internal transitioning students' mean score (more frequent than the response alternative, *unsure*) supports the suggestion made previously, that internal transitioning students may see the transition more as a step up into the next year level rather than an educational leap.

Finally, Contingency Table Analysis (Table 4.4) on the list of items which most excite transitioning students found no significant difference between internal and external transitioning students on the two identified academic items, *learning new things* and *doing practical subjects* (see section 4.2.2(a)). The item *learning new things*, was ranked the second highest item exciting internal (24.3%) and external (21.2%) transitioning students. This result supports findings from previous research which found the prospect of learning new things to be a positively anticipated aspect of transition (Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Graham & Hill, 2003; Smith et al., 2008).

On the other hand, the prospect of doing practical subjects was ranked last on the list of items most exciting students, for both internal transitioning (33.3%) and external transitioning (28.2%), about the primary to secondary transition (Table 4.4). Graham and Hill (2003) found the opportunity to do practical subjects a positive anticipation of participants in their study, but other studies have not identified this item as an exciting pre-transition aspect of transition.

6.2.3 Organisational dimension

Significant differences between internal and external transitioning students on two measures of the organisational dimension scale were found in this study. Firstly, external transitioning students report significantly higher expectations that teachers at secondary school will be stricter than teachers at primary school than do internal transitioning students (Table 4.6). However, both groups of students present mean scores which were more frequent than the response option *unsure*, which suggests both internal and external transitioning students expect this to be a realistic possibility.

While no research exists on school transitions for internal transitioning students, these findings may indicate an existing familiarity between internal transitioning students and teachers at the secondary school due to the Preparatory to Year 10 structure (or Preparatory to Year 12 structure). However, previous research has found transitioning students to be concerned about discipline and authority following transition which supports these results (Brown & Armstrong, 1982; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Cotterell, 1979; Elias, Gara & Ubricco, 1985; Measor & Woods, 1984; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001).

Secondly, external transitioning students report significantly higher ratings of the expectation that they will easily get lost following transition to secondary school than did internal transitioning students (Table 4.6). Furthermore, external transitioning students (32.9%) ranked the item, *getting lost*, their greatest concern, out of five pre-determined aspects about starting secondary school (Table 4.5) compared with internal transitioning students (19.6%) which strengthens these findings.

The anxiety of getting lost following transition has been identified in previous research and literature (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Brown & Armstrong, 1982, 1986; Graham & Hill, 2003; Johnstone, 2002; Pietarinen, 1998; Smith et al., 2008). Additionally, the size and complexity of school grounds also emerged in existing literature as being a major concern and may be associated with students' anxiety over getting lost following transition (Diemert, 1992; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Johnstone, 2001; Measor & Woods, 1984; Odegaard & Heath, 1992; Pratt & George, 2004). However, it would be reasonable to suggest that internal

transitioning students have lower ratings on this aspect of transition than do external transitioning students as they would be relatively familiar with the physical environment of the secondary campus, given their current enrolment status at the primary school.

Internal and external transitioning students had similar levels of ratings on the measure of the anticipated helpfulness of secondary teachers, as well as the expectation that it would be good to have a variety of teachers post-transition (Table 4.6). Additionally, this aspect of transition appeared on both the list of items which most excite and the list of items which most concern students about the transition to secondary school. The item, *having different teachers for different subjects*, was lowly ranked on both lists, with internal (26.5%) and external (32.7%) transitioning students ranking this item the least exciting aspect of transition (Table 4.4). Furthermore, internal transitioning students (36.5%) and external transitioning students (39.9%) ranked this item their least concerning aspect of transition (see *section 4.2.2 (a)*).

Subsequently, it may be implied that internal and external transitioning students have similar, but not strong, views about the number of teachers to whom they will be exposed at secondary school. These results corroborate previous research which found having different teachers for different subjects to be a positively anticipated aspect of transition (Odegaard & Heath, 1992). On the other hand, studies have found students report the prospect of having different teachers a cause for concern pre-transition (Johnstone, 2001, 2002; Pratt & George, 2004).

Finally, internal and external transitioning students report similar, non-significant ratings of the expectation that levels of independence and responsibility will be increased following transition (Table 4.6). Mean scores were high indicating similar levels of anticipation that the transition to secondary school is viewed as a period of growing up. However, Contingency Table Analysis on the data from Table 4.4 reports a significant difference between internal and external transitioning students on the rankings of this item, from a list of five items, of aspects most exciting students about transition to secondary school. Internal transitioning

students (20.6%) ranked this item as their first choice, compared with external transitioning students (11.5%).

The difference between these two findings may suggest that transitioning students associate transition as a period of personal growth and maturity; students may not consider it the most exciting aspect of transition. This corroborates previous research (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Ashton, 2008; Blyth, Bush & Simmons, 1978; Lucey & Reay, 2000; Pietarinen, 1998; Smith et al., 2008) which found the prospect of increased freedom and a sense of growing up to be a highly anticipated feature of transition. In contrast, other studies have found school transition to be associated with uncertainty about their new social status and role as the youngest members of the school (Graham & Hill, 2003; Pratt & George, 2004).

6.2.4 Parental influence

Statistical tests found significant differences between internal and external transitioning students on both measures of the parental influence scale (Table 4.6). Firstly, internal transitioning students present significantly higher ratings for the perspective that parents had spoken to them about secondary school, compared with external transitioning students. While no direct link is made between this finding and findings from previous research, Arrowsafe and Irvin (1992) and Lucey and Reay (2000) found that parents act as informants during transition. However, the information communicated is often associated with warnings, rather than positive information about moving into secondary school.

Secondly, external transitioning students present a significantly higher mean score on the measure of students' expectation that parents would assist them with homework following transition, than did internal transitioning students (Table 4.6). Mean scores for this measure are high which suggests high expectations by both groups of students that parents would help with homework if deemed necessary. Previous research and literature have not investigated student expectations of their parents during transition but findings from existing research suggests students whose parents help with homework (Baker & Stevenson, 1986), monitor progress (Crosnoe, 2009; Falbo, Lein & Amador, 2001) or are involved in their child's schooling (Akos, Queen & Lineberry, 2005), adjust better to school.

These findings address the first question: *Do the experiences of the primary to secondary transition differ between (b) internal and external transitioning students?* Findings suggest that internal transitioning students have lower levels of expectation of the potential friendliness of older students at the secondary school and the need to establish new friendships post-transition than do external transitioning students. External transitioning students expect homework and school work to be significantly more difficult, and anticipate a significant improvement in grades and results than do internal transitioning students post-transition. Furthermore, external transitioning students have significantly higher levels of expectation that they will get lost at the secondary school and anticipate teachers to be stricter following transition, than do internal transitioning students. However, internal transitioning students have greater expectation that they will communicate with parents about secondary school, but lower expectations that parents will help them with homework post-transition, than external transitioning students.

6.3 Internal transitioning students' experiences of the primary to secondary transition process

Following transition, students have different experiences of the process. Current research suggests the experience can be better or worse than anticipated pre-transition (Aikins et al., 2005; Akos, 2002, 2004; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Graham & Hill, 2003; Pietarinen, 1998; Smith et al., 2008). To explore the differences between the transition experiences for internal and external transitioning students the following question was asked:

Do the experiences of the primary to secondary transition differ between (b) internal and external transitioning students?

Year 7 students (n=722) participated in the Late Transition Questionnaire which included 189 (26%) internal transitioning students. Four scales, social, academic and organisational dimensions, as well as parental influence, were used to measure the lived realities of the

transition from primary to secondary school for students. Each of the scales has been included in the discussion below.

6.3.1 Social dimension

Two significant differences were found on the friendship measures of the social dimension scale. Internal transitioning students found it significantly more difficult than external transitioning students to make friends post-transition (Table 4.8). Additionally, internal transitioning students' present significantly lower perspectives that secondary school is a place to make new friends than do external transitioning students. However, mean scores for both measures were high, around the response option *agree*, suggesting that, although the difference between internal and external transitioning students' mean scores are statistically different, their actual experiences of the formation of new friendships has, in general, been positive. These results suggest that, as internal transitioning students generally move to the secondary school with friends and peers, they do not place a lot of emphasis on establishing new social connections.

These findings are supported by previous research on the experiences of school transitions which found students to cope better with the social aspects of school transition than they expected pre-transition (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Graham & Hill, 2003; Smith et al., 2008) and are more positive about school as things became more familiar (Brown & Armstrong, 1986). However, other studies have found the development of friendships to be more challenging than anticipated pre-transition (Akos, 2002, 2004).

Internal transitioning students do not find older students at the secondary school to be as friendly as do external transitioning students post-transition (Table 4.8). Statistical analysis found this difference to be significant. While not found in any other studies on transition, it may be suggested that internal transitioning students are familiar with many of the other students already at the secondary school and may have experienced some unfriendly behaviour from particular older students during their primary school days.

Both internal and external transitioning students in this study report non-significant, low mean scores on the measure of the perspective of being bullied post-transition (Table 4.8). These findings need further investigation as existing research has found feelings of victimisation to increase following transition (Berliner, 1993; Pellegrini & Long, 2002) and bullying to be a persistent concern following transition for some students (Akos, 2002; Mitman & Parker, 1982).

6.3.2 Academic dimension

Two significant differences between internal and external transitioning students were found on measures in the academic dimension scale (Table 4.8). Firstly, external transitioning students report significantly higher mean scores for the experiences of more difficult school work than do internal transitioning students. Mean scores for both internal and external transitioning students were high, suggesting that both groups of students find the academic work to be more challenging than primary school.

Additionally, external transitioning students report higher mean scores for the measure of increased difficulty of homework, than do internal transitioning students (Table 4.8). Mean scores were also very high for this measure suggesting that both groups of students experience challenges associated with homework. However, the challenges in this study have not been categorised as being related to the level of difficulty, frequency or volume of homework. Further investigation needs to be conducted to identify the pressures for transitioning students.

Findings from this study support findings from previous research which found post-transition students perceive homework and school work to be more difficult than anticipated pre-transition (Akos, 2002, 2004; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Graham & Hill, 2003; Mitman & Packer, 1982). However, Chedzoy and Burden (2005) found that students report the academic aspect of transition much easier and repetitive of primary school work following transition. This finding is in contrast to the studies identified above.

Similar, but not significant, ratings were found of student perspective of an improvement in grades and results post-transition. Mean scores are very high, indicating a perceived improvement in academic achievement following transition. This finding is a little removed from previous studies, which found a correlation between school transitions and academic achievement losses (Alspaugh, 1998a, 1998b; Alspaugh & Harting, 1995; Benner & Graham, 2009; Cotterell, 1986; Galton, Morrison & Pell, 2000; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999). Persistent concerns over grades, homework, teachers and understanding content have been reported by transitioning students in other studies (Phelan, Cao & Davidson, 1992). In light of the findings from previous research and literature, further examination should be conducted to determine whether the results of this current study are related to actual or perceived improvement of academic achievement since transition.

6.3.3 Organisational dimension

Following transition, external transitioning students have confirmed expectations of teachers being stricter at secondary school than teachers at primary school. Statistical tests report external transitioning students have significantly higher ratings on this measure than internal transitioning students (Table 4.8). External transitioning students' ratings were around the response option *tend to agree*, while internal transitioning students ratings were around the response option *unsure*.

External transitioning students' results are consistent with previous studies which found post-transition students to be concerned about the strictness of their teachers (Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Mitman & Packer, 1982), or the repercussions of being late to class (Akos, 2002), as well as identifying the importance of knowing and following the rules (Akos, 2004). However, internal transitioning students' results may be reflective of students having some level of familiarity with staff, through their association with the college during their primary years. However, further studies of internal transitioning students would need to be conducted to confirm this suggestion.

Getting lost post-transition was a realised concern for external transitioning students, but quickly overcome. Statistical analysis found internal transitioning students present

significantly lower ratings that finding their way around the secondary school is still an issue, than did external transitioning students post-transition (Table 4.8). Ratings were very low for both groups of students (less frequent than the response alternative, *tend to disagree*), suggesting a high level of familiarity with their new environment. This result supports findings from previous research which found transitioning students quickly adjust to the layout of the new school post-transition (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Cocklin, 1999; Graham & Hill, 2003; Mitman & Packer, 1982; Smith et al., 2008).

Internal and external transitioning students associate the primary to secondary transition with greater feelings of independence and responsibility. Mean scores were high on this measure for both groups of students (Table 4.8). This finding supports similar findings from other research (Akos, 2002; Gillison, Standage & Skevington, 2008), although Blyth et al. (1978) found increased feelings of independence and responsibility to be linked to pressure from teachers to act more maturely.

6.3.4 Parental influence

Statistical analysis found significant differences on the measures of the parental influence scale between internal and external transitioning students (Table 4.8). External transitioning students report significantly higher levels of communication with parents about secondary school issues than do internal transitioning students. While no links between findings of this study and findings from other studies can be made, existing research suggests that parental involvement in aspects of schooling (Akos et al., 2005; Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Crosnoe, 2009; Falbo et al., 2001; Paulson, 1994; Worsley, 1986) and talking positively about transition (Arrowsafe & Irvin, 1992; Lucey & Reay, 2000) may result in better adjustment outcomes for students.

External transitioning students also report significantly higher ratings of receiving parental help with homework than do internal transitioning students (Table 4.8). The fact that mean scores were high for both groups of students suggests that both internal and external transitioning students receive assistance when required. While not a direct link to this current

study, previous research has found that parental assistance with homework (Baker & Stevenson, 1986) and regular monitoring (Crosnoe, 2009; Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts & Fraleigh, 1987; Falbo et al., 2001; Paulson, 1984) are associated with increased levels of academic adjustment and achievement following transition.

These findings address the second research question: *Do the experiences of the primary to secondary transition differ between (b) internal and external transitioning students?* Findings suggest that internal transitioning students have different experiences of the primary to secondary transition in a number of different areas. Statistical analysis indicates that external transitioning students develop new friendships more readily, find older students to be friendlier and teachers stricter, and perceive school work and homework to be more difficult than do internal transitioning students post-transition. Furthermore, external transitioning students present higher levels of confirmation of the items of *parental communication of experiences at secondary school, and assisting them with their homework when necessary.*

6.4 Differences between early and late transition for internal transitioning students

To investigate the differences between the expectations and experiences of internal transitioning students, in four scales, the following question was presented:

What differences exist between expectation and reality for students (b) experiencing an internal transition, within the scales of social, academic and organisational dimensions, and parental influence?

To investigate the differences between expectation and experiences of transition for internal transitioning students (n=189), statistical tests, including Paired-samples *t*-tests and Wilcoxon signed rank tests were performed. These results were supported by the calculation of effect size (Cohen's *d*) for the differences between expectation and reality of the primary to secondary transition. The differences between expectation and reality for internal transitioning students, in the four identified scales, are included below.

6.4.1 Social dimension

Two significant differences, between expectation and reality, were found for internal transitioning students for friendship measures in the social dimension scale (Table 4.10). Internal transitioning students report a significant increase in mean scores, from early to late transition, that it is easy to make new friends and that new friendships were established post-transition. These statistically significant differences were calculated to have an effect size which was moderate in strength, $0.21 < d < 0.50$ (Cohen et al., 2007).

Internal transitioning students present mean scores (Table 4.10) around the response option *unsure* for the variable measuring the ease of making new friends following transition, which suggests an uncertainty about the development of new social connections. However, whether this uncertainty is related to the perspective that it is unnecessary to establish new friendships as internal transitioning students are moving on with friends, or they are tentative about their place in a new cohort of students, needs to be investigated further as contemporary literature does not make any conclusions about internal transitioning students.

Paired-samples *t*-tests found one significant difference between internal and external transitioning students on the measure of bullying in the social dimension scale (Table 4.10). Internal transitioning students in this study report a significant deterioration in mean scores from early to late transition of being bullied post-transition. Mean scores were low for the Early Transition Questionnaire (less frequent than the response alternative, *no opinion*) but decreased further (less frequent than the response alternative, *disagree*) for the Late Transition Questionnaire. This statistically significant difference was supported by the calculation of effect size ($d = 1.28$), which is reported to have a strong effect (Cohen et al., 2007). While further investigation is required into this aspect of transition for internal transitioning students, these results do not confirm findings of other studies in which transitioning students identified the prospect of bullying a major transition concern (Ashton, 2008; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Cotterell, 1979; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Pietarinen, 1998; Pratt & George, 2004).

Finally, no significant differences were found between expectation and reality for internal transitioning students on the measure of perceived friendliness of older students post-transition (Table 4.10). Mean scores for both the early and late transition stage were high, around the response option *agree*, indicating a level of confidence in the friendliness of older students. This result was confirmed by calculation of effect size ($d = 0.004$) which was found to be very weak ($d < 0.20$) (Cohen et al., 2007).

6.4.2 Academic dimension

Paired-samples *t*-tests found two significant differences on measures in the academic dimension for internal transitioning students (Table 4.10). Significant increases were identified, from early to late transition, on the measures of the perceived difficulty of school work and improvement in grades and results. These results suggest that internal transitioning students have found school work to be harder than anticipated early transition and that they perceive an improvement in grades and results more than they expected early transition. These results were calculated to have a strong effect, $d > 1.00$ (Cohen et al., 2007), which supports these statistically significant results. These findings also suggest a disparity between internal transitioning students' expectations of harder school work and perceived improvement in grades and their reality post-transition.

No difference was found between internal transitioning students' expectations and reality of their perspective of difficult homework, as investigated by *t*-tests for Paired-samples (Table 4.10). This result was confirmed by the calculation of effect size ($d = 0.04$), which was found to be weak, $d < 0.20$ (Cohen et al., 2007). Mean scores for this variable were high (more frequent than the response alternative, *tend to agree*), suggesting students expected and experienced an increase in the difficulty of homework. As suggested in *section 6.2.3*, further study is needed into what aspect of homework, such as level of difficulty, frequency or volume is of greatest concern to internal transitioning students.

While no studies on school transition for internal transitioning students exist, these findings corroborate earlier research which found homework to be a concern for transitioning students pre-transition (Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Odegaard &

Heath, 1992) and a persistent concern post-transition (Akos, 2002, 2004; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Graham & Hill, 2003; Mitman & Packer, 1982).

6.4.3 Organisational dimension

Two significant differences were found between expectation and reality for internal transitioning students on measures of the organisational dimension scale (Table 4.10). A Paired-samples *t*-test found a significant increase in reported mean scores, from early to late transition, of the perspective that having a variety of teachers is a positive aspect of the transition. At the early transition stage, students report a high mean score (more frequent than the response alternative, *tend to agree*), while at the late transition stage they report a very high mean score (more frequent than the response alternative, *agree*). This significant difference was confirmed by the calculation of effect size, $d = 1.00$, which was found to have a moderate-strong effect (Cohen et al., 2007). These findings suggest that internal transitioning students have both positive expectations and experiences of an increase in the number of teachers at the secondary school. These results also support other research findings which found students to be interested in the types of teachers they will experience at the secondary school (Ashton, 2008; Diemert, 1992; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001).

A Wilcoxon signed rank test found a significant difference between early and late transition on the measure of students' expectations and experiences of getting lost at secondary school (Table 4.10). The Wilcoxon signed rank test was conducted because data collected on the Late Transition Questionnaire failed to satisfy the assumption of normality. The test found a significant deterioration in ratings, from early to late transition, for internal transitioning students. Effect size, $d = 1.23$, was calculated to be strong in size, $d > 1.00$ (Cohen et al., 2007), supporting the statistical analysis. This result supports other studies, which found students quickly adjust to the size and layout of the secondary school, post-transition (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Graham & Hill, 2003; Johnstone, 2001; Mitman & Packer, 1982; Smith et al., 2008).

A Paired-samples *t*-test found no differences between expectation and reality for other measures of the organisational dimension scale (Table 4.10). Internal transitioning students

report similar mean scores on the measures of perceived helpfulness of teachers and a perspective that teachers are stricter at secondary school. Mean scores for both variables, at the early and late transition stages, were around the response option *tend to agree*, which suggests internal transitioning students' expectations were realised post-transition. These results were confirmed by the calculation of effect size, which was found to be weak in strength, $d < 0.20$ (Cohen et al., 2007).

Finally, internal transitioning students' expectations of greater independence and responsibility post-transition were also realised. The Paired-samples *t*-test found no statistically significant difference between early and late transition on this measure, which was confirmed by the calculation of a weak effect size, $d = 0.02$ (Cohen et al., 2007).

6.4.4 Parental influence

Paired-samples *t*-tests found one significant difference between internal transitioning students' expectations and experiences on the measures of the parental influence scale (Table 4.10). Internal transitioning students report a significant increase in mean scores on the measure of student perspectives of parental communication. This statistically significant difference was supported by effect size, calculated at $d = 1.67$, which was found to be strong in effect (Cohen et al., 2007).

Internal transitioning students' expectation that parents would help them with homework was realised, post-transition (Table 4.10). Mean scores for both the early and late transition stages were very high (more frequent than the response alternative, *agree*), suggesting high levels of expectation and experience of receiving homework assistance for internal transitioning students. These results were corroborated by the calculation of effect size, $d = 0.12$, which was weak in effect, $d < 0.20$ (Cohen et al., 2007).

These findings address the third question: *What differences exist between expectation and reality for students (b) experiencing an internal transition within the scales of social, academic and organisational dimensions, and parental influence?* Findings suggest a disparity between expectation and reality in the areas of the establishment of new friendships,

bullying, increased difficulty of school work and an expectation of an improvement in grades post-transition. Furthermore, students' perspectives that having a variety of teachers would be good, of getting lost and of greater communication with parents were also different between early and late transition for internal transitioning students.

6.5 Perceived effectiveness of existing transition programs

To explore the effectiveness of existing transition programs, from an internal transitioning student's perspective, the following question was presented:

What were the perspectives of the effectiveness of existing transition programs for (b) internal transitioning students?

Transitioning students, both internal and external transitioning, undertook a number of different transition programs. From a list identified on the Early Transition Questionnaire, orientation days were identified as the more frequent type of transition program with 95.6% of internal and 88.2% of external transitioning students completing this activity (Table 4.14). The biggest difference between internal and external transitioning students on the types of activities undertaken was the interview with the principal or other member of staff from the secondary school. 68.1% of external transitioning students experienced this activity, compared with 28.1% of internal transitioning students. This difference may be attributed to internal transitioning students already being enrolled at the college and the movement into the secondary school is automatic.

An Independent-samples *t*-test found only one difference between internal and external transitioning students on measures in the transition program scale (Table 4.15). On both the Early and Late Transition Questionnaires, internal transitioning students reported significantly higher mean scores of the perspective existing transition programs had been helpful during the primary to secondary transition. However, mean scores for both internal and external transitioning students were very high (more frequent than the response

alternative, *agree*), suggesting both groups of students highly rated the existing programs as being useful during transition.

On the other measure, the perspective of the need for more programs, both internal and external transitioning students reported similar, non-significant mean scores (Table 4.15). Mean scores were around the response option *unsure*, suggesting both groups of students did not have strong opinions about the need for more transition programs.

A Paired-samples *t*-test found internal transitioning students had no significant differences in their perspectives about the usefulness of existing programs and the need for more programs, between early and late transition (Table 4.16). Mean scores were around the response option *unsure*, indicating no strong opinion for more programs pre-transition. These results were confirmed by the calculation of effect size, which was found to be weak, $d < 0.20$ (Cohen et al., 2007). These results suggest internal transitioning students were satisfied that their needs were met, in relation to the primary to secondary transition process. These results support Graham and Hill's (2003) and Howard and Johnson's (2004) findings, in which participants in their study were satisfied with existing programs and required no modifications.

However, results from this current study (see *section 6.4*) suggest that internal transitioning students manage the organisational and social dimensions of transition relatively quickly, although the academic dimension aspects are still a challenge. These findings also support previous research which recommends that transition programs should focus on long-term adjustment, such as sustained academic success (Akos, 2002, 2004; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Brown & Armstrong, 1986; Graham & Hill, 2003; Mitman & Packer, 1982). Akos and Galassi (2004) also recommend transition programs should be conducted in stages, which focus on the social, academic and organisational aspects of transition.

These findings address the fourth question: *What were the perspectives of the effectiveness of existing transition programs for (b) internal transitioning students?* Findings suggest that internal transitioning students perceive existing transition programs, including orientation days, practice lessons and visits from staff from the secondary school, to be adequate for

their transition into secondary school. Contemporary research and findings from Question 3 (see *section 6.4*) suggest transition programs for internal transitioning students need to focus on the long-term academic success of students' transition to secondary school, as any concerns in the social and organisational dimension, for internal transitioning students, are quickly overcome.

6.6 Parents' perspectives of the transition process

The role parents play in assisting students to manage school transitions is important (Akos, Queen & Lineberry, 2005; Arrowsafe & Irvin, 1992; Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Bastiani, 1986; Falbo, Lein, & Amador, 2001; Lucey & Reay, 2000; Paulson, 1994; Worsley, 1986). To investigate parents' perspectives of their child's transition the following question was asked:

What are the differences in perspective of the transition process for parents of (b) internal and external transitioning students?

Previous research suggests parents have concerns around the primary to secondary transition (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Some studies report parents to be generally satisfied with the programs undertaken during transition in assisting student adjustment (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Worsley, 1986). Parent participants (n=461) completed the Parent Questionnaire, of which 24% (n=111) were identified as parents of internal transitioning students. Four scales from the questionnaire were used to measure parents' perspectives of the transition process and include social, academic and organisational dimensions, and transition programs. Each of these scales is discussed below.

6.6.1 Social dimension

Parents of external transitioning students have significantly higher expectations that students will make new friends following transition (Table 4.22). Parents of external transitioning students also report significantly higher mean scores of the importance of making new friends post-transition. These findings suggest parents of external transitioning students

consider the formation of new friendships to be important. The difference in responses between parents of external and internal transitioning students may be attributed to parents of internal transitioning students having a more relaxed attitude about their children's friendships as their children are familiar with the existing transitioning cohort.

These results are supported by Contingency Table Analysis (Table 4.22) which found significant differences in parents' perspectives about the importance of making new friends at secondary school. Parents of external transitioning students (32.7%) ranked the item, *making new friends*, as their highest aspect of transition, from a fixed list of aspects most exciting their child about starting secondary school, compared with parents of internal transitioning students (17.5%).

6.6.2 Academic dimension

No significant differences were found between internal and external transitioning students on measures of the academic dimension scale (Table 4.22). Both internal and external transitioning parents presented high ratings (more frequent than the response alternative, *tend to agree*) on the measures for *expectation of improvement in grades and results post-transition* and *help with homework following transition*, which suggests positive expectations about these aspects of transition.

A Mann-Whitney *U* test also found no significant differences between parents of internal and external transitioning students' perspectives that they would achieve academic success post-transition (Table 4.22). Mean scores were high (more frequent than the response alternative, *tend to agree*), indicating high expectations of academic success. Further research is recommended to investigate whether parental expectations about academic achievement become a reality following transition. While not directly linked to this study findings of previous research which associate academic success and careful monitoring of progress and parental assistance (Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Crosnoe, 2009; Dornbusch et al., 1987; Falbo et al., 2001; Paulson, 1994) may be useful in identifying strategies to be examined in future research.

Contingency Table Analysis (Table 4.20) also found similar perspectives between parents of internal and external transitioning students on the academic items, *learning new things* and *doing practical subjects*, as the most exciting aspect of the primary to secondary transition. Interestingly, parents of internal (40.2%) and external (34.3%) transitioning students ranked the item, *learning new things*, as the aspect of transition which most excites their child, pre-transition. However, this is in contrast to students, using the same list in the Early Transition Questionnaire, who identified the item, *making new friends*, the most exciting aspect of transition (Table 4.21). These findings support the need for further investigation into the disparity between parents' and students' perspectives of the academic dimension scale of the primary to secondary transition.

6.6.3 Organisational dimension

Parents of internal and external transitioning students report similar ratings for *being organised is important for success at secondary school* and *staff are approachable at the secondary school* following transition (Table 4.22). No significant differences were found between parents on these measures. Further research into parents' perspectives of the organisational dimension of secondary school is required as Bastiani (1986) found parents to be concerned about the differences between primary and secondary school organisational structures and organisational practices.

However, Contingency Table Analysis found significant differences between parents of internal and external transitioning students on the item, *having different teachers for different subjects*, as aspects of transition which most excite (Table 4.20) and concern (Table 4.21) students about moving into secondary school. Parents of internal transitioning students (14.6%) ranked this item as the most exciting aspect of transition, compared with parents of external transitioning students (6.3%). Furthermore, parents of internal transitioning students (7.1%) ranked this item as their child's most concerning aspect of transition (Table 4.21), compared with parents of external transitioning students (3.8%). This item was placed in both lists as current literature found transitioning students to be interested in the types of teachers they will have post-transition (Ashton, 2008; Diemert, 1992; Measor & Woods, 1984; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001). The findings from this current study suggest that parents

perceive their children to be not overly concerned or excited about having a greater range of teachers following transition to secondary school.

6.6.4 Transition programs

No significant differences were found between parents of internal and external transitioning students on the transition program measures (Table 4.22). Parents report high mean scores for the perceived effectiveness of existing transition programs in easing concerns about the primary to secondary transition, suggesting a high level of satisfaction with the usefulness of existing transition programs. These findings support previous research which found parents to be satisfied with existing transition programs (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Worsley, 1986).

Furthermore, no significant differences were found between parents of internal and external transitioning students on the variable measuring the need for more transition programs to assist students during the primary to secondary transition period (Table 4.22). Mean scores were around the response option *tend to agree*, which indicates parents perceive additional programs to be of some benefit. Further investigation is required to explore the aspects of transition parents perceive to be necessary to provide further support.

These findings address the fifth and final research question: *What are the differences in perspective of the transition process for parents of (b) internal and external transitioning students?* Findings found parents of external transitioning students present higher expectation ratings of the importance of establishing friendships post-transition than do parents of internal transitioning students. Without current research to support these findings, it may be suggested that parents of internal transitioning students do have confidence in students' established friendships which they take into secondary school.

6.7 Summary

This chapter examined the results from data gathered on the Early Transition Questionnaire, the Late Transition Questionnaire and the Parent Questionnaire to investigate the expectations and lived realities of the transition from primary school to Catholic secondary

school for internal transitioning students in Tasmania. This chapter reviewed each of the research questions outlined in Chapter 1, to investigate whether the outcomes of the study had been achieved.

Section 6.2 investigated the expectations of the primary to secondary transition. Statistical analysis found significant differences between internal and external transitioning students in measures of all four scales. Internal transitioning students present lower levels of expectations of the friendliness of older students and the need to develop new friendships following transition than do external transitioning students. External and internal transitioning students report significant differences around homework, school work, and expected improvement in grades and results post-transition. Furthermore, significant differences were found between the expectation of getting lost and the strictness of teachers at the secondary school, as well as the communication and assistance from parents.

Section 6.3 examined the experiences of the transition for internal transitioning students. Statistical analysis found internal transitioning students have different experiences of transition in a number of different areas. Findings suggest that external transitioning students develop new friendships more readily, find older students to be friendlier and teachers stricter, perceive school work and homework to be more difficult than do internal transitioning students. Furthermore, external transitioning students present higher levels of confirmation that parents talk to them about their experiences at secondary school, as well as assisting them with homework when necessary.

Section 6.4 investigated the differences between expectation and experience of the primary to secondary transition for internal transitioning students. The investigation found a disparity between expectation and reality in a number of areas, including the establishment of new friendships, reports of bullying, increased difficulty of school work and an expectation of an improvement in grades post-transition. Furthermore, students' perspectives that having a variety of teachers would be good, of getting lost and of greater communication with parents, were also different between early and late transition for internal transitioning students.

Section 6.5 examined the perceived effectiveness of existing transition programs. Findings suggest that internal transitioning students perceive existing transition programs, including orientation days, practice lessons and visits from staff from the secondary school, are adequate for transition into secondary school. Contemporary research and findings from Question 3 (see *section 6.4*) suggest that transition programs need to focus on the long-term success of the academic dimension of secondary school, as any concerns in the social and organisational dimension, for internal transitioning students, are quickly overcome.

Finally, *section 6.6* investigated parents' perspectives of the transition process for internal and external transitioning students. Findings found that parents of external transitioning students present higher expectations of the perceived importance of establishing friendships post-transition than parents of internal transitioning students. Without current research to support these findings, it may be suggested that internal transitioning students have confidence in established friendships which they take into secondary school.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to investigate the primary to secondary transition process and to investigate whether the experiences of moving into the secondary school meets students' expectations pre-transition for two key groups of students, within Catholic colleges in Tasmania. The first focus group was students transitioning from small rural primary schools to larger urban Catholic secondary schools. The second focus group involved students transitioning within Catholic schools that have a Preparatory to Year 10 (or Year 12) structure. This was referred to as an internal transition in this study. The study's purpose was to establish whether rural and internal transitioning students' expectations of the primary to secondary transition process were realised, to compare their expectations with urban and external transitioning students, respectively, to gauge the effectiveness of available transition programs and to investigate parents' perspectives of the transition process for their children.

This chapter presents a summary of the main findings (*section 7.2*), makes recommendations for future research in rural and internal transitioning students' primary to secondary transition (*section 7.3*), draws attention to limitations of this study (*section 7.4*) and concludes with final remarks (*section 7.5*).

7.2 Summary of main findings

The objective of this study was to investigate what differences exist between the expectations and realities of the primary to secondary transition for students (a) from small rural schools, and (b) experiencing an internal transition. For rural and internal transitioning students the main results are summarised below:

7.2.1 Rural students

1. Sizeable increases in perspective exist between the expectations and realities of the primary to secondary transition for rural students in the academic and organisational dimension, and parental influence scales. From early to late transition, rural students perceive an increase in the difficulty of school work, the benefits of having a variety of teachers, communication with parents about school and getting help with homework.
2. Sizeable deteriorations in perspective exist between the expectations and realities of the primary to secondary transition for rural students in the social and organisational dimension scales. Rural students experience fewer incidents than they expected prior to transition, of bullying and a decrease in the occurrence of losing their way around the new school environment.
3. No differences exist between expectation and reality of the effectiveness of existing transition programs. Rural students perceive existing programs to be helpful in easing their concerns about transition and do not perceive the need for more programs prior to transition.
4. Parents of rural students have very high expectations that their child will achieve well in the social, academic and organisational dimensions of the primary to secondary transition. Parents perceive that existing transition programs are adequate for the primary to secondary transition, although moderately high ratings suggest that parents perceive the addition of more transition programs to be beneficial.

7.2.2 Internal transitioning students

1. Sizeable increases in perspective exist between the expectations and realities of the primary to secondary transition for internal transitioning students in the social, academic and organisational dimensions, and parental influence scales. From early to late transition, internal transitioning students perceive an increase in the ease of

- making new friends, the number of new friends, the difficulty of school work, improvement in grades and results, and communication with parents about school, than they expected before transition to secondary school.
2. Sizeable deteriorations in perspective exist between the expectations and realities of the primary to secondary transition for internal transitioning students in the social and organisational dimension scales. Internal transitioning students experience fewer incidents than anticipated pre-transition, of bullying and a decrease in the occurrence of losing their way around the new school environment.
 3. No differences exist between expectation and reality of the effectiveness of existing transition programs for internal transitioning students. Students perceive existing programs to be helpful in easing their concerns about transition and do not perceive the need for more programs prior to transition.
 4. Parents of internal transitioning students have very high expectations that their child will achieve well in the academic and organisational dimensions of the primary to secondary transition. Parents of internal transitioning students perceive that the establishment of new friendships, post-transition, is not as pressing an issue (or a concern) as for parents of external transitioning students. Additionally, parents perceive existing transition programs to be adequate for the primary to secondary transition.

7.3 Further research and future directions

This study has revealed a number of findings, some of which suggest directions for future research into the primary to secondary transition for rural and internal transitioning students:

1. Investigation could be conducted into why transitioning students, both rural and internal transitioning, report low expectations of the prospect of being bullied pre-transition. Existing research and literature identify that the prospect of being bullied

post-transition is a major concern for students pre-transition. Other studies suggest that transition is viewed as a time to start afresh in the new environment and to escape bullying previously experienced. However, results of this study report no differentiation between groups of students (rural, urban, internal and external transitioning), all of whom report low levels of expectation and experience of being bullied following transition. This could be associated with the increased focus on anti-bullying programs at a primary level.

2. Further research could be conducted into the social networking of rural students in the early phase of transition, to better understand why some students manage well (Cocklin, 1999) and others have significant difficulty (Akos, 2002; Pietarinen, 1998). This may allow schools to provide strategies or interventions for this aspect of transition for rural students.
3. Further research is needed into why both rural and internal transitioning students find increased difficulty with the academic dimension, including difficulty of school work and homework, following transition. Additionally, greater investigation of which aspects of homework and school work cause the greatest concern post-transition, is needed to better inform future transition programming. Transition programs addressing these issues, such as study skills and time management lessons, could then be developed from these findings.
4. Investigation could be conducted into the reasons why rural students have significantly higher expectations than urban students that their grades and results will improve following transition.
5. An extension of the study above is required to investigate the possible reasons that students, both rural and urban, perceive an improvement in grades and results post-transition, despite existing research finding a decline in academic achievement following transition (Alspaugh, 1998a, 1998b; Alspaugh & Harting, 1995; Cotterell, 1986; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999).

6. Further investigation could be conducted into the role parents play in influencing their child's expectations and experiences of transition for both rural and internal transitioning students. Previous research and literature (Arrowsafe & Irvin, 1992; Lucey & Reay, 2000) suggest parents can positively or negatively influence the way a student perceives transition. This is dependent on the type of information parents give to students during the transition process.
7. Further investigation could be conducted into the effectiveness of transition programs which consider the primary to secondary transition as "temporal phenomena" (Akos & Galassi, 2004, p. 218) and which provide students opportunities to transition in the social, academic and organisational areas at different times.
8. Further research is needed which will provide better understanding of the socialisation experiences of internal transitioning students over the transition period. This current study found internal transitioning students present a casual attitude, pre-transition, towards the necessity of establishing new friendships post-transition. However, at post-transition they report a level of uncertainty about the development of new friendships. Further research should provide better insight into this aspect of transition for internal transitioning students.
9. An extension of this current study is required to compare the differences between expectation and reality of transition for urban and external transitioning students, which builds on the findings from research questions one and two. Additionally, this study could be further developed by comparing findings between the differences in expectation and reality for rural and urban students, as well as internal and external transitioning students.
10. Investigation should be conducted in other contexts, such as other Australian states and territories and in international settings, to compare those findings with, and deepen the understanding of, findings from this current study.

11. The findings from this study could be further developed with qualitative studies methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, which would provide greater insights and fresh perspectives to the findings of this quantitative study. Such qualitative studies methodology would allow for a richer understanding between two or more variables relating to school transitions, as well as how students and parents interpret the transition experience. Furthermore, qualitative research methodologies would ensure that the meaning of transition and associated events is not ignored and that the reader better understands how findings connect to everyday life (Bryman, 2004; Creswell, 2009; Gray, 2004; Weathington et al., 2010).

7.4 Limitations of this study

This study has a number of limitations which should be considered in extrapolating findings to students in different schools outside the research sample:

1. Students in Tasmania make the transition to secondary school at a different age from students from many other states, including Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia, and in other countries. Students in other states are likely to be a different chronological age from those making the primary to secondary transition in Tasmania, and their expectations of the transition process could vary with age and context.
2. The research samples of rural students (n=49) and internal transitioning students (n=189) were not large. Coupled with the issue of attrition, the representativeness of these findings diminishes.
3. No previous research on the transition of internal transitioning students could be found. Therefore, it was difficult to draw comparisons and confirm findings from this study.

4. The quantitative nature of this study necessitated the development of new instruments. This posed problems, in terms of the instrument's validity and reliability, as well as comparability of data.
5. The timing of questionnaire administration was complicated by the size of the study site. The administration of the Early Transition Questionnaire was in the first few days of the commencement of secondary school. This poses problems as questionnaires administered at different times may alter the quality of data being collected and raise issues about the comparability of the data.
6. The research sample was drawn from students and parents from Catholic secondary schools across Tasmania. While geographic contexts were considered, the study only involves schools within the Catholic Education system and not other educational sectors in Tasmania. This limitation must be taken into account when extrapolating findings to other educational contexts.

7.5 Final remarks

There are three distinctive contributions that this study has made to the understanding of the primary to secondary transition for rural and internal transitioning students. Firstly, the deterioration between students' expectations and actual experience of bullying, post-transition, suggest that for students in this cohort, anti-bullying programs in the primary school could have contributed to the reduced number of reported bullying incidents during the transition process. This is despite bullying having been identified in existing literature as a major concern pre-transition and a persisting concern post-transition.

Secondly, the phenomenon of an internal transition is increasing across the country. The findings from this study suggest that their expectations and experiences are unique to other transitioning students and, subsequently, transition preparation needs to be structured differently from other transitioning students.

Thirdly, although students, both rural and internal transitioning, and their parents, perceive existing transition programs to be adequate in meeting needs during the transition process, the findings from this study suggest that, while the organisational aspects are quickly overcome, further interventions are required for other areas, in particular the academic aspects of secondary schooling. This is confirmed from findings of previous research and literature.

It is hoped that the findings of this study, together with suggestions for future research into the primary to secondary transition for rural and internal transitioning students, will encourage further research and understanding of this important stage of education and development.

REFERENCES

- Aikins, J.W., Bierman, K.L., & Parker, J.G. (2005). Navigating the transition to junior high school: The influence of pre-transition friendship and self-esteem characteristics. *Social Development, 14*, 42-60. Retrieved May 12, 2010, from ERIC database.
- Akos, P. (2002). Student perceptions of the transition from elementary to middle school. *Professional School Counseling, 5*(5), 339-345. Retrieved August 27, 2009, from ERIC database.
- Akos, P. (2004). Advice and student agency in the transition to middle school. *Research in Middle Level Education, 27*(2), 1-11. Retrieved September 5, 2009, from ERIC database.
- Akos, P. (2006). Extracurricular participation and the transition to middle school. *Research in Middle Level Education, 29*(9), 1-9. Retrieved September 5, 2009, from ERIC database.
- Akos, P., & Galassi, J. (2004). Middle and high school transitions as viewed by students, parents and teachers. *Professional School Counseling, 7*(4), 212-222. Retrieved March 18, 2007, from ProQuest database.
- Akos, P., Hamm, J. V., Mack, S. G., & Dunaway, M. (2007). Utilizing the development influence of peers in middle school groups. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work, 32*(1), 51-60. Retrieved August 27, 2009, from ERIC database.
- Akos, P., Queen, J., & Lineberry, C. (2005). *Promoting a successful transition to middle school*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.
- Akos, P., & Martin, M. (2003). Transition groups for preparing students for middle school. *Journal for Specialists in Group Work, 28*(2), 139-154.
- Alspaugh, J. W. (1998a). Achievement loss associated with the transition to middle school and high school. *The Journal of Educational Research, 92*(1), 20-26. Retrieved March 18, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Alspaugh, J. W. (1998b). The relationship of school-to-school transitions and school size to high school dropout rates. *High School Journal, 81*(3), 164-160. Retrieved September 11, 2009, from ERIC database.

- Alspaugh, J. W., & Harting, R. (1995). Transition effects of school grade-level organization on student achievement. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 28(3), 145-149. Retrieved March 18, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Anderman, E. M., Maehr, M. L., & Midgley, C. (1999). Declining motivation after the transition to middle school: Schools can make a difference. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 32(3), 131-147.
- Anderson, L. W., Jacobs, J., Schramm, S., & Splittgerber, F. (2000). School transitions: Beginning of the end or a new beginning? *International Journal of Educational Research*, 33, 325-339.
- Arnold, M. L., Biscoe, B., Farmer, T. W., Robertson, D. L., & Shapley, K. L. (2007). *How the government defines rural has implications for education policies and practices* (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2007-No.010). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest. Retrieved February 2, 2009, from <http://ies.gov/ncee/edlabs>.
- Arrowsafe, D., & Irvin, J. (1992). Transition to a middle level school: What kids say. *Middle School Journal*, 24, 15-19.
- Arth, A. A. (1990). Moving into middle school: Concerns of transescent students. *Educational Horizons*, 68, 105-106.
- Ashton, R. (2008). Improving the transfer to secondary school: How every child's voice can matter. *Support for Learning*, 23(4), 175-182. Retrieved April 19, 2009, from ERIC database.
- Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training. (2007). *Attendance at government schools*. Retrieved June 27, 2009, from http://www.det.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/17597/AttendanceGovSchools.pdf.
- Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training. (2009). *Starting school*. Retrieved September 27, 2009, from http://www.det.act.gov.au/school_education/starting_school.

- Australian Curriculum Studies Association. (1993). *Case studies on middle schooling*. Canberra: Australian Curriculum Studies Association.
- Australian Government: *Caring for our country projects* [Image] (2010). Retrieved July 4, 2010, from www.nrm.gov.au/projects/tas/images.tas.gif.
- Baker, D. P., & Stevenson, D. L. (1986). Mothers' strategies for children's school achievement: Managing the transition to high school. *Sociology of Education*, 59, 156-166. Retrieved March 18, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Barratt, R. (1998). *Shaping middle schooling in Australia: A report on the national middle schooling project*. Canberra: Australian Curriculum Studies Association.
- Bassey, M. (1999). *Case study research in educational settings*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press. Retrieved March 18, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Bastiani, J. (1986). Going up to the big school: Parents' experience of the transition from primary to secondary schooling. In M. B. Youngman (Ed.), *Mid-schooling transfer: Problems and proposals*, (pp. 106-123). Philadelphia, PA: NFER-Nelson.
- Benner, A.D., & Graham, S. (2009). The transition to high school as a developmental process among multiethnic urban youth. *Child Development*, 80(2), 356-376.
- Berliner, B. (1993). *Adolescence, school transitions and prevention: A research-based primer*. Washington, DC: Department of Education. Retrieved March 18, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Berndt, T. J., & Hawkins, J. A. (1985). *The effects of friendships on students' adjustment after the transition to junior high school*. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago. Retrieved August 29, 2009, from ERIC database.
- Blyth, D., Bush, D., & Simmons, R. (1978). The transition into early adolescence: A longitudinal comparison of youth in two educational contexts. *Sociology of Education*, 51, 149-162.
- Blyth, W. A. L. (1980). Middle schools and the historical perspective. In A. Hargreaves & L. Tickle (Eds.), *Middle schools: Origins, ideology and practice*, (pp. 20-31). London: Harper & Row.

- Borg, W. R., & Gall, M. D. (1989). *Educational research: An introduction* (5th ed.). New York: Longman.
- Braggett, E. (1997). *The middle years of schooling: An Australian perspective*. Cheltenham, Vic: Hawker Brownlow Education.
- Brown, J. M., & Armstrong, R. (1982). The structure of pupils worries during the transition from junior to secondary school. *British Educational Research*, 8(2), 123-131.
- Brown, J. M., & Armstrong, R. (1986). Transfer from junior to secondary: The child's perspective. In M. B. Youngman (Ed.), *Mid-schooling transfer: Problems and proposals*, (pp. 29-46). Philadelphia, PA: NFER-Nelson.
- Bryman, A. (2004) *Social research methods* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burns, R. B. (1997). *Introduction to research methods* (3rd ed.). Melbourne: Longman Chesire.
- Butts, M.J., & Cruzeiro, P.A. (2005). Student perceptions of factors leading to an effective transition from eighth to ninth grade. *American Secondary Education*, 34(1), 70-80. Retrieved September 9, 2009, from ProQuest database.
- Capel, S., Zwozdiak-Myers, P., & Lawrence. (2007). The transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school: A case study of a foundation subject: physical education. *Research in Education*, 77, 14-30. Retrieved December 14, 2008, from ERIC database.
- Carrington, V. (2003). Mid-term review: The middle years of schooling. *Curriculum Perspectives*, 24, 30-41.
- Carrington, V. (2006). *Rethinking middle years: Early adolescents, schooling and digital culture*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Castles, I. (1986). *Census of population and housing 30 June 1986: Catalogue of 1986 census tables: Edition 1*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- Catterall, J. S. (1998). Risk and resilience in student transitions to high school. *American Journal of Education*, 106, 302-333.
- Chadbourne, R. (2001). *Middle schooling for the middle years: What might the jury be considering?* Melbourne : Australian Education Union. Retrieved September 17, 2009, from <http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Publications/Middleschooling.pdf>.

- Chapman, M., & Sawyer, J. (2001). Bridging the gap for students at risk of school failure: A social work-initiated middle to high school transition program. *Children and Schools*, 23(4). Retrieved September 5, 2009, from ERIC database.
- Chedzoy, S. M., & Burden, R. L. (2005). Making the move: Assessing student attitudes to primary-secondary school transfer. *Research in Education*, 74, 22-35. Retrieved November 15, 2008, from ERIC database.
- Cheers, B. (1987). *Rural disadvantage in Australia*. Unpublished paper. Townsville, Qld: School of Behavioural Sciences, James Cook University, 1-28.
- Chung, H., Elias, M., & Schneider, K. (1998). Patterns of individual adjustment changes during the middle school transition. *Journal of School Psychology*, 36, 83-101.
- Cocklin, B. (1999). *A Journey of transition: From Gumly Gumly Public to secondary school*. Paper presented at the Joint Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education and the New Zealand Association for Research in Education, Melbourne, Vic. Retrieved March 18, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Cohen, J.S., & Smerdon, B.A. (2009). Tightening the dropout tourniquet: Easing the transition from middle to high school. *Preventing School Failure*, 53(3), 177-184.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education* (6th ed.). London: Routledge.
- Commonwealth School Commission (1987). *Schooling in rural Australia*. Canberra: Curriculum Development Centre.
- Corby, P. (2003). *The virtual bridge*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Federation for the Teaching of English, Melbourne, Vic. Retrieved April 2, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Cormack, P. (1996). *From alienation to engagement: Opportunities for reform in the middle years of schooling. Vol. 2*. Canberra: Australian Curriculum Studies Association.
- Cotterell, J. (1979). Expectations and realities: A study of transition from primary to secondary school. *The Australian Journal of Education*, 23(1), 21-31.

- Cotterell, J. (1986). The adjustment of early adolescent youngsters to secondary school: Some Australian findings. In M. B. Youngman (Ed.), *Mid-schooling transfer: Problems and proposals*, (pp. 66-86). Philadelphia, PA: NFER-Nelson.
- Creswell, J.W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Crockett, L., Peterson, A., Graber, J., Schulenberg, J., & Ebata, A. (1989). School transitions and adjustment during early adolescence. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 9, 181-210. Retrieved September 18, 2009, from <http://jea.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/9/3/181>.
- Crosnoe, R. (2009). Family-school connections and the transitions of low-income youths and English language learners from middle school to high school. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(4), 1061-1076.
- Cumming, J. (1996). *From alienation to engagement: Opportunities for reform in the middle years of schooling. Vol. 1*. Canberra: Australian Curriculum Studies Association.
- Cunningham, R., Choate, J., Abbot-Chapman, J., & Hughes, P. (c.1995). *Rural disadvantage and post compulsory participation*. [Hobart], Tas: Department of Employment, Education and Training.
- Department of Education, Employment and Training. (2002). *Middle years research and development project*. Report to the Learning and Teaching Innovation Division, Department of Education and Training by the Centre for Applied Educational Research Faculty of Education, The University of Melbourne.
- Department of Education, Science and Training. (2005). *Boosting innovation, science, technology and mathematics teaching*. External programme guidelines 2004-05 to 2010-11. Retrieved September 12, 2009, from <http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/435AD2FB-503C-4C84-9994-58825495C21E/5228/BISTMTProgrammeguidelines1.pdf>.
- Diemert, A. (1992). *A needs assessment of fifth grade students in a middle school*. Acton, MA: Author. (ERIC Document No. ED 362 332).

- Dornbusch, S. M., Ritter, P. L., Leiderman, P. H., Roberts, D. F., & Fraleigh, M. J. (1987). The relation of parenting style to adolescent school performance. *Child Development*, 58, 1244-1257.
- Dowling, J. (1986). Predicting adjustment after transfer to secondary school. In M. B. Youngman (Ed.), *Mid-schooling transfer: Problems and proposals*, (pp. 87- 106). Philadelphia, PA: NFER-Nelson.
- Dwyer, P. (1996). *Opting out: Early school leavers*. Hobart, Tas: National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies.
- Eccles, J. S., Wigfield, A., Reuman, D., Mac Iver, D., & Feldlaufer, H. (1993). Negative effects of traditional middle schools on students' motivation. *The Elementary School Journal*, 93(5), 553-574.
- Education Department of Tasmania. (1942). *The Tasmanian Area School*. Hobart, Tas: H. H. Pimblett, Government Printer.
- Education Department of Tasmania. (1971). *The educational needs of rural areas: Report of the Committee on Educational Needs of Rural Areas*. Hobart, Tas: Education Department of Tasmania.
- Education Department of Tasmania. (1978). *The future of district schools in Tasmania: Report of the District Schools Committee to the Minister for Education*. Hobart, Tas: Education Department of Tasmania.
- Elias, M. J., Gara, M., & Ubriaco, M. (1985). Sources of stress and support in children's transition to middle school: An empirical analysis. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 14(2), 112-118.
- Falbo, T., Lein, L., & Amador, N.A. (2001). Parental involvement during the transition to high school. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 16(5), 511-529. Retrieved September 21, 2009, from <http://jar.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/16/5/511>.
- Fan, X., & Chen, M. (1999). Academic achievement of rural school students: A multi-year comparison with their peers in suburban and urban schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 15(1), 31-46.

- Felner, R., Brand, S., Adan, A., Mulhall, P., Flowers, N., Sartain, B., et al. (1993). Restructuring the ecology of the school as an approach to prevention during school transitions: Longitudinal follow-ups and extensions of the School Transition Environment Project (STEP). *Prevention in Human Services, 10*, 103-136.
- Fischer, V. (1995). Bigger isn't always better: Meeting the challenges of transition in rural communities. *Reaching to the future: Boldly facing challenges in rural communities*. Conference proceedings of the American Council on Rural Special Education. Las Vegas, NV. Retrieved April 2, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Galassi, J., & Akos, P. (2007). *Strengths-based school counseling: Promoting student development and achievement*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Galton, M., & Morrison, I. (2000). Concluding comments. Transfer and transition: The next steps. *International Journal of Educational Research, 33*, 443-449. Retrieved March 18, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Galton, M., Morrison, I., & Pell, T. (2000). Transfer and transition in English schools: Reviewing the evidence. *International Journal of Educational Research, 33*, 341-363. Retrieved March 18, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Gillison, F., Standage, M., & Skevington, S. (2008). Changes in quality of life and psychological need satisfaction following the transition to secondary school. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 78*, 149-162. Retrieved April 9, 2009, from ERIC database.
- Gold, E., Evans, S.A., Haxton, C., Maluk, H., Mitchell, C., Simon, E., & Good, D. (2010). *Transition to high school: School "choice" and freshman year in Philadelphia*. Research for Action. Retrieved May 18, 2010, from ERIC database.
- Graber, J. A., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (1996). Transitions and turning points: Navigating the passage from childhood through adolescence. *Developmental Psychology, 32*(4), 768-776.
- Graham, C., & Hill, M. (2003). Negotiating the transition to secondary school. *SCRE Spotlight, 89*. Retrieved March 18, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Gray, D.E. (2004). *Doing research in the real world*. London: SAGE publications Ltd.

- Griffith, D. (1992). Quantifying access to services in remote and rural Australia. In *Education, Equity and the Crisis in the Rural Community*, (pp. 51-65). Proceedings of the Rural Education Research Association Conference. Darwin, NT: NTU. Retrieved March 18, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Groome, H., & Hamilton, A. (1995). *Meeting the educational needs of Aboriginal adolescents*. Canberra: National Board of Employment, Education and Training.
- Grossman, J.B., & Cooney, S.M. (2009). Paving the way for success in high school and beyond: The importance of preparing middle school students for the transition to ninth grade. *GroundWork*. Retrieved April 12, 2010, from ERIC database.
- Groundwater-Smith, S., Mitchell, J., & Mockler, N. (2007). *Learning in the middle years: More than a transition*. Melbourne: Thomson.
- Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., Anderson, R. E., & Tatham, R. L. (2006). *Multivariate data analysis* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Hargreaves, A., & Earl, L. (1990). *Rights of passage: A review of selected research about schooling in the transition years*. A research study commissioned by the Ontario Ministry of Education. [Toronto], ON: Ministry of Education.
- Hargreaves, A., & Tickle, L. (1980). Emerging issues in middle schools. In A. Hargreaves & L. Tickle (Eds.), *Middle schools: Origins, ideology and practice*, (pp. 1-13). London: Harper & Row.
- Hargreaves, A. (1986). *Two cultures of schooling: The case of middle schools*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Hemphill, R. (1996). *Secondary school transition: Planning for success*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of children and adults with Attention Deficit Disorders. Chicago, IL. Retrieved April 22, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Hertzog, C. J., & Morgan, P. L. (1997). From middle school to high school: Ease the transition. *The Education Digest*, 62(7), 29-31. Retrieved September 9, 2009, from ERIC database.

- Hertzog, C. J., & Morgan, P. L. (1998). Breaking the barriers between middle school and high school: Developing a transition team for student success. *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin*, 82, 94-98. Retrieved September 11, 2009, from ProQuest database.
- Hill, P. (1995) *The middle years of schooling*. Melbourne: Centre for Applied Education and Research, University of Melbourne.
- Hirsch, B., & Rapkin, B. (1987). The transition to junior high school: A longitudinal study of self-esteem, psychological symptomatology, school life and social support. *Child Development*, 58, 1235-1243. Retrieved April 22, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Howard, S., & Johnson, B. (2004). *Transition from primary to secondary school: Possibilities and paradoxes*. Conference paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education. Retrieved March 4, 2009, from <http://www.aare.edu.au/04pap/how04184.pdf>.
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. (2001). *Emerging themes: National inquiry into rural and remote education*. Retrieved February 3, 2009, from http://www.humanrights.gov.au/pdf/human_rights/rural_remote/emerging_themes.pdf
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. (2000). *National enquiry into rural and remote education: Recommendations*. Retrieved February 3, 2009, from http://www.hreoc.gov.au/pdf/human_rights/rural_remote/tassub1.pdf.
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. (2001). *Rural and remote education: Tasmania: Submission from the Tasmanian Catholic Education Commission*. Retrieved February 3, 2009, from http://www.hreoc.gov.au/Human_RightS/rural_education/tas/cec.html.
- Independent Schools Council of Australia (2009). *Independent schooling in Australia: Snapshot 2008: The independent schools sector*. Retrieved May 13, 2010, from <http://www.isca.edu.au>.
- Isakson, K., & Jarvis, P. (1999). The adjustment of adolescents during the transition into high school: A short-term longitudinal study. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 28(1), 1-26. Retrieved September 11, 2009, from ProQuest database.

- Jackson, A. W., & Davis, G. (2000). *Turning points 2000: Educating adolescents in the 21st century*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Johnstone, K. (2001). *The lived reality of the transition to high school for rural students*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Freemantle, WA. Retrieved March 4, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Johnstone, K. (2002). *The transition to high school: A journey of uncertainty*. Paper presented at the Australian Association of Research in Education Conference, Brisbane, Qld. Retrieved January 10, 2009, from ERIC database.
- Kagan, S., & Neuman, M. (1998). Lessons from three decades of transition research. *Elementary School Journal*, 98(4), 365-379.
- Kinney, D. A. (1993). From nerds to normal: The recovery of identity among adolescents from middle school to high school. *Sociology of Education*, 66(1), 21-40. Retrieved September 11, 2009, from JSTOR database.
- Knipe, S., & Johnstone, K. (2007). Problematising middle schooling for middle schools and middle years education. In S. Knipe (Ed.), *Middle years schooling: reframing adolescence*, (pp. 3-20). Frenchs Forest: Pearson Education Australia.
- Koizumi, R. (2000). Anchor points in transition to a new school environment. *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 20(3), 175-187. Retrieved September 5, 2009, from ProQuest database.
- Langenkamp, A.G. (2009). Following different pathways: Social integration, achievement, and the transition to high school. *American Journal of Education*, 16, 69-97. Retrieved May 12, 2010, from ERIC database.
- Lazarus, R., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. New York: Springer.
- Lohaus, A., Elben, C., Ball, J., & Klein-Hessling, J. (2004). School transition from elementary to secondary school: Changes in psychological adjustment, in *Educational Psychology*, 24(2), 161-175.
- Longaretti, L. (2006). *School transition: Aspirations and inspirations*. Paper presented at the AARE Conference, Adelaide, SA. Retrieved March 4, 2009 from <http://www.aare.edu.au/06pap/lon06697.pdf>.

- Lucey, H., & Reay, D. (2000). Identities in transition: Anxiety and excitement in the move to secondary school. *Oxford Review of Education*, 26(2), 191-208. Retrieved March 13, 2007, from ProQuest database.
- McKenzie, P., Harrold, R., & Sturman, A. (1996). *Curriculum provision in rural secondary schools*. The Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd. Melbourne, Vic.
- Mac Iver, D. J., & Epstein, J. L. (1990). Responsive education in the middle grades: Teacher teams, advisory groups, remedial instruction, school transition programs, and report card entries. *American Journal of Education*, 99, 587-622.
- Maute, J., & Brough, J. A. (2002). The next best step: Helping our students transition "out". *Middle Ground*, 6(1). Retrieved September 11, 2009, from http://www.nmsa.org/portals/0/pdf/publications/On_Target/transitioning_hs/transitioning_hs_1.pdf.
- Measor, L., & Woods, P. (1984). *Changing schools*. Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press.
- Meyenn, R., Sinclair, R., & Squires, D. (1991). Teachers in rural schools. In R. Maclean & P. McKenzie (Eds.), *Australian teachers' careers*, (pp. 138-158). Hawthorn, Vic: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Ministerial Advisory Council on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs. (2008). *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. Retrieved August 1, 2009, from http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf.
- Ministerial Advisory Council on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs. (1999). *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*. Retrieved September 20, 2009, from http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/adelaide_declaration_1999_text,28298.html.
- Ministerial Advisory Council on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs. (1989). *Hobart Declaration on schooling*. Retrieved September 20, 2009, from http://www.mceetya.edu.au/mceecdya/hobart_declaration,11577.html.

- Mitman, A. L., & Packer, M. J. (1982). Concerns of seventh-graders about their transition to junior high school. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 2(4), 319-338. Retrieved September 18, 2009, from <http://jea.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/2/4/319>.
- Mizelle, N. B. (2005). Moving out of middle school. *Educational Leadership*, 62(7), 56. Retrieved March 19, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Mizelle, N. B. & Irvin, J. L. (2000). Transition from middle school into high school. *Middle school journal*, 31(5), 1-8. Retrieved August 27, 2009, from <http://www.nmsa.org>.
- Montgomery, D., Bull, K., & Cutbirth, D. (1995). *Creativity in rural special education settings: An example with transition*. Paper presented at the 1995 Conference proceedings of the American Council on Rural Special Education, Las Vegas, NV. Retrieved March 19, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Morgan, P. L., & Hertzog, C. J. (2001). Designing comprehensive transitions. *Principal Leadership*, 1(7), 10-16. Retrieved September 11, 2009, from ProQuest database.
- Muijs, D. (2004). *Doing quantitative research in education with SPSS*. London: Sage Publications Incorporated.
- Nachtigal, P. (1992). Rural schooling: Obsolete or harbinger of the future? *Rural Education Newsletter*, 3(1), 4-5. Retrieved March 19, 2007, from ERIC database.
- National Board of Employment, Education and Training. (1991). *Toward a national education and training strategy for rural Australians*. Canberra: AGPS.
- New South Wales Department of Education. (1957). *Report of the committee appointed to survey secondary education*. (Chairman: H. S. Wyndham). Sydney: Government Printer.
- New South Wales Department of Education and Training. (2004). *Excellence and innovation*. Sydney: NSW Department of Education and Training.

- New South Wales Department of Education and Training. (2005). *One size doesn't fit all. Report of the consultation on future directions for public education and training*. Sydney: NSW Department of Education and Training. Retrieved November 12, 2009, from https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/reviews/futuresproject/report/z_futures_report.pdf.
- New South Wales Department of Education and Training. (2009). *Leaving school*. Retrieved June 27, 2009, from http://www.det.nsw.edu.au/leavingschool/year_10.php.
- New South Wales Education Commission. (1984). *Listening and responding: A review of education in rural New South Wales*. Sydney: Education Commission.
- Northern Territory Department of Education and Training. (2009). *Schooling in the Northern Territory*. Retrieved June 27, 2009, from http://www.det.nt.gov.au/education/parents/schooling_in_nt.shtml.
- Northern Territory Department of Education and Training. (2009). *Early years*. Retrieved June 27, 2009, from <http://www.det.nt.gov.au/parents-community/schooling/stages-of-schooling/early-years>.
- Odegaard, S. L., & Heath, J. A. (1992). Assisting the elementary school student in the transition to a middle level school. *Middle School Journal, 24*, 21-25.
- Osterman, K. F. (2000). Students' needs for belonging in the school community. *Review of Educational Research, 70*(3), 323-367. Retrieved August 29, 2009, from ProQuest database.
- Paulson, S. E. (1994). Relations of parenting style and parental involvement with ninth-grade students' achievement. *The Journal of Early Adolescence, 14*, 250-267. Retrieved September 18, 2009, from <http://jea.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/14/2/250>.
- Pellegrini, A. D., & Long, J. D. (2002). A longitudinal study of bullying and dominance and victimization during the transition from primary school through secondary school. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology, 20*, 259-280.

- Pendergast, D., Flanagan, R., Land, R., Bahr, M., Mitchell, J., Weir, K., et al. (2005). *Developing lifelong learners in the middle years of schooling: A report about the practices, processes, strategies and structures that best promote 'lifelong learning' and the development of 'lifelong learners' in the middle years of schooling*. Brisbane, Qld: The State of Queensland (Department of Education and the Arts).
- Pereira, A., & Pooley, J. (2007). A qualitative exploration of the transition experience of students from a high school to a senior high school in rural Western Australia. *Australian Journal of Education, 51*, 162-177. Retrieved May 27, 2009, from ProQuest database.
- Perkins, P., & Gelfer, J. (1995). Elementary to middle school: Planning for transition. *The Clearing House, 68*, 171-173. Retrieved August 29, 2009, from ProQuest database.
- Phelan, P., Cao, H. T., & Davidson, A. L. (1992). *Navigating the psycho/social pressures of adolescence: The voices and experiences of high school youth*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA. Retrieved March 18, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Pietarinen, J. (1998). *Rural school students' experiences on the transition from primary school to secondary school*. Paper presented at the European Conference for Educational Research, Ljubljana, Slovenia. Retrieved March 18, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Plowden Report. (1967). *Children and their primary school. Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England)*. London: HMSO.
- Pratt, S., & George, R. (2004). Transferring friendships: Girls' and boys' friendships in the transition from primary to secondary school. *Children & Society, 19*, 16-26. Retrieved June 13, 2009, from ERIC database.
- Prescott, K. (Ed.). (1995). *Teaching prosocial behaviour to adolescents: Directory of process and programs*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.
- Punch, K. F. (1998). *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. London: SAGE Publications.

- Queensland Education. (2004). *The middle phase of learning state school action plan*. Retrieved March 20, 2008, from <http://education.qld.gov.au/tal/curriculumshase/teacher.wa.students.html>.
- Queensland Government. (2008). *Senior phase of learning: Education and training for 15 to 17 year olds*. Retrieved June 10, 2009, from <http://education.qld.gov.au/etrf/senior.html>.
- Queensland Government. (2009). *Get set for Preparatory*. Retrieved October 10, 2009, from http://education.qld.gov.au/studentservices/inclusive/preparatory/docs/preparatory_info_sheet.pdf.
- Reay, D., & Ball, S. J. (1998). 'Making their minds up': Family dynamics of school choice. *British Educational Research Journal*, 24(4), 431-449.
- Reynolds, K. (2005). *The fourth grade experience: Insights toward the transition to middle school*. [Online submission, 20pp.]. (ERIC Document No. ED491409). Retrieved March 19, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Rudolph, K.D., Lambert, S.F., Clark, A.G., & Kurlakowsky, K.D. (2001). Negotiating the transition to middle school: The role of the self-regulatory process. *Child Development*, 72(3), 929-946. Retrieved April 28, 2010, from ERIC database.
- Schielack, J., & Seeley, C.L. (2010). Transitions from elementary to middle school math. *Teaching children mathematics*. Retrieved April 27, 2010, from www.nctm.org.
- Schiller, K. S. (1999). Effects of feeder patterns on students' transition to high school. *Sociology of Education*, 72(4), 216-233. Retrieved September 11, 2009, from ProQuest database.
- Schools Council. (1992). *The middle years of schooling (Years 6-10): A discussion paper*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.
- Schools Council. (1993). *In the middle: Schooling for young adolescents*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.
- Schumacher, D. (1998). The transition to middle school. *ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education*. (ERIC Document No. ED422119). Retrieved March 19, 2007, from ERIC database.

- Shacher, H., Suss, G., & Sharan, S. (2002). Students' concern about the transition from elementary to junior high school: A comparison of two cities. *Research Papers in Education*, 17(1), 79-95. Retrieved March 19, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Simmons, R. G., Burgeson, R., Carlton-Ford, S., & Blyth, D. A. (1987). The impact of cumulative change in early adolescence. *Child Development*, 58, 1220-1234.
- Smith, J. S., Akos, P., Lim, S., & Wiley, S. (2008). Student and stakeholder perceptions of the transition to high school. *The High School Journal*, 9(3), 32-42. Retrieved September 4, 2009, from ERIC database.
- South Australia Department of Education and Children's Services. (2009). *Compulsory education age*. Retrieved June 27, 2009, from <http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/portal/community.asp?group=matters&id=compedage>.
- South Australia Department of Education and Children's Services. (2009). *Starting school*. Retrieved June 27, 2009, from <http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/portal/community.asp?group=matters&id=startingschool>.
- Starr, K., & White, S. (2008). The small rural school principalship: Key challenges and cross-school responses. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 23(5), 1-12. Retrieved February 13, 2009 from <http://www.jrre.psu.edu/articles/23-5.pdf>.
- Summerfield, M. (1986). Academic performance after transfer. In M.B. Youngman (Ed.), *Mid-schooling transfer: Problems and proposals*, (pp. 11-28). Philadelphia, PA: NFER-Nelson.
- Swidler, S. A. (2000). Notes on a country school tradition: Recitation as an individual strategy. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 16(1), 8-21.
- Tasmania Department of Education. (2005). *Essential learnings: A curriculum for the 21st century*. Retrieved September 23, 2009, from <http://www.education.tas.gov.au/annualreport/04-05/pre-compulsory/essentiallearnings>.
- Tasmania Department of Education. (2008). *What has changed and why?* Retrieved September 23, 2009, from <http://www.education.tas.gov.au/curriculum/changes>.

- Tasmania Department of Education. (2009). *Starting and leaving ages*. Retrieved June 27, 2009, from <http://www.education.tas.gov.au/school/parents/starting/starting-and-leaving-ages>.
- Tedlock, B. (2000). Ethnography and ethnographic representation. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, (pp. 455-486). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ticehurst, G. W., & Veal, A. J. (2000). *Business research methods: A managerial approach*. Frenchs Forest, NSW: Pearson Education Pty Limited.
- Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. (2008). *Leaving school before end of Year 12*. Retrieved June 28, 2009, from <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/aboutschool/leaving/default.htm#H2N1007C>.
- Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. (2009). *Stages at school*. Retrieved June 28, 2009, from <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/aboutschool/stages/default.htm>.
- Victorian Department of Education and Training. (2006). *School organisation*. Retrieved March, 17, 2009, from <http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/mys/pdf.MYMSchoolOrganisation.pdf>.
- Weathington, B.L., Cunningham, C.J., & Pittenger, D.J. (2010). *Research methods for the behavioral and social sciences*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Weller, S. (2007). 'Sticking with your mates?' Children's friendship trajectories during the transition from primary to secondary school. *Children & Society*, 21, 339-351. Retrieved June 13, 2009, from ERIC database.
- Wellington, J. (2000). *Educational research: Contemporary issues and practical approaches*. London: Continuum.
- Western Australia Department of Education and Training. (2009a). *Raised leaving age*. Retrieved June 10, 2009, from <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolleavingage/detcms/navigation/parents/?oid=Article-id-339027>.

Western Australia Department of Education and Training. (2009b). *Primary schooling*.

Retrieved September 10, 2009, from

<http://www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolsandyou/detcms/navigation/parents-and-community/schooling/>.

Wigfield, A., Eccles, J., Mac Iver, D., Reuman, D., & Midgley, C. (1991). Transitions during early adolescence: Changes in children's domain-specific self-perceptions and general self-esteem across the transition to junior high school. *Developmental Psychology*, 27(4), 552-565. Retrieved March 13, 2007, from OVID database.

Worsley, M. K. (1986). Parental reactions to an induction programme. In M. B. Youngman (Ed.), *Mid-schooling transfer: Problems and proposals*, (pp. 124-136). Philadelphia, PA: NFER – Nelson.

Youngman, M. B. (1978). Six reactions to school transfer. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 48, 280-289.

Youngman, M. B. (1986). Editorial review. In M. B. Youngman (Ed.), *Mid-schooling transfer: Problems and proposals*, (pp. 137-140). Philadelphia, PA: NFER-Nelson.

LEGISLATION

Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act 1900 (Cwlth), Ch. 1, V. Retrieved June 10, 2009, from <http://australianpolitics.com/articles/constitution/full-text-of-the-australian-constitution-as-amended#ch5>

APPENDIX 1: Approval letter from the Tasmanian Catholic Education Office



CATHOLIC
education office
HOBART

20 August 2008

Sally Towns
20 Kellatie Road
ROSNY 7018

Dear Sally

I am writing in response to your letter of 14 August 2008 seeking permission to research primary-secondary transition in Tasmanian Catholic Schools.

I have read the information provided by you and am happy to provide 'in principle' approval. Please note, however, that it is up to the individual school to determine whether they wish to participate. I also note that the model of implied consent may be utilised to enable 'in class' completion of the survey.

Please also be advised that a considerable number of research requests have been recently approved and it is possible that some schools might not be in a position to co-operate with this study.

Please accept my best wishes for the survey and do not hesitate to contact this office if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dan White".

Dr Dan White
Director

dw jm

APPENDIX 2: Letter to college principals

Sally Towns
20 Kellatie Road
Rosny 7018
Ph: 0488225211
stowns@mackillop.tas.edu.au

The Principal
[*Insert college name*]
[*Insert college address*]

Dear [*Insert principal's name*]

As part of a Doctor of Education degree I am hoping to conduct some research in your school. The research has been granted ethics approval by Southern Cross University (approval number: ECN-08-047) and CEO approval (see attached letter). The details of the project are outlined below.

Name of Project

Measuring Up: An examination of the expectations and realities of rural students during the primary-secondary transition.

Current Year 7 students and their parents are invited to participate in a study that examines the transition of Year 6 students into Year 7. We hope to establish whether rural students' expectations of the primary-secondary transition process were realised, to compare their experiences with students from urban areas and to gauge the influences of other factors, such as parents, siblings and transition programs, on their lived realities.

Procedures to be Followed

Student participants will be invited to complete two survey questionnaires. The first questionnaire will be conducted within the first week of students beginning their secondary education (February 2009). This questionnaire will focus on student expectations of the transition process. Parent participants will also be invited to complete a survey questionnaire that measures parent perspectives about their child's experiences of the transition into secondary school.

Each survey should not take more than ten minutes to complete.

The second survey questionnaire will be held in May 2009 and will focus on actual experiences of secondary school. The procedure will be similar to the first round of surveys.

Possible Discomforts and Risks

None

Responsibilities of the Researcher

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and kept securely. All surveys are completed anonymously.

Freedom of Consent

If students and parents/caregivers decide to participate, they are free to withdraw their consent and to discontinue participation at any time.

Timeframe

The research will be conducted in two phases.

Phase 1 (Early transition): It is anticipated that data will be collected in February 2009 from students and parents.

Phase 2 (Late transition): It is anticipated that data will be collected in May 2009 from students.

Inquiries

If you have any additional questions at any time please ask:

Supervisor Details

Brian Kean
Senior Lecturer
Southern Cross University
PO Box 157
Lismore NSW 2480
02 6620 3797
bkean@scu.edu.au

If you have any complaints about the ethical conduct of this research, they should be sent in writing to:

*The Ethics Complaints Officer
Graduate Research College
Southern Cross University
PO Box 157
Lismore NSW 2480
Email: sue.kelly@scu.edu.au*

I have attached a copy of the student and parent information sheets, as well as copies of the survey questionnaires for you to keep.

A copy of the final report will be made available to your college.

Please let me know, via email, your willingness to participate in the study and the number of Year 7 students enrolled for 2009. I will contact you in late 2008 to arrange delivery of the survey packages.

Yours sincerely
Sally Towns

APPENDIX 3: Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) notification

**HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HREC)
NOTIFICATION**

To: Dr B. Kean/S. Towns
School of Education
brian.kean@scu.edu.au,ross.towns@bigpond.com

From: Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee
Graduate Research College, R. Block

Date: 28 May 2008

Project: Measuring Up: An examination of the expectations and realities of rural students during the primary-secondary transition.

Status: **Approval Number ECN-08-047**

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HREC)

At the meeting of the HREC on 19 May, this resubmission to the Deputy Chair was further considered.

This application is now approved subject to some special conditions and the usual standard conditions of approval.

Compliance to any special conditions should be within one month of this approval. Please respond to the special conditions listed below. There is also a certification attached after this letter for return to the Secretary.

The HREC reserves the right to rescind the approval number if the special conditions are left unanswered.

Special Conditions

1. The email address for Sue Kelly should read:

sue.kelly@scu.edu.au

There is a *comma* after sue in your documentation. Please correct and forward corrected information to Sue Kelly.

See attached information sheets for corrections (student and parent/caregiver)

2. Please confirm that you will forward the DET approval for this research project to

Sue Kelly when it has been processed. There is a sign-off document required for DET from SCU. The Secretary of the HREC will provide this when requested. If you require a further letter for DET, addressed specifically to them, please provide the appropriate address details for this correspondence to the Secretary.

See Special Condition #5.

4. The schools involved in this research project should be notified that the research has been granted ethics approval by Southern Cross University and be given the ethics approval number. Please clarify how you will do this and forward any information that will include this.

See attached information sheets and Principal letter for this information.

5. Please confirm that you will provide the HREC with any changes in protocol for this research project.

Having discussed my research with my supervisor (Dr Brian Kean) we have decided to make a change to the list of schools in which this research will be conducted. Having recently moved to Hobart, Tasmania we have decided that it would be advantageous to conduct research in all the Catholic secondary schools in Tasmania (see attached list). As Catholic Secondary schools act independently in this Diocese approval will need only come from individual schools and not from the Catholic Education Office. Subsequently I will not need to gain DET approval (see Special Condition #2).

I have attached a copy of the letter to be sent to each school, outlining the details of the research.

The advantages of this change include:

- *a larger pool of data will be collected (1000+)*
- *more accessible for the researcher*
- *reduces the cost to the researcher*
- *provides a state focus, rather than a local focus to the research*

LIST OF RESEARCH SCHOOLS (SECONDARY) IN TASMANIA

Dominic College
204 Tolosa St
Glenorchy 7010 (03) 6272 5011

Mt Carmel College
361 Sandy Bay Road
Sandy Bay 7005 (03) 6216 7900

Sacred Heart College
2 Cross Street
New Town 7008 (03) 9228 4090

St James' College
25 Mary Street
Cygnets 7112 (03) 6295 1541

St Mary's College
164 Harrington St
Hobart 7000 (03) 6234 3381

Marist Regional College
Paraka Street
Burnie 7320 (03) 6424 7622

St Brendan-Shaw College
127 James Street
Devonport 7250 (03) 6341 9988

MacKillop College
Goondi Street
Mornington 7018 (03) 6245 0099

St Virgil's College
195 Main Road
Austins Ferry 7011 (03) 6249 2784

Standard Conditions in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Statement) (NS).

- 1. Monitoring**
NS 5.5.1 – 5.5.10

Responsibility for ensuring that research is reliably monitored lies with the institution under which the research is conducted. Mechanisms for monitoring can include:

- (a) reports from researchers;
- (b) reports from independent agencies (such as a data and safety monitoring board);
- (c) review of adverse event reports;
- (d) random inspections of research sites, data, or consent documentation; and
- (e) interviews with research participants or other forms of feedback from them.

The following should be noted:

- (a) All ethics approvals are valid for **12 months** unless specified otherwise. If research is continuing after 12 months, then the ethics approval **MUST** be renewed. Complete the Annual Report/Renewal form and send to the Secretary of the HREC.
- (b) *NS 5.5.5*
Generally, the researcher/s **provide a report every 12 months** on the progress to date or outcome in the case of completed research specifically including:
 - The maintenance and security of the records.
 - Compliance with the approved proposal
 - Compliance with any conditions of approval.
 - Any changes of protocol to the research.

Note: Compliance to the reporting is **mandatory** to the approval of this research.

- (c) Specifically, that the researchers report immediately and notify the HREC, in writing, for approval of **any change in protocol**. *NS 5.5.3*
- (d) That a report is sent to HREC when the **project has been completed**.
- (e) That the researchers report immediately any circumstance that might affect ethical acceptance of the research protocol. *NS 5.5.3*
- (f) That the researchers report immediately any serious adverse events/effects on participants. *NS 5.5.3*

2. **Research conducted overseas**

NS 4.8.1 – 4.8.21

That, if research is conducted in a country other than Australia, all research protocols for that country are followed ethically and with appropriate cultural sensitivity.

3. Complaints

NS 5.6.1 – 5.6.7

Institutions may receive complaints about researchers or the conduct of research, or about the conduct of a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) or other review body.

Complaints may be made by participants, researchers, staff of institutions, or others. All complaints should be handled promptly and sensitively.

Complaints about the ethical conduct of this research should be addressed in writing to the following:

Ethics Complaints Officer
HREC
Southern Cross University
PO Box 157
Lismore, NSW, 2480
Email: sue.kelly@scu.edu.au

All complaints are investigated fully and according to due process under the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and this University. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and you will be informed of the outcome.

All participants in research conducted by Southern Cross University should be advised of the above procedure and be given a copy of the contact details for the Complaints Officer. They should also be aware of the ethics approval number issued by the Human Research Ethics Committee.

Sue Kelly
Secretary, HREC
Graduate Research College
Ph: +61 +2 6626 9139
sue.kelly@scu.edu.au

A/Prof Baden Offord
Chair, HREC
Ph: +61 +2 6620 3162
baden.offord@scu.edu.au

COMPLIANCE TO SPECIAL CONDITIONS CERTIFICATION

Approval ECN-08-047

Kean/Towns

School of Education

Measuring Up: An examination of the expectations and realities of rural students during the primary-secondary transition.

If special conditions have been imposed, you must complete this and return it to the Secretary of the HREC within one month of this approval.

I certify that the special conditions outlined in the have been fully met, any requested documentation is attached, and that the standard conditions will be met.

Name and Signature of Principal Investigator/Supervisor and/or the researcher:

.....

Date:

.....

Date:

**HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HREC)
NOTIFICATION**

To: Dr Brian Kean/Ms Sally Towns
School of Education
brian.kean@scu.edu.au, stowns@mackillop.tas.edu.au

From: Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee
Division of Research, R. Block

Date: 25 June 2009

Project: Measuring UP: An examination of the expectations and realities of rural students during the primary-secondary transition.
Old Approval Number ECN-08-047
New Approval Number ECN-09-082

Your application for renewal of your research project was considered at the HREC meeting on the 22 June 2009.

This has been approved and your research may continue with this current approval number.

The approval is subject to the mandatory standard conditions of approval. Please note these and inform the HREC when the project is completed or if there are any changes of protocol.

Standard Conditions in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Statement) (*NS*).

1. Monitoring

NS 5.5.1 – 5.5.10

Responsibility for ensuring that research is reliably monitored lies with the institution under which the research is conducted. Mechanisms for monitoring can include:

- (a) reports from researchers;
- (b) reports from independent agencies (such as a data and safety monitoring board);
- (c) review of adverse event reports;
- (d) random inspections of research sites, data, or consent documentation; and
- (e) interviews with research participants or other forms of feedback from them.

The following should be noted:

- (c) All ethics approvals are valid for **12 months** unless specified otherwise. If research is continuing after 12 months, then the ethics approval **MUST** be renewed. Complete the Annual Report/Renewal form and send to the Secretary of the HREC.
- (d) *NS 5.5.5*
Generally, the researcher/s **provide a report every 12 months** on the progress to date or outcome in the case of completed research specifically including:
- The maintenance and security of the records.
 - Compliance with the approved proposal
 - Compliance with any conditions of approval.
 - Any changes of protocol to the research.

Note: Compliance to the reporting is **mandatory** to the approval of this research.

- (c) Specifically, that the researchers report immediately and notify the HREC, in writing, for approval of **any change in protocol**. *NS 5.5.3*
- (d) That a report is sent to HREC when the **project has been completed**.
- (e) That the researchers report immediately any circumstance that might affect ethical acceptance of the research protocol. *NS 5.5.3*
- (g) That the researchers report immediately any serious adverse events/effects on participants. *NS 5.5.3*

4. Research conducted overseas

NS 4.8.1 – 4.8.21

That, if research is conducted in a country other than Australia, all research protocols for that country are followed ethically and with appropriate cultural sensitivity.

5. Complaints

NS 5.6.1 – 5.6.7

Institutions may receive complaints about researchers or the conduct of research, or about the conduct of a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) or other review body.

Complaints may be made by participants, researchers, staff of institutions, or others. All complaints should be handled promptly and sensitively.

Complaints about the ethical conduct of this research should be addressed in writing to the following:

Ethics Complaints Officer
HREC
Southern Cross University
PO Box 157
Lismore, NSW, 2480
Email: sue.kelly@scu.edu.au

All complaints are investigated fully and according to due process under the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and this University. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and you will be informed of the outcome.

All participants in research conducted by Southern Cross University should be advised of the above procedure and be given a copy of the contact details for the Complaints Officer. They should also be aware of the ethics approval number issued by the Human Research Ethics Committee.

Sue Kelly
Secretary HREC
Ph: +61 +2 6626 9139
sue.kelly@scu.edu.au

Professor Bill Boyd
Chair, HREC
Ph: (02) 6620 3569
william.boyd@scu.edu.au

**APPENDIX 4: Survey instruments – Early Transition Questionnaire, Late Transition
Questionnaire, Parent Questionnaire**

STUDENT SURVEY

EARLY SECONDARY SCHOOL – QUESTIONNAIRE

Please tick the box that applies to you

1. Are you male or female? male or female
2. Which primary school did you attend? _____
3. How far do you live from your high school?
 - less than 10 kilometres
 - 10-20 kilometres
 - more than 20 kilometres

From the list of Year 6 into Year 7 programs, below tick the boxes that show the type of activities that you did while in Year 6.

- Year 7 Orientation Day
- ‘preparation lessons’ at the high school
- visits and talks by teachers from the high school to your primary school
- interviews with the principal or other staff member from the high school
- Other. Please state the type of activity: _____

From the list below rank in order from 1-5 (1 being the most important and 5 the least important) the things that you were most excited about before starting secondary school. [NOTE: Only use each number once and don’t leave any spaces.]

- ___ making new friends
- ___ having different teachers for each subject
- ___ learning new things
- ___ doing practical subjects
- ___ greater independence and responsibility

From the list below rank in order from 1-5 (1 being the most important and 5 the least important) the things that you were most concerned or worried about before starting secondary school. [NOTE: Only use each number once and don't leave any spaces.]

- ___ getting lost
- ___ more homework
- ___ being bullied
- ___ losing friends
- ___ having different teachers for each subject

Please read the statements below and indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with them by ticking the appropriate box.

	disagree strongly	disagree	no opinion	agree	agree strongly
School work in high school is harder than primary school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It will be easy to make new friends in high School.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The older students at school are friendly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The teachers at high school are helpful.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It has been easy finding my way around the school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Many Year 7 students get bullied at high school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

INSTRUCTIONS

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
strongly disagree	disagree	tend to disagree	unsure	tend to agree	agree	strongly agree
SD	D	TD	U	TA	A	SA

Please circle how strongly you agree or disagree according to the above scale with each of the following statements:

	Circle the most appropriate response:						
	SD	D	TD	U	TA	A	SA
1. I was excited about starting high school this year.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. It is easy to get lost finding your way around high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. High school is a place to make new friends.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I won't know many people at high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Teachers will be more strict than the teachers at primary school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Students are given more independence at high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Students are given more responsibility at high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Homework will be more difficult at high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. It is important to me that I am in the same classes as my friends.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Many students from my primary school are going to the same high school as me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Circle the most appropriate response:						
	SD	D	TD	U	TA	A	SA
11. Having different teachers for different subjects will be good.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. New students get picked on by older students at high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. My parent/s have spoken to me about what to expect at high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. My parent/s help me with my homework at high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. My grades and results will improve at high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. The Year 6 into Year 7 programs helped make starting school less stressful.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. There needs to be more Year 6 into Year 7 programs before starting high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. Older brothers and sister have talked to me about what to expect at high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Thank you for your time.

STUDENT SURVEY

LATE SECONDARY SCHOOL – QUESTIONNAIRE

Please tick the box that applies to you

1. Are you male or female? male or female

2. Which primary school did you attend? _____

From the list of Year 6 into Year 7 programs below tick the boxes that show the type of activities that you did while in Year 6.

- Year 7 Orientation Day
- ‘preparation lessons’ at the high school
- visits and talks by teachers from the high school to your primary school
- interviews with the principal or other staff member from the high school
- Other. Please state the type of activity: _____

From the list below rank in order from 1-5 (1 being the most important and 5 the least important) the things that you were most excited about before starting secondary school.

- making new friends
- having different teachers for each subject
- learning new things
- doing practical subjects
- greater independence and responsibility

From the list below rank in order from 1-5 (1 being the most important and 5 the least important) the things that you were most concerned or worried about before starting secondary school.

- getting lost
- more homework
- being bullied
- losing friends
- having different teachers for each subject

Please read the statements below and indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with them by ticking the appropriate box.

	disagree strongly	disagree	no opinion	agree	agree strongly
School work in high school is harder than primary school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It has been easy making new friends in high school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The older students at school are friendly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The teachers at high school are helpful.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It has been easy finding my way around high school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Many Year 7 students get bullied at high school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

INSTRUCTIONS

1 strongly disagree SD	2 disagree D	3 tend to disagree TD	4 unsure U	5 tend to agree TA	6 agree A	7 strongly agree SA
--	---------------------------	---------------------------------------	-------------------------	------------------------------------	------------------------	-------------------------------------

Please circle how strongly you agree or disagree according to the above scale with each of the following statements:

	Circle the most appropriate response:						
	SD	D	TD	U	TA	A	SA
1. Settling in to high school has been easier than I thought it would be.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I still get lost finding my way around high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I have made many new friends this year.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I get on well with most students at my school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Teachers are more strict than the teachers at primary school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Students are given more independence at high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Students are given more responsibility at high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Homework is more difficult at high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. It has been important to me that I am in the same classes as my friends.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. I have different friends from the ones I had in primary school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Circle the most appropriate response:						
	SD	D	TD	U	TA	A	SA
11. Having different teachers for different subjects has been good.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. New students get picked on by older students at high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. My parent/s talk to me about what is happening at my school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. My parent/s help me with my homework at high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. My grades and results have improved at high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. The Year 6 into Year 7 programs helped make starting school less stressful.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. There needs to be more Year 6 into Year 7 programs before starting high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Thank you for your time.

PARENT SURVEY

PRIMARY SCHOOL TO SECONDARY SCHOOL QUESTIONNAIRE

Please tick the box that applies to you

1. Is your Year 7 child male or female? male or female

2. Which primary school did they attend? _____

3. How far do you live from your child's high school?

- less than 10 kilometres
- 10-20 kilometres
- more than 20 kilometres

4. What is your annual household income? (optional)

- less than \$19 999
- \$20 000 - \$34 999
- \$35 000 - \$50 000
- \$50 000 - \$79 999
- \$80 000 - \$99 999
- more than \$100 000

From the list of Year 6 into Year 7 programs below tick the boxes that show the type of activities that your child did while in Year 6.

- Year 7 Orientation Day
- 'practice lessons' at the High School
- visits and talks by teachers from the High School to your Primary School
- interviews with the Principal or other staff member from the High School
- Other. Please state the type of activity: _____

From the list below rank in order from 1-5 (1 being the most important and 5 the least important) the things that your child is most excited about before starting high school.

- __ making new friends
- __ having different teachers for each subject
- __ learning new things
- __ doing practical subjects
- __ greater independence and responsibility

From the list below rank in order from 1-5 (1 being the most important and 5 the least important) the things that your child is most concerned or worried about before starting secondary school.

- __ getting lost
- __ more homework
- __ being bullied
- __ losing friends
- __ having different teachers for each subject

Please circle how strongly you agree or disagree according to the scale below with each of the following statements.

1 strongly disagree SD	2 disagree D	3 tend to disagree TD	4 unsure U	5 tend to agree TA	6 agree A	7 strongly agree SA
--	---------------------------	---------------------------------------	-------------------------	------------------------------------	------------------------	-------------------------------------

	Circle the most appropriate response:						
	SD	D	TD	U	TA	A	SA
1. Year 6 into Year 7 programs helped ease any concerns that my child had about starting high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. The number of Year 6 into Year 7 programs need to be increased to help ease concerns about moving from primary school into high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Parental help with homework is important for academic success at high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Ensuring that children are organised at school is essential for their overall success.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Parents should talk to their children about what to expect at high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Making new friends is important for my child when starting high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Staff at the high school are approachable to discuss issues concerning my child's progress.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I expect my child's grades and results will improve at high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. My child feels confident that he/she will achieve well in their school work at high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. My child feels confident that he/she will make new friends at high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX 5: Student information sheet

STUDENT INFORMATION SHEET

You have been invited to take part in a study being conducted by Sally Towns, as part of a Doctor of Education Degree with Southern Cross University (Approval Number: ECN-08-047).

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

The research project is entitled: **Measuring Up: An examination of the expectations and realities of rural students during the primary-secondary transition.**

The research will focus on the following:

- your feelings about moving from primary school to high school;
- whether high school is what you thought it would be;
- whether students from rural schools have different expectations and experiences from students from urban schools; and
- the influence that your parents, siblings and transition programs have on your high school experiences.

The information from the study will be used to write a thesis and a copy of the final report will be made available to your school.

WHEN WILL IT HAPPEN?

We will ask you to complete two survey questionnaires. The first survey questionnaire will occur in February 2009 and the second in May 2009.

It will take students about 15 minutes to complete each survey. Research will take place at your school at a time convenient for both the school and the researcher.

DO I HAVE TO PARTICIPATE?

Participation is voluntary. If you do decide not to take part, it will not affect your results or progress.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE INFORMATION?

No-one will be able to identify you from the results of the study. Only the researcher will have access to this information. Questionnaires are completed anonymously and all information will be kept confidential, as well as being stored securely. All information will be destroyed at the completion of the study.

WHO CAN I CONTACT?

When you have read this information Sally Towns will be available to answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Sally Towns by email: stowns.12@scu.edu.au or in writing to PO Box 1068, Rosny Park, 7018.

OR

Brian Kean, Senior Lecturer
Southern Cross University
PO Box 157
Lismore NSW 2480
02 6620 3797
bkean@scu.edu.au

If you have any complaints about the ethical conduct of this research, they should be sent in writing to:

*The Ethics Complaints Officer
Graduate Research College
Southern Cross University
PO Box 157
Lismore NSW 2480
Email: sue.kelly@scu.edu.au*

This information is for you to keep.

APPENDIX 6: Parent information sheet

PARENT/CAREGIVER INFORMATION SHEET

Research Project: Measuring Up: An examination of the expectations and realities of rural students during the primary-secondary transition.

Your child is invited to take part in a study being conducted by Sally Towns, as part of a Doctor of Education Degree with Southern Cross University (Approval Number: ECN-08-047). [*insert school name*] has agreed to be involved in the study.

AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

We are trying to find out whether rural students' expectations of the primary-secondary transition process are realised, to compare their experiences with students from urban areas and to gauge the influences of other factors, such as parents, siblings and transition programs, on their lived reality.

The information from the study will be used to write a thesis and a copy of the final report will be made available to your child's school. We will ask your child to complete two survey questionnaires. The first survey questionnaire will occur in February 2009, and the second in May 2009. It will take students about fifteen minutes to complete each survey. Research will take place at your child's school at a time convenient for the school.

Parents are also asked to complete the attached survey. Please complete it anonymously and return to your child's school in the envelope provided.

Participation is voluntary. If your child does not participate, it will not affect his/her results or progress.

Questionnaires are completed anonymously and all information will be kept confidential, as well as being stored securely. Only the researcher will have access to the information and it will be destroyed at the completion of the study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

When you have read this information, Sally Towns will be available to answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Sally Towns by email: stowns.12@scu.edu.au or in writing to PO Box 1068, Rosny Park, 7018.

OR

Brian Kean, Senior Lecturer
Southern Cross University
PO Box 157
Lismore NSW 2480
02 6620 3797
bkean@scu.edu.au

If you have any complaints about the ethical conduct of this research, they should be sent in writing to:

*The Ethics Complaints Officer
Graduate Research College
Southern Cross University
PO Box 157
Lismore NSW 2480
Email: sue.kelly@scu.edu.au*

This information is for you to keep.