

# The transition to primary school: Growing Up in Scotland study findings



## Background

This briefing summarises findings related to children's transition to primary school from two reports which use data from the Growing Up in Scotland (GUS) study. Since 2005, GUS has been tracking the lives of thousands of children and their families from the early years, through childhood and into adolescence, to understand how the circumstances and experiences of children growing up are changing and provide insight on how early life experiences affect later outcomes.

Findings from both birth cohorts were used for this analysis. Children in Birth Cohort 1 (BC1) were born in 2004/05 and started primary school in 2009 or 2010. Children in Birth Cohort 2 (BC2) were born in 2010/11 and started primary school in 2015. Prior to 2010, nurseries and primary schools had different curriculum frameworks: 'Curriculum Framework 3 to 5' in nurseries and the '5-14 Curriculum' in schools. After 2010, nurseries and primary schools both worked under the Curriculum for Excellence 3-18, the early level of which spans from nursery to the end of Primary 1.

The two studies included in this briefing are:

- **Growing Up in Scotland: Early Experiences of Primary School (2012)<sup>1</sup>**

The report examines the factors leading to a successful early school experience for children and other practical issues related to starting school, using data collected between 2007 (CC<sup>2</sup>) and 2011 (BC1).

- **Changes in Early Learning and Childcare Use and Outcomes at Age 5: Comparing Two Growing Up in Scotland Cohorts (2017)<sup>3</sup>**

This report compared data from the two birth cohorts to explore any changes in children's adjustment to primary school. The aim was to identify potential differences among 5-year-olds in 2009/2010 (BC1) and 5-year-olds in 2015 (BC2).

Further details are available from the study website [growingupinScotland.org.uk](http://growingupinScotland.org.uk).

A successful primary school experience is one of many factors in a child's life that can affect their long-term educational outcomes.<sup>4</sup> GUS provides an opportunity to

<sup>1</sup> Bradshaw, P., Hall, J., Hill, T., Mabelis, J., & Philo, D. (2012). Growing Up in Scotland: early experiences of primary school.

<sup>2</sup> Children in the Child Cohort (CC) were born in 2002/03 and started primary school in 2007 or 2008.

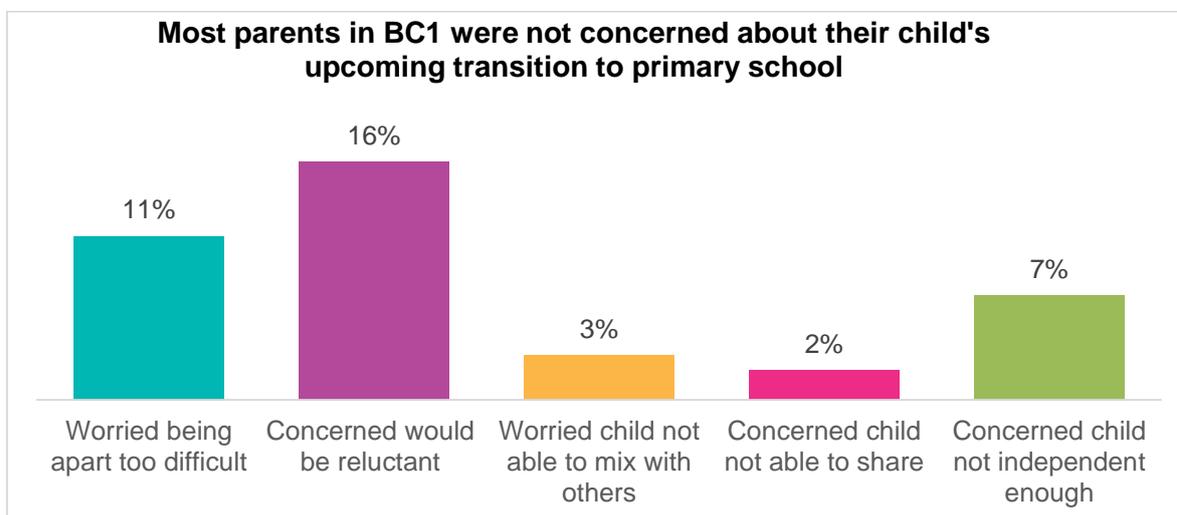
<sup>3</sup> Knudsen, L., Currie, E., & Bradshaw, P. (2017). Changes in early learning and childcare use and outcomes at age 5: Comparing two Growing Up in Scotland cohorts.

<sup>4</sup> Dunlop, A-W. A. & Fabian, H. (eds.) (2003). Transitions. European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, Themed Monograph 1.

explore the experiences and feelings of children and their families around the time they enter primary school.

### Ease of transition to primary school

When asked about different aspects of their child's transition to primary school, the vast majority of parents in BC1 were not concerned (see graph below).



Parents of girls had fewer concerns about their transition to primary school than parents of boys. This is in line with other GUS findings<sup>5</sup> in which girls of this age are generally reported by parents to have fewer difficulties related to their health and development.

Parents were slightly less likely to be concerned about the transition if they:

- Had higher levels of education,
- Lived in less deprived areas, or
- Lived in higher income households.

Although these associations are statistically significant, the relationship is weak.

After controlling for differences in children's socio-economic background, certain aspects of children's development were also positively associated with lower parental concern about transition. These include:

- Higher vocabulary ability,
- Higher problem-solving ability, and
- Lower level of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

This suggests that families of boys, children with atypical development, children with higher levels of difficulties, and those from more disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds may benefit from more information and advice around this transition. In this context it is worth noting that education authorities are required under legislation (Additional Support for Learning Act 2004) to plan for the transition to primary school

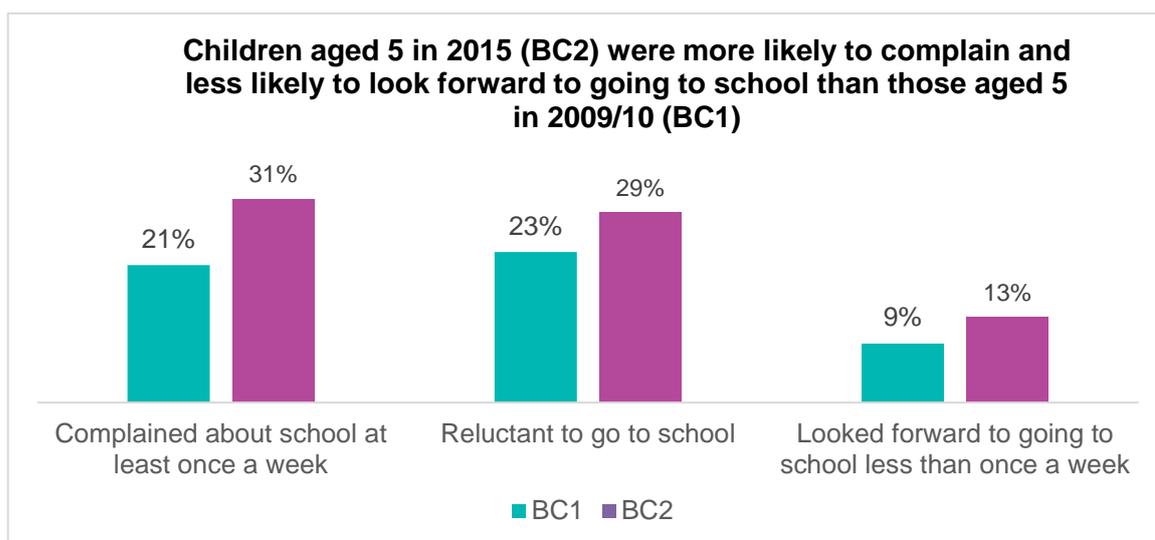
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<sup>5</sup> For example, see Bromley, C. and Cunningham-Burley, S (2010) Growing Up in Scotland: Health inequalities in the early years, Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

for children with additional support needs no later than 6 months before the school starting date.

### School adjustment

Overall, parents' perceptions of their child's adjustment to primary school were similar across BC1 and BC2 with the majority reporting their child having adjusted well. However, as shown below, children aged 5 years old in 2015 (BC2) were more likely to complain and less likely to look forward to going to school than those aged 5 years old in 2009/10 (BC1).



Analysis of BC1 data showed that parent-reported adjustment to primary school tended to be lower for children from more socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Similar results were found when BC2 data was analysed. For example:

- 43% of children in the lowest income households had below average levels of adjustment compared with 31% in the highest income households
- 46% of children whose parents' highest educational qualifications were lower Standard Grades<sup>6</sup> or who had no formal qualifications had below average adjustment compared with 33% of children whose parents had a degree.

These findings appear to emphasise that children from more socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds find it more difficult to adjust during their primary school transition.



Growing up in Scotland is funded by the Scottish Government and carried out by the Scottish Centre for Social Research.

<sup>6</sup> Standard Grade qualifications were awarded based on grades 1 (highest) to 7 (lowest). 'Lower' Standard Grades are those achieved with grades of between 4 and 7. This is broadly equivalent to current National 3 level awards.