

Preparing for the transfer of pupils to a new educational setting during Covid-19

Introduction and scope

Transition between schools has been identified as being one of five important life stages for young people. Moving to a new school or setting is an exciting time for all children, but it will be made complicated this year by the current situation. It can also, of course, be a time of worry, particularly for our most vulnerable children and their parents. Again, the current situation may amplify some of these concerns, and may create others.

This document is aimed at supporting you with ideas and suggestions about how you might manage the first stage of transition, from the perspective both of parents and pupils, and of the educational establishment. By 'first stage', we mean the typical activities that might normally take place over this term, such as induction days and visits to/from new settings, and how these activities might take place in the current climate rather than the entire transition process. Please note that where 'school' has been used throughout this document it refers to schools and settings.

Celebrating the positive

With the current climate and as natural problem solvers, it can be easy to over-focus on what the issues are that we need to address. As more pupils return to school we may well find ourselves equally surprised at the positive changes we see in some of our young people as much as we are disheartened by those that had we can see have had a difficult time.

While this document focuses, predominately on positive solutions on how to overcome areas of particular concern during this time, we would wish to recognise and celebrate the high quality induction and transition that is already part of school practice as well as the adaptations which schools are making on a daily basis.

Areas that are likely to cause the greatest concern for parents and pupils

Anticipating likely anxieties

It would be remiss not to start by considering the aspects which are causing the greatest concern to our parents and pupils at this time. Transition to a new establishment can be a time of great excitement and anticipation. Effective transition capitalises on this opportunity, but only by ensuring that any barriers are identified in order that they can be overcome.

If there has been limited opportunity to support children through transition in the normal ways, due to the Covid-19 outbreak, then young people may experience difficulties with accessing the curriculum, developing new friendships and being part of their peer group.

While most children and young people will continue to thrive as usual, there will be additional stresses on some families. Some pupils may return to school not having eaten healthily and with additional worries about their family circumstances. Some may be feeling vulnerable due to the prevalence of the virus, or may have had or been close to a bereavement. (See our [bereavement document](#) for further guidance.)

Despite many young people having access to social media, this will not be the case for all, and this will have led to feelings of isolation for some. Friendships groups may have changed during the time spent at home which may have had a positive or a negative impact on pupils.

Relationships at home may have changed. This may have impacted on some children and young people's mental health. This would inevitably increase anxiety levels and affect attitudes to starting a new school or setting if so.

Schools and settings have worked tirelessly to support pupils; however, it is possible that some children will have lost some sense of belonging, as they did not have the opportunity to say goodbye to the school/setting community, before moving to a new establishment.

Managing the anxieties of parents and children

Not knowing what to expect can often be a concern during a transition and if parents are worried then this transfers to their children. This is why managing the anxiety of parents is at the top of this list.

The following are some suggestions that schools may wish to consider to support with this process.

For pupils leaving your school:

- Spend time talking with pupils about any worries and alleviating fear of the unknown. This will support young people with being prepared and will help them feel more in control of the situation. Give advice to parents on how they can do this too
- Find out what the parental and pupil worries are and act as a go between to find out information.
- Ask parents to use one of their daily walks to walk to their new school (if they will be going on foot) to rehearse their route. Pupils can discuss with their parents what problems they might encounter and how they would overcome them.
- Ensure good liaison with the school you feed into, to ensure they have as much information about your children as possible, particularly if there are families that you know have been struggling, but may not yet be known to other agencies such as Early Help.
- Parents worry about their child when they and their child are facing the unknown. Provide parents with reassurance guidance on how to talk to their children about Covid-19. (Example: [BBC news article](#))
- Research also suggests that pupils' concerns about transition generally involve issues such as losing old friends, and at this time the traditional ways of 'saying goodbye' may not be possible for all children. This is compounded when the child has SEND. Consider creating virtual 'memory boxes' that children can make and keep to help, and try to recreate 'end of year' celebrations (such as leavers' assemblies) virtually. Consider if it will be practical for you to offer some opportunities at a different time, when restrictions are lifted, to help these children feel like they will still have their rites of passage (e.g. agreeing a delayed end of school prom.)
- Celebrate what you can offer at this time. Children and parents may be less aware of the transition opportunities that would normally take place than the schools. Try to minimise their feelings that they have somehow missed out.

For new pupils arriving into your school

- A simple letter explaining what you are doing and that you will be in touch is a good first step. Explain that there will be a transfer of relevant information. This is particularly important for children with additional needs such as SEN Support Plans, Chronology of Support and Intervention (if available - this is new to 2020 so not all pupils will have these) and EHCP details. Where possible, provide parents with details about how such communication between the 'departing' and 'receiving' school will happen (typically through SENCOs.)

- Send an information pack. This will give parents something to prepare with their child, such as equipment needed, standard timetable with lunch and break times, etc. Identifying which parents are 'new' to the school is especially important, as they are likely to have additional questions and concerns and may be anxious about losing informal support networks if they have been accessing these through their current school. Be mindful of accessibility for all parents (providing versions in alternative languages, for example) particularly when people may be more isolated at this time.
- Uniform is a big worry for parents, as they won't want their child being the 'odd one out' on the first day. Consider what your policy is on uniform and shoes during a phased return. Many parents will have lost jobs or have uncertain futures; money may well be tight. Is there anything you can do to relieve the stress at this time? Give advice on how can they obtain the uniform if they can't get to shops to buy what is needed, or whether or not there will be a relaxation of uniform requirement during this pandemic. If you are relaxing rules for this reason, be explicit about what, why and until when. If you expect children to be in clean clothes each day, make sure parents understand this. Whilst many schools will be relaxing rules on uniform at this time, uniform also helps children to have a sense of belonging, so schools should consider other ways that they can establish this at this time.
- Produce a virtual tour and photos of different areas, post it on your school website and share it with your feeder schools. Be creative with your approach – schools have reported using a drone to film outdoor play areas, for example. Include snippets from key members of staff that the children will meet when they start their new school or setting (examples: [Longman's Hill](#), [Applegarth Primary](#), [Richmond School](#))
- Consider a 'new parents and pupils FAQs' page on your website and consider providing details of how older children can send in additional questions that they have. (Example: [Ripon Outwood](#))
- Consider sharing pictures and pen portraits of key staff.
- Arrange appropriate additional support for children with additional needs. For example, some pupils, particularly those with Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) or Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), may require a visual [social story](#) 'book' of a typical day, which parents can share with their child over and over again.
- Try to identify which children have not been into school since March and consider how their needs might vary compared to those who have attended school.
- Consider a virtual coffee morning with new parents, so that they can ask questions and post answers on your FAQs page.
- Some of the guidance and information on your website that would normally help alleviate anxieties and answer parents' questions may not be relevant at this time. Consider your website through the eyes of a new parent. What is still appropriate? What rules and routines are different at this time? Would it be clear to someone who is new to the school? Consider how you can help parents and children to understand as much as possible about your school, before new pupils arrive.
- Schools (particularly large secondary schools) might want to consider how to manage children's fear of getting lost in the school. Whilst social distancing is in place, there may be further restrictions, such as one-way systems, that will make this especially challenging for pupils with ASD and/or dyslexia. Prepare them by providing a map of the new school site which they can use to do a virtual treasure hunt online, or to do set challenges to find different places on the map which they can use with parents at home. Pose start and finish questions to help pupils understand one-way systems and make sure your map includes this information. For pupils with a physical disability, getting around the school is particularly worrying. If they haven't visited the school due to the pandemic, then this will compound their worry. Use Google Earth or similar to give them a 'real' view of the school.

Effective communication

Good communication is universally understood to be the key for all effective transitions. SENCos in particular know the importance of good communication between schools, parents and pupils for children with additional needs.

- At this time, it is important that schools do what they can to meet every child's needs. Schools may find it helpful to reflect on [Maslow's Hierarchy of Need](#) in order to help them prioritise those children who are most at risk due to the changes in schooling in recent months. Try to ensure there is time allocated for a Zoom-style meeting or phone call between staff in both schools, wherever possible, for those children identified as having a high need at this time. This is particularly important for children with SEN. Ensure the SENCos (or an appropriate person representing inclusion) are given time to share important information. (This is highly likely to take place, but it would be remiss if it were not included in this document!)
- Much of this year's statutory assessment will not have taken place, making the sharing of useful data really important. In particular, there is likely to be a significant gap between where the child is and where they should have been. Without this information, the receiving school will have little to go on other than their own baseline assessments which, although vital for understanding starting points, do not help in identifying those who have fallen behind the most.
- Ensure the usual secure transfer of all relevant documentation, including the documents listed above, as well as any safeguarding/medical information etc.
- Make sure parents are informed about who their point of contact/key worker/mentor is in their new school, and how to contact them (including the name and contact details of the SENCo where appropriate). Consider what else you can do for those hard to reach parents, or those who may be shielding.
- Consider a parent forum, via an electronic meeting, for groups of parents whose children have similar identifications – for example, for parents with children who have dyslexia to share common concerns and to understand how the school will meet these needs. It will be good for parents to know that their child will not be the only one with this challenge in the new school. You might like to consider setting out the protocols at the start of the meeting, so as to not be drawn into discussing individual pupils.
- Arrange for some current children to become virtual mentors for new children, through recorded tours, supervised web chats or reintroducing the concept of pen-pals! Ask older children to produce a PowerPoint of 'what I wish I'd known when I started at this school'.

Knowing the routine

All pupils need to know what will happen on a day by day basis, but this is particularly important at this time – especially for pupils with SEND. Parents of pupils with ASD may be particularly fearful for their child, as the nature of their child's difference often presents a difficulty with coping with a change of routine.

- Ensure children starting secondary school know how to use a timetable. This is also a new concept for most, but particularly confusing for those with SEND. Prepare their actual or a sample timetable to be sent home or to be put on the school website to download. Set a quiz to help them understand and navigate around the time table. (Example: St Francis Xavier School – available in the Transition sections of our [shared folder](#), username: eaug18008, password; Secondary123!).
- Ensure children starting secondary school have seen any daily planner that will be used, with an explanation of how it works and what it is for; this will be a new concept for most primary children and is often a cause of anxiety for pupils with SEND, who may find this strange and confusing.
- It's important that pupils know what happens from the moment they arrive at the school gate. Ensure that any virtual tour explains the process at this time, highlighting how to wait and queue and what routines pupils will follow when they enter the building. Pay particular attention to what they will be expected to do on their first day.
- Pupils will often be worried about what happens at lunch time, particularly in secondary schools, where it is often very different to primary. Provide sample menus where applicable. Perhaps have current pupils make a video of how they queue for lunch and get them to model the process from start to finish. If they need to buy their own food, this is likely to be a new experience for many

- Home learning is likely to be part of our curriculum offer for the foreseeable future. What information can you provide children about what this will look like in their new school?
- Toilets are often an aspect that children are anxious about when they start a new school. Make sure that you take the opportunity in your virtual tour to explain how and when children can access the toilet, to help them understand the routines
- Send home suggested practice activities, to get children used to some of the routines of their new adventure, such as packing their bag, waiting for the bus, budgeting for lunch...

Friendships

Research highlights that children who can keep some of the same friends during transition periods tend to cope better. Supporting and encouraging friendships during a transition period and beyond may help pupils to improve attainment and behaviour.

Many of the pupils may not have seen their friends since March. Even if they have returned to school, they may not have been in the same 'bubble' as their friends. Even within the same bubble, social distancing may have prevented friendships from blossoming. Making a move to a new school is a time when children need to try to maintain friendships where possible.

- Try to find opportunities for form groups/bubbles to have a supervised, online group chat prior to attendance, in order to meet one another – perhaps led by their new teacher or form tutor – and find a way for children to share common interests with existing or potential new friends.
- Some children will be moving to a new school without their friendship group and may be especially worried. Try to make sure you know who these children are, so that you can prioritise them.
- Mindfulness: some young people become easily overwhelmed, and mindfulness can offer a method to support them with getting 'back on track'. Mindfulness is a method of introducing relaxation; this can be done together with the parent or on their own when needed. There are many different types of relaxation techniques, that are all designed to help us improve happiness, general behaviour, concentration and confidence.

Helpful Online Resources for further ideas

- [Be awesome, go big](#) (Primary to Secondary)
- [Rise Above](#) (Supporting friendships)
- [Young Minds](#) (Transitioning to secondary school)
- [Promoting Positive Transitions](#) (Specific guidance on returning to school during and after this crisis)
- [Transition and Transfer](#) (Guidance on the 5 bridges of transition)
- [Coronavirus: supporting transition into reception](#) (Guidance from The Key)
- [Planning guide for primary schools](#) (Includes section on transition to secondary school)

Appendices - Additional age-specific aspects to consider

Appendix 1: Pre-school to Reception

It is recommended that you use your best endeavours to support the children's transition into school for September; however, this will look very different to any normal practices you would have done in previous years.

Be proactive and develop the home-school relationship early.

Transition into a reception class is a big move for children and parents, even more so if this is the first child in the family to start school. Parents worry about how their children will manage, whether they are prepared for starting school and whether the parents are ready for their child to start school. It can, in normal circumstances, be an anxious and emotional time for everyone and, with the uncertainty around how schools will be running in September due to coronavirus, this is heightened as parents may be concerned about the safety of their child.

It is vital that we reassure parents as much as possible before the summer holidays. Acknowledge how they may be feeling and how you will support them and their child as best you can in this preparation for starting reception. They will need reassurance about social distancing in school, and about the different school routines that are in place due to coronavirus.

Many schools are looking at how to use technology to, for example:

- hold meetings for parents and children of the new starters;
- meet their teacher a few times this term;
- replace home visits with online visits;
- create videos to show children the school and their classrooms;
- maybe read a story online to the children;
- work closely with, and talk to, private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings as part of the normal transition arrangements, to discuss and share information about the children;
- have small group chats with a few children, to support them in getting to know other children, particularly if they don't know anyone else who is starting.

Support parents with ways they can help to prepare their child for reception. This cohort of reception children will have missed out on additional time in their early years setting, so parents could be supported with practical tips on what they can do to help their child, e.g. sharing toys, tidying toys, dressing themselves, managing their own hygiene.

Appendix 2: Infant school to Junior school

Planning for transition to junior school is obviously more difficult this year, due to Covid-19. Sharing information about children remains crucial and should involve parents/carers and key school staff, so that the individual child and their context can be understood as much as possible. Wherever possible, involve the child in this process too, asking them what they would like their new school to know about them. Remember, it is important to capture their individual strengths, personal interests and achievements alongside their academic profile.

Curriculum

As children start Year 3 in September 2020, planning will need to consider revisiting aspects of the Key Stage 1 (KS1) curriculum, as some Year 2 learning may have accessed on a limited basis, or even not at all for some children. Infant and junior schools will need to work together to make sure there is continuity of the curriculum and to address gaps in learning, whilst still providing new areas of interest for pupils in their new school and year group.

Teaching and learning approaches will need to match the emotional development level of that particular child, and for some children, after a period of isolation, engaging in learning may feel out of their comfort zone. The child may try to avoid risking failure and damage to their self-esteem. But no matter the age of the child, their efforts in engaging with learning should be recognised and praised. Therefore, schools will need to consider extending the transition process until all children feel safe and comfortable within the new school environment.

It will be important to communicate to parents about what new expectations there may be on children in the classroom. Pupils may be expected to display an increased independence, to speak and listen in new ways, to write at greater length, and – perhaps – to graduate from writing in pencil to using a pen. Children may have particular worries about these things following a prolonged break from school, and it may help to arrange for some preparation over the holidays. For instance, keeping a diary over the summer period may support pupils with practicing their writing skills.

Self-organisation

At this age, particular attention will need to be made to communicating the rules and expected behaviours around social distancing to parents, who will then be able to communicate these to their children. Parents will need to adapt to the fact that routines will change. In KS1, parents will generally have supervised their own child until the moment they went into the school. However, in Key Stage 2 (KS2) it is more common for children to wait in the playground, to line up and to go into school by themselves when the whistle blows. Therefore, parents need to be supported in understanding that if their child is anxious about being dropped off, they should encourage them to find a friend from their ‘bubble’ with whom they can stay until it is time to go into the classroom.

Increasingly, when children enter KS2 they are also expected to take more responsibility for organising themselves, for example by remembering to bring their reading books and PE kit to school on the relevant days. While hygiene measures remain strict, protocols around these things may be unusual and may change. It is useful to establish a diary which reminds the children when to bring their PE kit or when homework needs to be submitted. A leaflet posted on the junior school’s website can explain the new rules and expectations so that all is clear to them on the first day they start at the school, and thus helps to alleviate any concerns they may have.

Relationships

It may be necessary to consider helping children to build the peer relationships which would ordinarily have begun during induction days or events. This will need to be built into time at the beginning of Year 3, or carried out virtually during the last weeks of this term. Google Classroom allows for examples of work to be shared by Year 2 pupils with their Year 3 teacher. This would also enable announcements, lesson material and assignments to be shared in the future. Files, videos, images and links can all be up-loaded and teachers can mark work and have control over whether pupils have permission to comment or post.

At the end of Year 2 and the beginning of Year 3 the provision of a virtual “worry” box could be considered, where time would be built into the normal curriculum to address any concerns. In addition, so that this does not just become a negative exercise, the children could also have a virtual “anticipation” box which identifies areas they wish to experience at the new Junior school.

Appendix 3: Primary school to Secondary school

With the usual induction visits having not happened, secondary schools will want to plan for rapid and effective induction in the autumn. However, any plans for this induction will remain provisional, while it is unknown what conditions schools will be working under in September.

Secondary schools will have concerns around the readiness of new Year 7 pupils, academically and psychologically, following a disrupted Year 6. Although some pupils have returned to primary school after summer Half Term, many have not and teaching, socialising and other usual activities have been hampered by social distancing.

There will also be concerns around the assessment of pupils. With no SATs outcomes, schools will be relying even more on their own assessments, for setting targets and grouping pupils in Year 7; however, the validity of any early base-line testing or teacher assessment will be very provisional, until pupils have 'caught up' with missed learning.

Among other strategies, schools might consider:

- sending a sample lesson home, or linking to one on the website;
- sending home mini-projects for pupils to complete over the summer;
- inviting pupils in for days towards the end of the summer holidays, if permitted;
- planning an intense induction period, which acknowledges and compensates for curriculum time missed, while making the start to higher study both challenging and exciting;
- delaying the start of the regular timetable;
- planning for delayed baseline assessments, and for delayed starts to any setted grouping arrangements;
- arranging for examples of pupils' work to be sent from primary schools;
- holding discussions with staff on identifying signs that children need reassurance, and on avoiding unduly stressful situations when term begins.

Appendix 4: KS4 to Post-16 (particularly where this involves a change in school)

Parents' and students' concerns

Current Year 11 pupils and their parents will have concerns around the technicalities of starting post-16 study under the current circumstances – around the challenging of GCSE grades, the possibility of re-takes, any options to defer places, the situation with apprenticeships, and the implications for ECHPs or any particular individual needs.

However, they will also have important concerns around how courses themselves will be run under any remaining social distancing measures, and what it will mean to have missed some teaching in the spring. These will be in addition to all the usual apprehensions when undertaking further study, within a new culture and – often – a new institution.

With the cancelling of exams, pupils may also be seeking reassurance that their prior work has been accurately assessed and properly valued.

Students attending 11-16 schools (and their parents and schools) may be anxious as to whether they will at a disadvantage when applying for specific courses in 11-18 schools. Those schools will know what their own students are capable of, regardless of what statistical standardisation does to calculated grades. I would like schools to be asking, if in doubt, whether a student is suited to studying a particular L3 course even if grades suggest otherwise.

Among other strategies, sixth forms and other post-16 providers might consider:

- discussing with 11-16 schools whether their students are suited to studying a particular Level 3 course even if grades suggest otherwise, and reassuring students and parents that they are doing this;
- writing to all parents to explain in detail how courses will be taught when the new Year 12 begins;
- talking through their prior attainment with individual pupils;
- creating a video presentation and virtual tour of the 6th Form site and facilities, and of the systems of support;
- pre-course virtual meetings for parents;
- pre-course virtual meetings for pupils;
- recording introductions by subject teachers.

Post-16 providers' concerns

For sixth forms and other post-16 providers, one concern will be preparing pupils for the *curricular* demands of further study, following the loss of some teaching, of the intense GCSE revision and exam period, and – in some 11-18 schools – of a formal induction period at the end of the summer term.

There may be concerns around how to enculture pupils back into the formalities of school, and into the habits and disciplines of study, after a prolonged time away.

There may also be concerns around the mental health and motivation of late-adolescents, after prolonged lockdown and (potentially) exposure to anxiety and trauma. Certainly, there will be an acute awareness that pupils have missed out on important rites of transition, formal and informal.

Among other strategies, sixth forms and other post-16 providers might consider:

- providing pupils with comprehensive pre-course materials and prep work – booklets, reading lists, etc.;
- holding virtual meetings with classes, to set and monitor preparation;
- arranging with 11-16 schools to allow for delayed celebrations and other rituals to take place, if possible;
- arranging for contact with previous teachers;
- planning an unusually intense induction period, which acknowledges and compensates for curriculum time missed, while making the start to higher study both challenging and exciting