

How to plan for SEND pupils return to school

Children with SEND they have all experienced a wide variety of experiences since the start of lockdown.

- Some have always been in school but the focus will not always have been on learning
- Some have remained at home throughout and by September there will be a gap of nearly 6 months since they were last in school.
- Some would have engaged with home learning and routines and others may not have done.
- Some would have engaged with self-directed learning only and may have forgotten the structure and routine of school.

So, how to we plan for their return?

Use two basic, but effective principles: Communication and Planning.

Most children will be excited to return to school. Albeit a little apprehensive!

Capitalise on their excitement to be back in school by focusing on the things they have missed and how they felt when it was taken away. We appreciate things more when they are no longer available!

Please see the [EP Service guidance](#)

Ask yourselves whether you have new concerns about the child or young person or are the concerns as before, but now more amplified?

Manage the expectations of staff and parents. Ensure they have active participation in the process to give them a sense of control and involvement. Celebrate success!

The 5 losses, of routine, structure, friendship, opportunity and freedom, can trigger the emergence emotionally of anxiety, trauma and bereavement in any child. The overall impact cannot be underestimated. It will cause a rapid erosion of the mental health state in our children – Prof Barry Carpenter. [The Recovery Curriculum](#)

Knowing what to expect is key for us all but especially children. Prepare them with social stories before September – use photos or videos to tell them what their school now looks like, especially if they now have to use different

entrances, put coats in a different place, hand washing stations etc. Talk them through, with visual prompts, new routines, such as extra handwashing, different outdoor activities arrangements - such as playtimes. Include what will look different, what will be different, social distancing arrangements, more handwashing and no hugs! Also inform them about what will be the same – friends, teachers, TAs etc.

Toilet breaks could be a trigger point for some children. These may have to be scheduled in some schools due to social distancing measures. As children have been used to going to the toilet whenever they want to for the last 6 months, some pupils may need more breaks built into the timetable than others.

Be clear about any non-negotiables such as hand washing, but still be flexible. Let the children have their say in case any compromises need to be made otherwise state that, although that was an interesting idea, we can't do that just yet because...

Re-establishing friendships can be a challenge especially if some have not seen their class mates for nearly 6 months. Give them time.

For those who have not yet returned this term, encourage parents to walk with their child past the school at a given time before the end of term so that they can wave at their (new) teacher and other pupils.

Use the principles of the graduated response:

Assess – Talk to the pupil and parent. How are they feeling? What are they looking forward to? Is there anything worrying them? What would they like to see in place? Be careful that teachers and/or TAs do not fuel their anxiety by asking questions such as “Are you worried about catching Covid19”, but rather ask general open questions in the first instance.



Talk to the previous teacher – At what point were they at in March. Share their work and exercise book etc. with the new teacher. Talk to the previous and current TAs and SENCo about what they know about the child now as well as what they were like in March.

Plan – refocus any priorities – How are you going to awaken previous learning? It might appear that they have forgotten everything – but it may just need to be ‘woken up’ and reactivated. What visuals or resources did the previous teacher use? Can these be available again? Try to have joint planning meeting

with the previous teacher. Try to use the same learning language, vocabulary , resources as the previous teacher initially to help reactivate previous learning.

Be mindful of pupils with sensory issues. Some may not have been outside so much; they may have spent a long time on their own in the quiet. School suddenly seems a noisy place. There may be strong smells – such as bleach- that impacts on them. Sitting on a hard chair again for a length of time may be problematic. Be mindful they may need a shorter time to sit initially and this can be gradually increased. Listening to one adult for or an extended period may be challenging initially too. These children may need more rest breaks and ‘time-out’ breaks more frequently initially.

Do - Initially focus on helping the child be secure and positive. Re-establish their learning to learn skills. Use schedules to help re-establish a routine. Have, weekly, daily and ‘now and next’ visuals. Include visuals to show, what I am doing now, how long will I do this for, what am I doing next and finally when can I get to do what I want to do. This final point is important as most children for nearly 6 months will have had more opportunities to self-initiate what they do and when; moving away from this could be a trigger point for some.

Review – Be prepared to re-focus your priorities for the child – flexibility and adaptability is key. Review after two weeks in the first instance and then increase the graduated response time as appropriate.

Interventions

Do carefully consider any interventions.

Don’t rush into this. Give children time to recover first. Re assess the child and ensure you now have the right intervention to address the actual barrier to the child’s learning. This may now have changed since March.

Future lockdowns

Prepare your children for any possibility of future lockdowns.

Do you need to teach them how to access new platforms to access learning?

Have you got social stories prepared for such an eventuality?

Consider what other contingency plans may be required.