

## SUPPORTING THE TRANSITION OF CHILDREN INTO SCHOOL AND COLLEGE FOLLOWING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND SOCIAL DISTANCING

**It is entirely understandable to feel anxious** at the current situation regarding coronavirus. It is very natural to feel apprehensive, but we would not want children or young people to feel anxious all the time. Even though it is not possible to predict when and how schools and colleges will partly or wholly reopen, we recognise that some transition planning can help to alleviate anxiety, especially for our more vulnerable children, young people and families. It also helps to plan practical issues too, such as identifying staff for CYP with an EHCP plan who may require a high level of individual assistance.

**Prioritise emotional wellbeing over the more task-specific aspects of orientation.** The most potent and protective factor that will make the difference is the quality of relationships between people. Initially, you must take care of how you and others are feeling. How you respond will influence the process. Try to stay calm and reassure children that you can manage this situation together. They will benefit from being with people they trust to turn to, to feel safe.

**Be curious** about the things that parents, children and colleagues say that cause them anxiety. It may be something quite specific rather than about the coronavirus itself, for example, about examinations being cancelled, or about missing their friends. We cannot stress this enough; relationships are vital and so try to find ways that people can be in touch and interact while staying safe.

**Try to maintain a routine and be organised.** Maintaining routine or having familiar rituals such as assemblies is reassuring for everybody. It may be difficult in such uncertain times but work together to find creative ways to support learning and self-care together.

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### STAFF WELLBEING

- Most schools have remained open with staff continuing to work in some capacity. Many teams have worked through the 'school holidays' while also juggling the demands of home-educating, managing role changes, and uncertain financial situations. Consequently, **school staff are likely to “start feeling physically and emotionally tired, and this will impact on their ability to lead, manage and respond to change”**.

To support staff emotional wellbeing to consider:

- Opportunities for staff to socialise to share experiences over the lockdown period and to talk about how they are feeling.
- Communicating what is happening to ensure that teams are 'kept in the loop' with plans and ideas.
- Re-establishing peer and management supervision systems so that staff have opportunities to share/discuss issues through informal and formal processes.
- Hosting a whole school meeting to ensure that the work that teams have been doing through the Covid-19 pandemic is recognised and valued.

## TRANSFERRING FROM PRE-SCHOOL TO INFANTS

- Avoid duplication by checking whether transition planning has been started (e.g. by the ATS).
- **Place a stronger emphasis on consulting with parents/carers** as this will help to reduce their stress which can otherwise transmit to their child.
- Strong, supportive links help the child with the vital task of holding their important people in mind when they are apart from them. It supports vulnerable attachments in the home and care setting.
- Guide parents/carers to useful [resources](#) (e.g. [Family Information Service](#) or for [SEND](#)).
- **Parents meeting for new starters** – *Many schools invite the parents of new starters into school for 'move-up' meetings to share essential information and to answer questions. Alternatives include:*
  - a voice-over PowerPoint presentation that shares vital information with parents
  - a transition booklet or pack that covers key information for students
  - a Reception Year email address so prospective parents can ask specific questions
  - amending the school website to answer Frequently Asked Questions
  - personal video profiles of staff so parents/pupils can 'meet them' virtually.
- **Transition planning and meetings with Pre-School settings** – *Gathering Early Years progress data and discussing pupils with pre-school setting staff are critical for facilitating a smooth transition. Pre-School settings must complete the [Transition Record](#) on the EY Team website. As face-to-face meetings are not possible:*
  - Have telephone conversations with settings and parents and ask them to send (via a secure means) progress data electronically to the school. Ask about sleep and energy patterns; how the child usually shows anxiety or distress and what helps their child to soothe and comfort themselves.
  - Be mindful that lockdown and time away from settings will have a disproportionate impact on families, e.g. those with Communication and Interaction needs or challenging home circumstances. Try to elicit this information from settings/parents/ carers/childminders, so that transition planning is enhanced considering the impact of Covid-19.
- **Home Visits** – *Home visits provide children, and their parents, with a valuable opportunity to meet Reception staff. With social distancing, this is not able to happen, therefore consider:*
  - Delaying the start of school for Reception aged children during the first week back, to enable Reception staff to complete home visits.
  - Inviting Reception aged children to come in for part of the day (for example, a cohort in the morning and a cohort in the afternoon) to provide them with time to form relationships with staff.
- **Help children to become familiar with the setting** by providing a virtual photo book and a video tour of the environment. These could be hosted on the school website.
- **Have friends in the same class** as this will help them to adjust to the demands of the new setting, especially for vulnerable children. Make sure you ask parents/carers about their child's friendships. Schools need this information as soon as possible to enable planning.
- **Transition objects** have an important role as comforters. If it is important to a child's sense of security, then it needs to be somewhere visible until it is no longer needed. Sometimes a virtual message can help, e.g. a parent's kiss they can keep in the child's pocket or an imaginary heartstring that can't be broken by distance.

- **Hellos and good-byes** – The time when parents/carers will need to feel most connected with and supported by practitioners, are the beginning and end of sessions. Parents/carers and children will need the soothing presence of a sensitive practitioner who understands and empathises with them at handover and does not try to dismiss their anxiety or briskly ‘fix’ the child’s distress. The temporary changes in societal behaviour will have affected us all in ways we are only just beginning to understand, so flexibility and sensitivity are crucial. Consider typical ‘nurturing’ practice, e.g. avoid lining up, children are greeted and come in to settle to a task, others may need longer cuddles or more time to settle.

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## TRANSFERRING FROM PRIMARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

- Check if transition planning has been undertaken, e.g. by the Advisory Teacher, to avoid duplication.
- **Transition days for Year 6 pupils** - *Pupils starting a new school would typically have had several visits and sessions in their new setting before starting in September, alternatives to these could include:*
  - Photos on the school website of key areas within the school and a guided online video tour around the school.
  - Pupils may have a transition booklet to help them explore key information and will be useful to send out to pupils in advance, to reduce potential anxiety.
  - Answers to key questions that pupils might usually be told at a transition event would be helpful, e.g. ‘whom to go to when you’re upset or ill?’, ‘where is the canteen?’, ‘where can I have my break?’, ‘where are the toilets?’ along with maps/visuals.
  - Some small activities sent home will help parents to become a part of the induction back into the school as well as help them understand the changes and feel reassured.
  - There should be opportunities for children and young people to talk through concerns both during and after the transition.
  - Online information with a ‘pen portrait’ of staff introducing themselves, the area they teach and telling the new pupils something about themselves.
  - Staff will need to be mindful of ensuring accessibility of access for pupils with specific communication needs, e.g. HI, VI or other SEND, and fair accessibility for pupils with limited ICT/internet access.
- **Summer school sessions** – *Many schools arrange some small groups or sessions over the school holidays for some pupils to attend a summer school or small group before school starts to build up familiarity with the school and staff. If this is possible to continue, this can help pupils to ‘find their feet’ in the new setting. If it is not possible, it may be helpful for some pupils to visit the school when other pupils are not in to become familiar with the school before the return.*
- **Opportunities to make friendships** - *Friendships are a vital predictor of success with transition and transition days are an excellent opportunity for pupils to meet and socialise. Without these being able to occur, consider:*
  - Plan for students to have tutor and year group ‘bonding activities’ in the first few weeks so they can get to know their peers and form positive relationships.
  - Mix groups up so that students do not quickly form niches but use the time to mingle with as many different students as possible.
  - Use peer mentors from older year groups to informally support potentially vulnerable students, with oversight from Pastoral Team.

- **School Uniforms** – *Uniforms can be expensive, and post Covid-19 many families may be experiencing economic hardship as well as logistical factors around purchasing uniforms.*
  - To enable parents to purchase uniforms online.
  - To have a day, before students attend when the school is open to enable parents to purchase uniform on site.
  - To have a period of flexibility over uniform during the first week/month.
- **Transference of information and data** – *Sharing this information is vital as it enables schools to allocate resources/staff.*
  - Electronic sharing of SEN Passport/profiles and ensuing there are 'virtual opportunities' for key staff to meet while being mindful of data sharing over non-secure platforms.
  - To arrange transition meetings for the first week(s) with the previous setting so that, where possible, a salient representative from the previous setting can attend.

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## GENERAL GUIDANCE

- **Leaving a setting behind** – *The end of a school year is an opportunity for pupils to explore new places and to say good-bye to the settings, peers and staff they have known for several years. The challenges of good-byes and moving on must be acknowledged. It can hard for children/young people to 'move on' if no closure:*
  - Explore virtual ways to try and replicate some of this celebrating, e.g. secure online 'parties' co-ordinated through the school website.
  - Staggered good-byes for pupils with additional SEMH needs, e.g. a few days apart, and a planned, gradual process. This could be done online by saying good-bye to key staff, pupils, then key worker. *(Please note if this is done electronically then ensure that the platforms are secure)*
  - Create leavers activity packs or a digital 'yearbook'. This could include fondest memories, a thank-you wall to staff.
  - Consider a date in the diary for when the lockdown is over for meeting up. The previous school could consider a 'reunion' disco/event for former Year 6 or 11s, closure for pupils and staff alike.
- **Passing on old copies of books and work** – *This would usually happen during the last week of term, and many students like to keep these. Instead, consider:*
  - Having times whereby ex-students can collect books, clear out lockers and any old physical education kits.
  - Have a 'leavers parents evening', using an appointment system for former Year 6 or 11 pupils to come back to see Form Tutor. This will help pupils share with the teacher how they are/how they've coped and provide staff and pupils with an opportunity to say good-bye.
- **Pupils with additional learning needs** – *The summer term would typically be a time for sharing information and liaising with settings to ensure resources and systems can be implemented. Where this has not been able to happen:*
  - Consider enabling the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and the school Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Co-ordinator (SENDCo) to have additional time off timetable, during the first few weeks to help them manage increased workload due to school closures.
  - Pupils with sensory/physical needs/AAC needs

- Most learners with S/P needs and their families will have encountered the same lockdown challenges as their peers. However, their individual needs and requirements may mean that they face additional barriers to a successful transition. They may have grown, and their equipment or aids no longer works so well or is uncomfortable, for example, foot splints, wheelchair or moulds to their hearing aids. They may not have been able to do their regular therapy at home, e.g. exercises recommended by a physiotherapist or speech and language therapist. They may be worried about how social distancing will affect the support they have from others in school, e.g. for writing, toileting or signing. They may be vulnerable and have to shield at home when their friends are back at school, or their parents may not wish them to be exposed to Covid-19 risks in school.
  - The best way of managing the transition is working together with the family and child, listening to their experiences, understanding their individual needs and requirements, the school perspective, and working together to plan, deliver, and monitor a personalised transition plan.
  - The Specialist Advisory teacher for VI, HI, PD will have already started the transition process with those students, schools and parents on their caseload. For some students, professionals such as an Occupational Therapist or a Habilitation Officer will also be part of the team around a child's transition. They will contribute to the environmental audit of new settings, and suggest any adaption or building work required, as well as provide general transition guidance.
  - Where there have been safeguarding concerns for children, Covid-19 may have created new challenges for the DSL to manage. Consider this when planning time for this vital work..
  - Organise retrospective handover meetings for salient cohorts of students (i.e. those who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences, those known to social care and those on the SEND Code of Practice) to ensure that crucial information has been passed on.
- **Accessing provisions** - *Some pupils will have accessed settings/schools during Covid-19, while others will not have been in schools for some time. It may take some time for pupils to get used to being in a formal setting again*
    - Allow additional time for pupils to return to a structured timetable in a school setting through introducing the school timetable and expectations
    - Increase a time-tabled focus on shared play, team games, general play-based learning including a range of free-play (children will have missed the range of toys and games available at school and will be keen to re-familiarise themselves) and rule-based play/games (e.g. Simon Says, Handa's Game, Junk Modelling challenges, etc.) as both teams and individuals. EYFS Development Matters PSED section may be a useful document for planning.
    - Gradually increase the time younger children spend in school as they move up from pre-school.
  - **Pupil behaviour** - *Pupils may demonstrate a regression in skills or some challenging behaviours if they are feeling unsettled and it will be essential to recognise that all behaviour is communication and respond to this*
    - There should be opportunities for children and young people to be allowed to explore any concerns or questions they have about the new setting or any anxieties.
  - **Bereavement/illness** - *Children and staff may be returning following bereavement or having experienced illness themselves or within their families. It will be necessary for children and staff to be supported empathetically to manage these emotions*
    - There should be opportunities for children and young people to be allowed to explore any concerns or questions they have about bereavement, illness or Covid-19.

- **Separation anxiety** - Pupils may have trouble separating from their parents as they may not have been attending a provision for some time and this will be a new setting to get used to. Some pupils may need to be supported by having adults staying for a while longer for younger pupils or having shorter initial sessions to build up resilience.

## USEFUL WEBSITES

Documents to support schools further in managing pupil, staff, and parental wellbeing during transitions:

Local Authority and EP service support, advice and guidance:

1. <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/education-and-learning/special-educational-needs-and-disability-send/educational-psychology-service-eps/>
2. <https://www.ghll.org.uk/covid19/>

Information for schools and staff:

3. <https://www.annafreud.org/media/11610/managing-unexpected-endings-transitions-may2020.pdf>
4. <https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/Coronavirus%20and%20UK%20schools%20closures%20-%20support%20and%20advice.pdf>
5. <https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/Talking%20to%20children%20about%20coronavirus.pdf>
6. <https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Member%20Networks/Divisions/DECP/Teacher%20resilience%20during%20coronavirus%20school%20closures.pdf>
7. <https://www.seainclusion.co.uk/post/the-many-problems-of-returning-to-school>

Mental health for children and young people:

8. [www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/looking-after-yourself/coronavirus-and-mental-health](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/looking-after-yourself/coronavirus-and-mental-health)
9. <https://mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus>
10. <https://www.annafreud.org/what-we-do/schools-in-mind/resources-for-schools/advice-for-parents-and-carers-talking-mental-health-with-young-people-at-primary-school/>
11. <https://www.annafreud.org/coronavirus-support/support-for-early-years/>

Bereavement:

12. <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=74e7be4a-022a-4400-a398-bd6922440292>
13. <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=e99e1f53-01c0-4112-bfa4-e2a58dfb4e24>
14. <https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-supporting-bereaved-children-and-young-people/>
15. [https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-funerals-alternative-goodbyes/?utm\\_source=Winston%27s+Wish+newsletter&utm\\_campaign=948985d440-email\\_newsletter\\_2020\\_04\\_02&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_d9f3f2fa6f-948985d440-404890297](https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-funerals-alternative-goodbyes/?utm_source=Winston%27s+Wish+newsletter&utm_campaign=948985d440-email_newsletter_2020_04_02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_d9f3f2fa6f-948985d440-404890297)

Social Stories for children/young people:

16. <https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf>
17. <https://www.widgit.com/covid19.htm>

Support for young people and families with additional needs:

18. <https://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/health/coronavirus>
19. <https://www.sheffieldchildrens.nhs.uk/patients-and-parents/coronavirus-resources-for-children-and-families/>