

# Transition Checklist for Supporting Successful Education Transitions for Children in Care (CiC) or Children Looked After (CLA)

Children in Care (CiC) often face frequent school moves, disrupted relationships, and past trauma, making transitions between educational placements a particularly vulnerable time. This checklist has been informed by evidence-based practice and research for supporting positive transitions for CiC, which is detailed below.

## Background & Rationale

Evangelou et al. (2008) defines a successful transition as the child or young person having experienced the following:

- developed new friendships and improved their self-esteem and confidence
- settled so well into school life that their parents/carers had no concerns
- showed an increasing interest in school and schoolwork
- got used to their new routines and school organisation with great ease
- experienced curriculum continuity

Similarly, Evans, Boriello and Field (2018) identify three key factors for successful transition: social integration, feeling a sense of belonging to school, and curriculum interest and continuity.

It is important to note that for CiC, transitions may be particularly challenging as they may have experienced multiple transitions and changes in their lives, and may have had some challenging life experiences. Research from Berridge (2008; cited in Brewin & Statham, 2011) noted that 'pre-care experiences, the process of going into care, and being in care' may all influence education participation and attainment.

Information from Oakley, Miscampbell and Gregorian commissioned by The Social Market Foundation in 2018, noted that within the population of Children Looked After (CLA), 'only 14% achieved 5 A\*-C GCSEs (including maths and English) in 2015, a figure dwarfed by the 55% rate nationally, and CLA are five times more likely to face exclusion than their peers'. They also report that children who are looked after are 'hugely overrepresented in the youth justice system, and in 2015-2016 it was estimated that approximately 39% of the children in secure training centres had been in care, despite CiC accounting for around 1% of all children'. Data from the Department of Education (2010) reported that CiC were four times more likely to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) after Year 11. Researchers have identified that children who are CLA, can be vulnerable, with Evangelou et al. (2008) recording this population as being 'twice as likely to experience bullying than their

peers', and the Care Inspectorate (2020) reporting long-standing mental health and well-being needs for this group of young people (Care Inspectorate, 2020).

A report published by National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC; 2015) reported that while CLA were not a homogenous group, 72% had some form of 'social emotional need' when entering care. Dent and Brown (2006) noted that Looked After Children (LAC) are 'more likely to present with challenging behaviour', which can manifest itself at times of stress, such as transition (Dent and Brown, 2006; cited in Brewin & Statham, 2011). In addition, West, Sweeting and Young (2008) found that children who are looked after, are more likely to find the transition to secondary 'more challenging than their peers'.

Research by Brewin and Statham (2011) note the importance of transition planning being individual, as 'all children are different with diverse needs' and while some children will have needs which are no different from children who are not looked after, 'some children in this group have extremely complex needs'.

Brewin and Statham (2011) have identified the potential complexity of transitions for CLA, noting that 'having a corporate parent means that many different people are responsible for them, therefore necessitating a coordinated approach'. They report the importance of planning and information sharing, which should be 'holistic', 'minimise children's differences', and 'individualises support', which ensures the child or young person is supported appropriately but guard against providing that which is not needed or could be detrimental.

## Psychological models related to positive transitions

The following models are important to consider when supporting CiC with educational transitions to new settings, and inform the contents of the checklist.

- **Attachment and Relationships**  
CiC commonly experience attachment disruptions. Research emphasizes the importance of consistent, trusting relationships with adults as a foundation for emotional regulation and learning (Bomber, 2007; Geddes, 2006). Building strong relationships with key adults (e.g., teachers, mentors) creates a secure base to support transition.
- **Trauma-Informed Practice**  
Care-experienced children are more likely to have encountered trauma, which can impact behaviour, cognition, and trust (Perry & Szalavitz, 2006). Trauma-informed approaches during transitions—such as predictable routines, sensitive communication, and emotional safety—help reduce re-traumatization (Bath, 2008).
- **Ecological Systems Approach**  
Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory highlights the importance of systemic interactions. Research underscores the need for coordinated planning across schools, carers, social workers, and other professionals to ensure a child-centred, holistic transition (Daniel & Wassell, 2002).

- **Promoting Resilience**  
Despite adversity, many CiC demonstrate resilience when supported appropriately. Key protective factors include consistent education, supportive relationships, high expectations, and a sense of school belonging (Gilligan, 2000; Rutter, 1987). Educational psychologists should focus on identifying and strengthening these factors during transitions.
- **Inclusive Schools with an Ethics of Belonging**  
A strong sense of school belonging enhances emotional wellbeing and academic success (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Creating inclusive, nurturing school environments with visible care for looked-after children fosters this sense of belonging (Sebba et al., 2015).
- **Child-Centred Transition Planning**  
Effective transitions are planned in advance, tailored to the child's needs, and include their voice (Holland, 2011). Good practices include phased visits, use of social stories, peer support, and warm handovers between professionals and schools (Cameron & Das, 2019).

## Key Recommendations

Research indicates that the following aspects are key to successful education transitions for CiC:

- **Preparing for the transition:**  
Planning early and collaboratively supports a positive transition. Effective transitions are informed by a collaborative working relationship between current and new setting and services, which allows for good information sharing and planning for appropriate levels of information dissemination.
- **Collaborative planning together:**  
It is identified that young people who have had successful transitions are supported by enhanced transition plans, which include professionals, parent/carers, and the young person, and provide clear plans of action, and effective information sharing and involvement of relevant services. Using Personal Education Plan (PEPs) can help to guide and support transitions.
- **Involving the child or young person meaningfully in decision-making, where possible:**  
This includes preparation for the child or young person, gaining information and views from the young person, their parent/carers and professionals, and practical aspects related to securing school places and identifying what the young person will need in the new setting.
- **Considering and planning for practical aspects:**  
It is important to support the child or young person with the practical aspects of the change in education setting, which will include considering transport and travel, school induction, uniform, and new peer and adult relationships.

## Actions for Current Setting & Professionals prior to an Education Transition

Actions to be completed	Who will complete this action?	Date completed
Has the 'protocol for a potential school move form' been completed? ( <a href="#">protocol-for-a-potential-school-move-revised-april-24-final-copy.docx</a> )		
Apply for & secure a school place		
Gaining views of the Child and Young person (CYP): CYP consulted on their own concerns and aspects they are looking forward to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on the information, adults update a 1-page profile detailing interests/strengths, aspirations, aspects which the CYP finds challenging and strategies which help</li> </ul>		
Recording any questions or worries the CYP wishes to ask the new school or new key adults when they meet		
Parents/Carers outline successful support strategies for the CYP to be shared with new setting		
Existing school prepares information to transfer to new school which includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outlining successful support strategies</li> <li>Collating the key reports and current information about the CYP to share with the new setting</li> <li>Providing information about current attainment and recent rates of progress</li> <li>Providing any relevant information about SEN, cultural or linguistic needs</li> <li>Considering if there is a transition object that the CYP may find comforting or supportive</li> </ul>		
Staff and professionals prepare the CYP for the education transition, including discussing what will be the same or similar and what will change		
Parents/Carers and professionals prepare the CYP for any living or placement transitions, including sharing what will be the same or similar and what will change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>View School website or information sent by the receiving school ahead of the move</li> </ul>		

## Transition Meeting and Direct Actions from Meeting

Actions to be completed	Who will complete this action?	Date completed
Transition meeting with all key stakeholders, along with the CYP, to create a transition plan which includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing school to share the information they have collated about the CYP (see <i>preparation actions for current setting</i>)</li> <li>Person-Centred plan</li> <li>Plan visits to new school</li> <li>Identify new Key Adults</li> <li>Plan times to meet new key staff</li> <li>Plan if the transition will be phased, and if so, the schedule for this</li> </ul>		
Transition booklet created for new school which the CYP is able to access independently		
If the CYP has any specialist equipment/resources, these need to be identified and communicated to the new setting to ensure the CYP has access to these in the new setting		
New setting to identify if there are opportunities to meet other students prior to starting formally		

## Actions for the Receiving Education Setting

Actions to be completed	Who will complete this action?	Date completed
New staff to create document to summarise key information about the CYP that is accessible for all relevant staff to access, which provides the right level of information for adults to be able to support the CYP with wellbeing and access to education		
Make sure the CYP has the correct uniform and equipment		
Induction for the new school is planned and arranged, which includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where the CYP can obtain key information/help or support when they start at the new school</li> <li>Adult has communicated the importance of the CYP feeling safe in the new school, and who they can seek support from</li> <li>Information about the school day and routines are provided to the CYP, such as knowing start/end times, timetables, map of the site, where entrance/collection points are, facilities within the school eg lunch hall/toilets/student support</li> <li>Having a 'buddy' system for supporting them around the site and to develop connections with other students</li> <li>Has there been a consideration of how they can be supported to enhance building of new friendships and social networks?</li> <li>Pre-teach any new vocabulary they may hear in the new school, such as 'form tutor' or 'houses'</li> </ul>		
Based on the information provided by the existing school, the school will need to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify appropriate intervention or support, if needed</li> <li>Select the correct groups or classes based on the CYP</li> <li>Identify any potential gaps in learning are identified and develop plans made to close these</li> </ul>		
Parents/Carers to plan transport and travel arrangements and share these with the CYP		

## Ongoing Transition Support Actions

Actions to be completed	Who will complete this action?	Date completed
Regular multi-professional meetings to provide updates and information about upcoming changes, which includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close liaison between parent/carers and new placement, if applicable</li> <li>• Social Care Team to provide feedback information about placement</li> <li>• Handover of current services to receiving services, where required</li> <li>• Ensuring the CYP and the parents/carers are informed of any changes or updates</li> </ul>		
Have opportunities to continue to access extra-curricular activities of interest or any new activities identified		

## References:

- Bath, H. (2008). The three pillars of trauma-informed care, *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 17(3), 17–21.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation, *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497–529
- Berridge, D. (2008; as cited in Brewin & Statham, 2011)
- Bomber, L. M. (2007). *Inside I'm hurting: Practical strategies for supporting children with attachment difficulties in schools*. Worth Publishing
- Brewin, M. & Statham, J. (2011). Supporting the transition from primary to secondary school for children who are looked after, *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 27 (4), 365-381
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press
- Care Inspectorate (2020) A report on the deaths of looked after children in Scotland 2012-2018. Retrieved from <https://hub.careinspectorate.com/media/3948/report-on-the-deaths-of-looked-after-children-in-scotland-2012-18.pdf>
- Cameron, C., & Das, C. (2019). 'Warm transfers': Improving the transition of looked-after children between schools, *Children and Youth Services Review*, 96, 330–337.
- Daniel, B., & Wassell, S. (2002). *The school years: Assessing and promoting resilience in vulnerable children*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers
- Dent, R. J. & Brown, S. (2006; cited in Brewin & Statham, 2011)
- DfE (2010), Department for Education. (2010). Outcomes for children Looked After by Local Authorities in England, as at 31 March 2010 (Statistical First Release SFR 38/2010). Retrieved from <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000978/sfr38-2010v4.pdf>
- Evangelou, M., Taggart, B., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P. & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2008). What makes a successful transition from primary to secondary school? *Institute of Education*, University of London
- Evans, D., Boriello, G. A., & Field, A. P. (2018). A Review of the Academic and Psychological Impact of the Transition to Secondary Education, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 1-18
- Geddes, H. (2006). Attachment in the classroom: The links between children's early experience, emotional well-being and performance in school. Worth Publishing.



Gilligan, R. (2000). Adversity, resilience and young people: The protective value of positive school and spare time experiences, *Children & Society*, 14(1), 37–47.

Holland, S. (2011). Listening to children in care: A review of methodological and theoretical approaches to understanding looked after children's perspectives. *Children & Society*, 25(3), 226–237.

Holland, S. (2011). Listening to children in care: A review of methodological and theoretical approaches to understanding looked after children's perspectives, *Children & Society*, 25(3), 226–237.

Jones, R., Everson-Hock, E. S., Papaioannou, D., Guillaume, L., Goyder, E., Cjilcott, J., Cooke, J., Payne, N., Duenas, A., Sheppard, L. M., & Swann, C. (2011). Factors associated with outcomes for looked-after children and young people: a correlates review of the literature, *Child: Care, health and development*, 37, p. 613-622

NSPCC, (2015). Children in Care. Retrieved: [Looked after children | NSPCC Learning](#)

Oakley, M., Miscampbell, G., & Gregorian, R. (2018). Looked-after Children: The Silent Crisis, The Social Market Foundation Retrieved: [Looked-after Children: The Silent Crisis](#)

Perry, B. D., & Szalavitz, M. (2006). *The boy who was raised as a dog: And other stories from a child psychiatrist's notebook*. Basic Books.

Rutter, M. (1987). Psychosocial resilience and protective mechanisms, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 57(3), 316–331

Sebba, J., Berridge, D., Luke, N., Fletcher, J., Bell, K., Strand, S., Thomas, S., Sinclair, I. & O'Higgins, A. (2015). *The educational progress of looked after children in England: Linking care and educational data*. University of Oxford.

West, P., Sweeting, H. & Young, R. (2010). Transition matters: pupil' experiences of the primary-secondary school transition in the west of Scotland and consequences for well-being and attainment, *Research Papers in Education*, 25 (1), p. 21-50