

Preparing for School Changes (Transitions)



Ideas to support children in care
for parents, carers and schools



Information, Guidance and Support

We all need a little information, support and advice from time to time.

Here are some helpful starting points for parents, carers and teachers of children in care.

This guide is not a manual for all children, it is a starting point to help and assist with some common challenges.

The focus of this guide is principally the transition from Primary to Secondary. However much of the guide will support any stage/age of transition or school change.

Change can be exciting and scary at the same time and a real challenge for many children and adults. Leaving behind everything you know and feel comfortable with, to face the unfamiliar and unknown can be extremely daunting and difficult for some children.

For those children who may have attachment, trauma or SEND needs, transitions can be especially difficult.

Supporting all children with transitions is important, for those who have additional needs they may need much more consideration. The key to successful transitions is the planning, preparation and support that is put in place.

Remember always keep each unique child in mind when planning transitions.

We have tried to give you some ideas and suggestions in this guide. Not all will be relevant, necessary or right for your child. You will know your child best, so take these as a guide and adapt these to suit their needs.

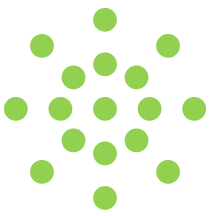
Please remember, if you have any concerns you can seek advice from your child's school, SEND Services or other agencies involved and the Virtual School (see contacts page).

Top Tips



- Understand an individual child's needs and always keep these in mind
- Work in partnership with child, parents/carers, school staff, social worker, virtual school and other relevant professionals
- Make a transition plan, review and reflect on this throughout the process
- Keep communication up to date and regular throughout the transition process
- Make sure you know a child's concerns and mitigate against these
- Make sure you know a child's interests and use these to engage, excite and connect during transition
- Don't forget the basics of keeping a child feeling safe, settled and secure throughout





Teachers

All schools have existing universal transitions work and plans in place. Make sure you keep to your established routines and include all children.

It is worth considering all of your children and splitting them by levels of need. Starting with those who will need no more than the **universal** offer of transitional support. Then consider the other children and the level of support they need.

Those children who have a moderate level of vulnerability will need a more **targeted** level of support. Children in care or with care history are likely to need a more targeted level of support.

There might be a small number of children with more complex and significant needs, such as those with EHCPs, they may well need **specialist** support.

The examples opposite given against 3 categories of support are only guides and suggestions. You may well have other successful work and plans in place or you may wish to adapt them to incorporate some of these.

Whatever your approach think of each category as a layer, so someone who needs specialist support should also receive (where appropriate) the other two layers.

Remember the more complex needs a child has, the more layers and elements of transition work will be required.

For those who need it don't forget to use local agreements, protocols and planning tools around transition (please see local links and contacts at the end of this document).

Remember a transition is as much about what you are leaving (saying goodbye to) as it is about what you are going to (new people/places) and the time in the middle (usually school holidays).

Remember the greater the needs, the more stepping stones that may be required to support a successful transition.

what can I do

• Universal

- Leavers mementoes
- Leavers Assembly /Celebration
- Saying goodbye to people/place

- All about me (pupil) transition sheet for new staff
- Transition Days
- Transition Guide / Pack
- Parents/carers Information
- Meet new teachers / staff
- Summer PEP meeting for children in care (with both schools)

• Targeted

- Transition personalised gift / book
- Significant keepsake/memory book/box
- Detailed bespoke transition plan
- Additional transition time/events
- Informal summer holiday provision

• Specialist

- Detailed multi-agency specialist transition plan
- Allocate Key Person to build early connections
- Specialist curriculum / timetable review
- Social Stories / Book to prepare
- Transitional Object(s)
- Multiple points of transition / visits and build trusting relationships prior to move





Teachers

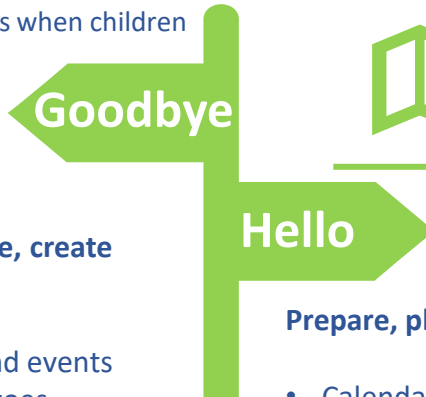
what can I do

Here are a few more ideas and suggestions, which you can think about and adapt to the level of needs you are working with.

Think of these as the goodbye part of the transition and the hello to the new. But also don't forget to think about the holiday break in the middle.

Especially towards the end of holidays when children may well start to get anxious.

Think of transitions as a journey. For that journey to be successful in reaching the planned destination, you need to be prepared for it, you need to plan for it, you need your maps/guides and you need to feel safe and settled along that journey. If all these things are in place you will arrive ready and prepared for the future.



Goodbye

Hello

Celebrate, share, say goodbye, create positive ending...

- Celebrations, memories and events
- Leavers hoodie or mementoes
- Year book
- Personal card with messages
- Leavers day trips/residential
- Creative and collaborative activities for class/year group
- Create a video or short film for keep sake

Building new relationships

- Bridging materials / activities
- Key staff sharing information / handover

Prepare, plan, what to expect and when...

- Calendar of events/actions
- New school to attend Summer PEP
- Maps and plans of new school
- Pictures of new school labelled
- All about me guide written by pupils and shared with key new staff
- Allow child to ask questions & share concerns
- Updated pupil passport
- Key adult (person) & relationship established
- Orientation visits
- Peer support
- Social communications and other group work

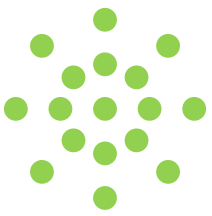
Research by University College London highlighted the tops concerns of year 6 pupils moving to secondary as:

- Losing old friends
- Homework
- Getting lost
- Being bullied
- Discipline and detentions

Why don't you carry out a year 6 survey early in spring term to support your transition work?

Targeted or Specialist Transitional Need Don't forget about sharing/planning for:

- Triggers (people, smells, events, environment)
- Consider curriculum topics/themes which may cause distress to vulnerable pupils with past trauma
- Use appropriate Local Authority planning tools (such as transition planning documents / PEPs)
- Important and key personal information/history
- Longer and more in-depth planning and transitional meetings/events for child
- Investing in building secure relationships prior to new start



Teachers

what can I do

As teachers and leaders when looking at your whole cohort of children transitioning, it is worth considering the risk and protective factors for success.

Risk Factors

- Failure to identify children who require additional support (or late identification) and/or poor understanding of need
- Children's views not being heard or the child not involved in transition planning
- Children not feeling prepared for the change
- Poor information sharing between schools / settings
- Lack of contact and collaborative working with parents / carers
- Experience of bullying or negative peer experiences.
- Difficulty with social integration



When planning your approach to transition make sure you have mapped out your timeline.

For those who need more support and input (Targeted or Specialist) during transition the time line will need to be longer and include more work.

Children in care, or with previous care experience are a vulnerable group.

This group of children may need extra consideration and care. You will need to keep them in mind and help to prepare them for, and support them through, any transition.

In your planning and preparation keep your most vulnerable children's needs in mind. This time of change will be a real challenge and present some difficulties. Consider how you can keep them feeling settled, safe and secure.

The role of 'key person' is crucial for our vulnerable children. They need to know that somebody cares that they are ok and that they are held in mind by an adult.

For the key Person to be effective a unique connection with the child needs to be established enabling the child to regulate with the adult. The adult holds all the information and the child can 'download' the adult's resilience and regulation.

Protective Factors

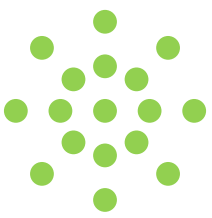
- Early identification of need
- Robust and current knowledge and understanding about children's strengths & needs
- Child centred processes
- Children are well prepared to adjust to the new environment and curriculum expectations
- Children have a positive sense of school belonging and feel supported by friends/peers/key adults.
- Good information sharing between settings - a consistent approach and partnership working between schools/setting.
- New setting to attend summer term PEP
- Positive home support and involvement of parents/carers.
- Curriculum continuity between year 6 and 7

DOs AND DON'Ts OF A TRAUMA-INFORMED COMPASSIONATE CLASSROOM

- 1 CREATE A SAFE SPACE**
Consider not only physical safety but the children's emotional safety as well.
- 2 ESTABLISH PREDICTABILITY**
Write out a schedule and prepare children for transitions. It helps create a sense of security and safety.
- 3 BUILD A SENSE OF TRUST**
Follow through with your promises and in situations where changes are unavoidable be transparent with your explanations.
- 4 OFFER CHOICES**
Empower students and offer "power with" rather than "power over" strategies.
- 5 STAY REGULATED**
Help your students (and yourself!) stay in the "Resiliency Zone" to promote optimum learning. Have regulation tools ready to help students bumped out of the zone into either hyperarousal (angry, nervous, panicky) or hypoarousal (numb, depressed, fatigued).

There's really only one DON'T
Let's not punish kids for behaviors that are trauma symptoms.

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Parents & Carers

what can I do

As a parent/carer you will know your child best. Make sure you use and share your knowledge, and any concerns you have, as early as possible with both their sending and receiving school through, or before, your child's summer term PEP or transition planning meeting.

Don't be afraid to ask questions or highlight where you feel support is needed.

Celebrations & goodbye

Be honest and supportive of the whole process. Talk positively, developing strength and resilience. Don't add to anxiety or negativity. Change is both exciting and scary, but everything that is new soon becomes normal.



Make sure your child enjoys the end of year celebrations and creates the mementoes and keepsakes which will allow them to successfully say goodbye.



Perhaps have your own small end of year after school party with a few key friends or family. Think about what you can do at home that will be particularly special for your child.

School Holidays

Make the most of your holiday time to relax and take part in whatever leisure activities are of most interest to your child. Sometimes the first few days/week children just need to rest and enjoy some down time at home, especially after a busy end of term.



If they need extra support with anything practical or with social and emotional support during this time, seek this out or support this yourself. Keeping some form of routine across the holiday will help getting back into school routine in September. Share any worries you may have with your supervising social worker or the child's social worker.

Towards the end of the holiday your child might start to get anxious and this will likely come out in their behaviour. Use this time to reflect on the positive end of term at last school and the re-uniting with key friends or building of new friendships at the new setting. Keep talking positively!



If anything is of particular concern, plan and mitigate against this. For example a new walk or bus ride to school; do this towards the end of holidays to help prepare.

New Term

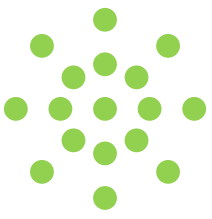


Think ahead and plan around anything that might be an issue – bed times, getting up, getting ready on time, organising school bag, clothes etc. For the first few days/weeks you might need to do much more than usual to support your child to reduce anxiety and stress.

Plan to reduce any anxiety, stress or grumpy behaviour with kindness and love. Remember when your child returns from school don't bombard them with questions, let them rest and settle for a while.



Don't plan to do anything too hectic at weekends or after school for the first few weeks, the mental, physical and emotional energy they will use up in the first few weeks will be exhausting.



Parents & Carers

what can I do

Once a child starts secondary school your contact and involvement with school will change. Children will be expected to be more independent and you can support them with the key skills they will need to do that.



Here is a short check list of things to think about and prepare for. Some might be relevant, others not, but do take time to think about your child and what you might need to do to support them. You may need to be a little bit of a personal assistant to your child for a short while...



Check List **Uniform & School Kit**



- Check and make sure you have all the uniform early
- Perhaps buy a spare item or two, for those pieces they are likely to lose (tie?)
- Use permanent marker to put their initials on labels, so if lost they can be re-united
- Check what stationary they need from school prospectus.
- Perhaps put a coloured sticker on each item, to help keep them together.
- If needed create a check list for your child of items they need. Pop on bedroom door as visual reminder
- Most children will need help organising themselves, do this in a supportive and encouraging way to build their confidence and self-organisation
- Practice putting on uniform and check there are no annoying labels that need to be cut out
- Get a copy of the school timetable and be aware of what equipment is needed when e.g. when PE days are on or food tech ingredients



Communication

- Each school will have a designated teacher for children in care, make sure you know who this is and how you can get in touch with them – hopefully you might have already made contact during the transition.
- Most schools have pastoral or year leaders, make sure you have their names and contact details.
- Your child will have a form tutor at secondary school, make sure you have their name and contact details.
- Keep a list of all of these to hand so you can get in touch easily. In most secondary schools these staff will teach all day, so email is usually the best means of communication.
- If there are any issues communicate with school as swiftly as you can.



Supporting Learning & Development

- Most schools will use some online or smart phone apps for setting homework and communicating with parents/carers and pupils. Make sure you know what these are and how they work. Login and check on these regularly. Don't forget to save your login details.
- Your child will most likely need a device and internet access at home to complete homework.
- Make sure you have a quiet space set up for your child to complete homework, perhaps somewhere you can oversee and support when required.



Social and Emotional Needs

- The social, emotional and physical exertion children use during days at school can sometimes mean when they get home they can become overwhelmed. Make use of school homework clubs where possible so children can rest when they get home.
- Remember you can use your child's termly PEP meetings as a place to discuss your child's social and emotional needs and agree strategies to help support your child.





Unexpected Transitions

what can I do

Unexpected endings, changes or additional transitions may bring new or additional challenges for some children. For some it may mean traditional goodbyes or transition work does not take place. This may heighten emotions and feelings, which need additional support and consideration.



Parents/carers at home

Unexpected situations are a challenge to children and adults, especially if what was once the normal routine has suddenly stopped. Here are a few suggestions for extra or additional support:

- Keep up to date with information and advice from school and share what is appropriate with your child
- Keep in contact with school, school friends and family
- If they have any anxieties talk these through with them and share these with the network including the child's social worker.
- Think about what you could do with some close friends/family to celebrate the end of the school year in other ways
- Work with your child on their own school memories scrap book
- Don't forget to share your concerns or questions with old or new school and seek out support

If your child is not currently attending school:

- Keep some routine and daily learning using the resources and home learning that has come from school
- Use alternative methods to keep in contact such as telephone calls
- Talk to school about some keep in touch visits or virtual contact
- Ask school about what virtual goodbye/ending activities can be done

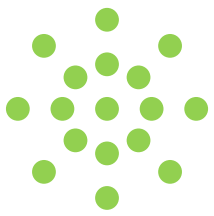


Professionals at School

For those more vulnerable children unexpected changes may create additional or stronger worries, anxiety or sadness. Think about how you can support these children across transitions, either back to school or to a new school:

- Offer extra or additional calls/video calls to these children and families, letting them know you still hold them in mind
- Think about welfare calls being much more about the well-being of the child
- Think about how you can create other ways of celebrating, sharing and saying goodbyes for instance virtual celebrations and goodbye books which can be sent
- Keep in touch more regularly with those vulnerable children
- Remember to maintain contact between the key adult in school and child
- Think about how staff could send out a message to a wide number of children with a short film
- Think about buddying up some children to provide peer support
- Don't forget to work with parents/carers as a key advocate and expert on the child's needs
- Work with the child's social worker and virtual school link to plan a return to school for any children in care who have been out of education





Useful Links & Resources

Beacon House Transition

<https://beaconhouse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Supporting-Transitions-2.pdf>

Find out more about Attachment and Trauma –The Braveheart website for example has a wealth of information <https://www.bravehearteducation.co.uk/>

Anna Freud Centre Managing Unexpected Endings and Transitions

<https://www.annafreud.org/media/11610/managing-unexpected-endings-transitions-may2020.pdf>

Touch Base Resources

Primary - [New Guide for Transition Back to School – Touchbase](#)

Secondary - [Secondary School Guide to Collective Recovery - Touchbase](#)



Links and other useful resources

<https://www.annafreud.org/media/11465/helping-cyp-manage-anxiety-apr2020-v3.pdf>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/transitioning-to-secondary-school/zkc9pg8>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zrynnrd>

<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/risks-and-protective-factors/school-based-risk-factors/transitions/>

<https://beaconhouse.org.uk/resources/>

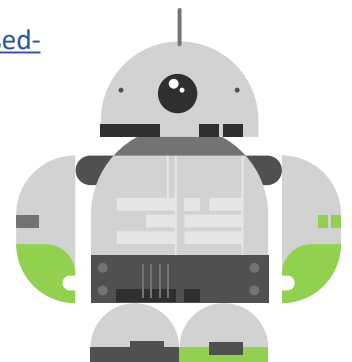
Local SEND Parent Information & Advice

[Southampton](#)

[Portsmouth](#)

[Hampshire](#)

[Isle of Wight](#)





Contact Details

For further support, advice and guidance please contact the virtual school from the child's placing Local Authority

Southampton Virtual School



Virtual School Head: Maria Anderson
Phone: 07721109951
Email: thevirtualschool@southampton.gov.uk

Termly E-PEPs for all children in care and Local Authority Transition planning tool available.

Portsmouth Virtual School



Virtual School Head: Tina Henley
Phone: 02392 688641
Email: virtualschoolforlookedafterchildren@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

[Portsmouth Virtual School and College - Portsmouth Education Partnership](#)

Termly E-PEPs for all children in care and transition planning completed for all school moves.

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Virtual School



Virtual School Head: Nicola Blake
Phone: 01962 835227
Email: virtualschool@hants.gov.uk



Virtual School Head: Nicola Blake
Phone: 01983 814680
Email: virtual.school@iow.gov.uk

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/educationandlearning/virtual-school>

Hants and IOW: Termly PEPs for all children in care and use the Hampshire Transition Partnership Agreement for transitions for children in care:

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/educationandlearning/educationalpsychology/Transition>

