

Supporting Primary to Secondary transition for pupils with ASD

Moving from primary school to secondary school is scary for most children. However, it is even more scary for those young people with Autism. Primary school has often been a safe hub for these children for the past 7 years - same teacher all day, same room all day, same children all day – but Secondary school is a very different environment.

- Larger class sizes
- Higher number of daily lessons
- Different travel arrangements getting to and from school (often independently)
- Now the youngest in the school
- More teachers with different teaching styles
- Often larger building sizes
- New timetable
- New routine
- Having to move around the building to find each lesson
- New subjects they have never encountered before
- Sometimes a longer day (including traveling times to and from school)

Many Year 6 children have already been out of school for 12 weeks and some will not be returning to their primary school. In light of this, it is important that as teachers and other professionals we look at new ways to support them with this big transition in the best way we can.

Traditional ways for transition	Ways to support during Covid-19
Transition meetings with parents and child in the school.	Virtual meeting with parents and child - include SENCO/Form tutor/Key member of staff that will be available for support i.e. ASD unit lead.
Extra visits to the school.	Social story to be sent home including a clear, colour-coded timetable; also a MAP (with pictures of key rooms - form room, lunch hall, science room, inclusion centre, etc.). Virtual tour of the school - videos to be sent to primary schools to be shared / use of website.
Liaise with agencies involved with supporting the child.	Virtual meetings.
Staff across the school are aware of ASD learners needs.	Pen pictures to be created for the learner, this should be done in consultation with parents and the primary school
Transition plan to be drawn up by lead professional highlighting any sensory issues.	Can still be done through virtual consultations with parents and primary school. Ask parents and learner to complete a 'My Autism' profile.
Social story to be written about transitioning from school to school. It is important to highlight the big changes that may cause anxiety such as waking up earlier, taking the bus or eating lunch.	This can still be completed.

	Consider a virtual buddy system where learners can engage with a peer from their new group who is similar to them.
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Travelling to school
<p>For many young people, the first time they travel 'alone' may be when they go to secondary school. If a pupil with an ASD is going to be using a school bus or a form of public transport, they will need to be prepared for this.</p> <p>The pupil needs to know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • where to wait for the bus (or other form of transport e.g. train) • how and when to use their bus pass or pay for their ticket (if applicable) • what time the bus leaves • how much time they should allow to get to the bus stop • roughly how long the journey takes • who to go to with problems / what to do if the bus doesn't arrive • where to get off the bus <p>There are smart phone apps available for this.</p>

Once in school
Lesson aims or tasks to be on the whiteboard as this makes the student aware of the structure of the lesson including how much they have to do.
If students are required to copy tasks/learning objectives from the board, provide them with these on a piece of paper on their desk (or ready printed to go straight into books). This prevents students from becoming distracted and losing concentration while shifting their attention repeatedly.
<p>Give a 5-minute warning prior to the end of class to prepare them for the next transition - verbally, visual sign or both</p> <p>Allow them to pack up and transition a few minutes earlier - reduces anxiety of busy corridor, fear of being late, organise themselves for next lesson</p>
Use prompt cards to support independence in unexpected situations e.g. 'What if..... I lose my dinner money/forget my PE kit?'. These remind the learner what to do in certain situations reducing anxiety. Cards should be reviewed regularly.
Ensure all staff are aware of the pupils ASD needs including sensory difficulties.
Reminders/ prompts at the beginning of each day- daily timetable, MAP of school; spare copies to be available.
Identified buddy in school.
<p>Timetables:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • replace initials for subjects with symbols • try using a picture e.g. of a globe instead of Gg for Geography

- colour code different subjects
- use pictures of clock faces instead of times or 'Period 1', etc.
- write out teachers' names for each subject in full
- use classroom numbers, along with brief descriptions of each room

Break time/lunch time:

Break times and lunchtimes can be a problem because of the relative lack of structure, the noise, smells (in the dining hall), activity and movement

- where to go
- how to get their lunch (if they don't bring their own)
- where to sit
- what lunchtime clubs, if any, are available
- where they can go for help if they need it

Pupils with an ASD can misunderstand tasks and instructions. Some may appear to defy staff instructions or requests, but in actual fact may simply not understand what you're asking them to do.

- 'bad' behaviour can be due to difficulties with communication or understanding
- 'defiance' can be due to not understanding or slower processing speed: give pupils time
- break down tasks into small chunks
- keep instructions simple and clear
- use visual supports wherever possible
- pupils with an ASD may well have difficulty making choices, so it is best to limit choices to two or three
- allow pupils five minutes' chill-out time in difficult moments
- many pupils with an ASD will benefit from a 'refuge', a safe, quiet place in the school where they can relax and get support from people who will listen to them