

Section 10: Transitions for disabled children and children with SEN

This section of the toolkit is about transitions for disabled children and children with SEN: from home into an early years setting; changing between providers; or moving from a setting into school.

It is important that when children start in a setting, move on to another setting or to school, that they have the best possible chance of a smooth transition and a successful placement.

Transition for all children

Transitions should be seen as a process not an event, and should be planned for and discussed with children and parents. Settings should communicate information which will secure continuity of experience for the child between settings.

Early Years Foundation Stage Practice Guidance, 2008

If transition is a process, the key to its success lies in the preparation and planning beforehand and the settling in, or follow up, afterwards.

The voice of the child

Transition is a time of change and can be a source of both excitement and anxiety for children and for parents. Throughout the transition process, young children need to feel secure and confident that their needs, wants, likes and dislikes will be understood.

Early years providers [...] should know precisely where children and young people with SEN are in their learning and development. They should ensure decisions are informed by the insights of parents and those of children [...] themselves.

DfE and DH (2015) SEN and disability code of practice: 0-25 years, para 1.25

Young children are dependent on the adults around them to share this important information. Practitioners and parents should be encouraged to share their observations of children's choices, and the preferences reflected in these, at every stage. Respecting the different ways in which children communicate, toys, pictures, photos of people and settings, creative role play using puppets and dolls in different scenarios, can all be used to promote communication and enable children to express their views.

Transition into the setting

Planning and preparation for transition may involve a range of different elements, though these are not necessarily separate activities. They are likely to include:

- establishing relationships
- sharing information
- visits
- creating continuities
- preparation in the setting
- training and support
- settling in and follow up

Successful transition for disabled children and children with SEN has its foundation in good practice for all children. Where a child's needs have been identified before they are admitted to the setting, transition is likely to require more detailed planning, the closer participation of parents and the sharing of a wider range of information. The period of planning and preparation is likely to involve the SENCO as well as the allocated key person and, for some children, the involvement a wider range of professionals. Different settings plan transition in different ways and leaders decide how to support the process. In the sections below, it is assumed that the key person is leading the transition process with the support and involvement of the SENCO. At different stages and for different children and families, the SENCO may be more involved.

Establishing relationships: Successful transition preparation begins early so that there is time to establish good communication and build a trusting relationship between home and setting by the time the child starts attending the setting.

Sharing information: Information is shared through the completion of admissions and registration forms, and well-designed forms can support smooth transitions, but information also needs to be gathered face-to-face in order to benefit from parents' insights. The range of information gathered needs to include sufficient detail for the setting to understand the child's stage of learning and development, their likes, dislikes, who and what is important to them, their routines, and, importantly, how the child communicates.

Settings can benefit from parents' insights into what has really helped and supported their child's learning and development to date. For a child whose needs have already been identified, the setting will want to know which other professionals have already been involved in working with the family, for example a health visitor, a Portage worker or a speech and language therapist. The setting may ask parents to share information from other professionals, and may want to seek parents' permission to work with other professionals, to gain a fuller picture of different aspects of the child's development and to better prepare the setting for the child's start there.

Settings may encourage parents to gather information in an 'All about me' book, with photos showing important aspects of the child's life: the child involved in a favourite activity; the child using pictures, signs or symbols to communicate; or the detail of how a child with a physical impairment needs to be positioned in order to engage in a particular activity.

Settings need to use the period of planning and preparation to gather information to feed into their approach to SEN Support when the child starts attending the setting. Settings should have in mind the discussions they have at different stages of the *assess, plan, do, review* cycle and should seek to cover as much as they can of *assess*, and *plan* so that they can *do* and *review* when the child starts, see *Section 5: SEN Support in the Early Years – A Graduated Approach*.

The other part of information-sharing is about giving parents a good picture of the setting: everything from the setting's approach to teaching and learning to the daily routines. For disabled children and children with SEN it is important that parents understand the setting's approach to SEN and disability, their policies, and their underlying commitment to equality of opportunity and including children in every aspect of the life of the setting.

Visits: Visits to the child's home provide an opportunity for the parent to share information in an environment where both they and the child feel more comfortable. For the setting, it will be important: to see the child playing in their own home; to learn from skills or techniques used by parents to support their child at home; to gain an insight into the wishes, views and feelings of the child and of their parents; to gain a fuller picture of the child's stage of learning and development; and to gain insights into how they may need to adapt arrangements in the setting to match or mirror aspects of the home. A home visit is an opportunity to gather much of the information that is needed and to plan for the child's start in the setting.

Inviting parents to visit the setting provides an opportunity for parents to consider, with the key person and SENCO, how the child may respond to different aspects of the setting: to different toys and activities; what they may enjoy, what they may find difficult. This is an opportunity for the key person to identify with the parent any reasonable adjustments that may need to be made for a disabled child – making reasonable adjustments is an anticipatory duty, so adjustments need to be made before the child could be *placed at a disadvantage*, see *Section 2: Statutory responsibilities*.

Where parents have concerns about the setting's ability to provide a suitable learning environment for their child, a detailed audit of the setting with the parent may help both the parents and the setting: the parents' concerns may be allayed; and the setting will be better able to make the necessary adjustments to include the child in the full range of activities.

Creating continuities: Familiar books, pictures, comforters or other objects can help to provide continuity of experience between home and setting. Home visits provide an opportunity for the setting to identify things that are important to the child at home that might be available or be made available in the setting. Photos of family in the setting and of the setting at home can help to create familiarity and act as prompts for discussion with the child.

Preparation in the setting: The information gathered during the period of preparation and planning from all these sources can give the setting a good picture of what they may need to do to prepare the setting for the child. This may range from physical changes to the layout or location of particular activities, to changes in policies and practices or daily routines.

Training and support: Preparation within the setting includes careful consideration of staff skills and whether training may be needed, for example: in the use of particular sign or symbol systems of communication; or in particular procedures for supporting a child's health needs in the setting.

Settling in and follow up: Careful preparation will make for a smooth transition but the process continues when the child starts in a setting, and *starting* itself may be a staged process with the amount of time in the setting gradually building up.

Promoting continuity between home and setting and good communication will be vital to making adjustments in the first few days. Communication may need to be more frequent and more detailed for children with SEN and a child's key person may need time allocated to daily feedback to parents and the opportunity to seek parents' input on how their child is supported in the setting.

Settings normally wait until the child is settled into the setting before carrying out the progress check, between the ages of 2 and 3. Information gathered through the check should inform how the setting is working with the child through SEN Support. Where SEN Support has been put in place, any new insights from the progress check may trigger an early review of the child's progress and a consideration with parents of the interventions and support for the child, see *Section 5: SEN Support in the Early Years – A Graduated Approach*.

Leadership of transition

The resources involved in preparing for smooth transitions are significant and dependent on the commitment of leaders and managers and on a good understanding of the positive benefits for children. As one setting puts it: *We believe that smooth transitions support the personal social and emotional development, learning and future success of every child.*

Children who already have an Education, Health and Care Plan

Where a child is admitted to the setting with an EHC plan, the setting will have been consulted by the local authority before the setting is named in the child's plan, see *Section 9: Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments and Plans*. There is significant information gathered together through the Education, Health and Care needs assessment and planning process and the provision to be made for the child will be specified and quantified in detail in the EHC plan.

It is likely that before requesting a particular setting or making representations to have their child placed in the setting, the parents will have visited and discussed their child with the setting. There may well be opportunities for discussion and an exchange of information during this time.

The setting will want to make broadly the same arrangements for the child's transition as for any other child with SEN. The SENCO may have greater involvement and it is likely that there will be more professionals involved with the child. The involvement of the professionals who contributed to the EHC assessment and plan is likely to be important to the child's successful transition into the setting and to early planning and adjustments within the setting.

Transition into school

The process of transition into school tends to be more standardised than transition into a setting and many local authorities have standard transition policies and procedures. Local authorities may have standard paperwork and may ask for information about special educational needs, disabilities, medical needs and other aspects of children's individual circumstances.

Schools themselves will vary in their approach to transition but many allocate time to outreach visits to settings in order to prepare for children's transition into school. Schools and settings may also agree shared learning projects and this will help to create continuities for children with SEN, along with others. It is helpful if arrangements for moving into school can also recognise friendship groups, for example, through the co-ordination of visits.

Early years providers and schools should support children so that they are included in social groups and develop friendships. This is particularly important when children are transferring from one phase of education to another (for example from nursery to primary school)

DfE and DH (2015) *SEN and disability code of practice: 0-25 years*, para 8.8

Transition into school needs to cover similar ground to that outlined above for transition into the setting. Settings should expect to gather together their records of how they have supported children at SEN Support and agree with parents what needs to be shared as part of the transition process.

There may be opportunities for mutual visits and settings will want to welcome Reception Class teachers and school SENCOs to see how children are learning and developing in the setting. Where parents are involved at the same time, this can be a helpful way of introducing them to school staff and of building up new relationships.

SEN Support should include planning and preparation for transition, before a child moves into another setting or school. This can include a review of the SEN support being provided or the EHC plan. To support the transition, information should be shared by the current setting with the receiving setting or school. The current setting should agree with parents the information to be shared as part of this planning process

DfE and DH (2015) *SEN and disability code of practice: 0-25 years*, para 5.47

Within the arrangements for transition into school, the Area SENCO may play a more significant role in planning and co-ordinating transition across a number of settings and schools.

The Area SENCO plays an important part in planning for children with SEN to transfer between early years provision and schools

DfE and DH (2015) *SEN and disability code of practice: 0-25 years*, para 5.57

Children who have an Education, Health and Care Plan

For children with an EHC plan before they move into school, planning needs to start at the annual review prior to transition into primary school and consider the school that the parents would like to request is named in the EHC plan.

An EHC plan must be reviewed and amended in sufficient time prior to a child or young person moving between key phases of education, to allow for planning for and, where necessary, commissioning of support and provision at the new institution.

The review and any amendments must be completed by 15 February in the calendar year of the transfer at the latest for transfers into or between schools.

DfE and DH (2015) *SEN and disability code of practice: 0-25 years*, para 9.179

The practical arrangements for transition, discussed above, need to sit alongside these statutory arrangements.

Checklist of action for transition to setting or school

1.	Gather as much information as possible about the child. Use admission forms, All About me booklets, transition records and one page profiles	
2.	Talk to parents and plan a home visit for relevant staff	
3.	Arrange a transition meeting with parents setting or school staff, parents and any professionals involved before the child starts	
4.	Think about who would be a suitable key person. Support and create opportunities for them and the SENCO to build a relationship with the child and parents	
5.	Ensure staff receive any training that may be needed before the child starts at the setting or school	
6.	Have in place any specialist equipment the child may need, plan ahead as this may take time to source	
7.	Audit toys, books and other resources to ensure they are suitable and accessible for the child	
8.	Consider the room layout to ensure mobility, the provision of a quiet area, toilet adaptations, changes to lighting, flooring or furniture	
9.	Where a child has an EHCP or top-up funding, plan for any additional staff who may need to be recruited, inducted and given the opportunity to get to know the child and parents	
10.	Agree an admission and settling in plan with parents	

Ideas to support transition to school

