TRANSITION TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

Transition from primary to secondary can be traumatic for many pupils whether or not they are disabled or have Special Educational Needs. However, transition for children categorised as having SEND can be particularly difficult.

Make sure your child's Education Health and Care Plan, IDP (Wales) or Statement (Northern Ireland) is up to date and reflects your child's current needs and the secondary school environment.

The first consideration that parents/carers will have to think about is 'which school?' You will need to start looking well in advance and consider a number of different options. You are likely to be looking over a wider geographical area than for primary school. Local authorities in England must publish details of schools as part of their Local Offer. Individual schools must also publish information about the provision they make for young people with SEND. See our guide on secondary school for a list of questions to ask when visiting potential schools.

In many cases there is one main secondary school which most of the primary pupils feed in to. For pupils with Down's syndrome, this is by far the most sensible option to go for socially, as they will be well supported by the peers that they have grown up with. However, sometimes there are overriding reasons for this not to happen and the pupil has to transfer to a different secondary school without the support of familiar peers from the feeder school.

A positive attitude from the receiving school is essential. In addition, a good and well-prepared transition plan needs to be set in place to pave the way for it to be as smooth and trouble free as possible for the pupil, staff and parents.

The transition plan must take into account the actual situation and be personalised to the learner who has Down's syndrome.

Useful strategies

Start planning early e.g. at the Annual Review meeting during year 5.

- **Use the first term in year 6 to visit schools and agree the receiving secondary school with the local authority.**

- **Ensure the Annual Review meeting in last year of primary is held in the autumn term, allowing plenty of time to draw up a transition plan.**

- **Ensure that everybody involved with the child is invited to a transition planning meeting. (This could be the Annual Review meeting.)**

    - **From primary: class teacher, TA and SENCO**
    - **From the already identified secondary school: SENCO, relevant learning support staff, possibly year or form tutors; - From outside agencies: any involved professionals e.g. speech & language therapist, educational psychologist, education officer, etc.**

- **Explore opportunities for the secondary SENCO/form teacher/LSA/TA to visit the pupil in primary school before transition, to observe the pupil in a familiar and secure setting.**

- **Invite the secondary school SENCO, secondary form tutor, etc. to the pupil's final termly review at primary.**

- **If possible, find out who the form tutor and Learning Support Assistants/Teaching Assistants (LSA/TA) will be in order to set up visits and training.**

- **Set up regular meetings with both primary and secondary staff to discuss planning and progress of transition plan, including after the move has taken place if necessary.**

- **Encourage the secondary school to arrange class groupings in such a way that the pupil with Down's syndrome has familiar and supportive friends in their new class.**

- **Consider whether pupil with Down's syndrome needs extra pastoral care during and after transition.**

- **Establish who will register any concerns, be main contact person, and what procedures will be carried out, e.g. a safety base for the pupil to go to (perhaps a learning resource room, their form room or the SENCO's room).**

- **In secondary school, your child will come across a much larger number of staff who won't all know them well. You may want to think about preparing a one-page profile that is easy to share with more people. You may also want to ask if the school has any kind of buddy system for new pupils.**

A regular feature of successful transition procedures is a programme of visits. Because many children with Down's syndrome are thrown by change and find it more difficult to adapt to new surroundings without extra help and preparation, this is an aspect that deserves separate consideration.

Useful Strategies:

- **Consider which other peers from their primary class can accompany the pupil with Down's syndrome on any school visits.**

- **Arrange for the pupil to meet head teacher and relevant members of staff – form tutor, any subject teachers, learning support staff, dinner supervisors, support teachers etc.**

- **Try to develop their familiarity with the layout of secondary school – dining room, hall, toilets, classroom, library etc. Consider producing social stories and photo books to help with this.**

- **Practice the route from playground into school, which door to use etc.**

- **Provide the child with a map of the school, colour coded if possible.**

- **Routines: visits should cover a playtime, lunch break, assembly etc. Many pupils with Down's syndrome settle quickly once they understand the routine and the rules.**

- **Ensure you have information about class/school rules and routines, uniform (including PE).**

- **Ensure you have information about the after school clubs and other extra-curricular activities held in the school and ask the school how the pupil who has Down's syndrome can be included in all activities of the school.**

- **Consider lunch: what is best initially for your child? To pay in the canteen and choose lunch or to take a packed lunch?**