

**Supporting Students with
Social Communication & Interaction Needs:
A Re-integration & Transition Guide
for During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Secondary & Post 16 Settings

**Barnsley Education Inclusion Services
Social Communication & Interaction Team**

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Introduction

Transition

Covid-19 has brought significant change for all children, young people and families. In life there are lots of changes that happen, these can be unsettling and difficult to manage, even more so when the change is unexpected.

Transition is the process of changing from one place or activity to another and can produce feelings of anxiety, confusion, uncertainty and possibly even fear. For a young person with social communication and interaction (SCI) needs, these feelings may be heightened.

This booklet provides a summary of the impact of school/college closures for students with social communication and interaction needs, as well as some practical strategies to help reduce anxiety and make the transition to a new setting, or re-integration into an existing one, as smooth as possible.



Introduction

Why is change difficult for people with SCI needs?

Many people experience anxiety in their daily lives and this is enhanced when questions cannot be answered effectively. The current situation means there are lots of uncertainties being imposed upon us all, such as when can I visit family? When will I return to school/college? Will school/college be like it used to be?

Often students feel comforted when there is a familiar routine as this is predictable and 'safe'. When the usual routine is interrupted, and particularly when a new consistent routine doesn't take its place this can be very unsettling.

It can be difficult for students to predict what might happen in a new setting so they may prefer to keep with what is known and familiar, e.g. the home situation rather than venturing out.

Due to differences in social understanding it may take students longer to understand the social rules of a new environment (school/college) and how to respond or adapt their behaviour in a new situation, e.g. unstructured breaktimes.

Introduction

Transitioning to a new school or college will involve many changes, including:

- The environment, e.g. buildings, recreation areas, student/staff areas
- People including staff and peers
- Language and vocabulary used
- More distant supervision and intervention
- Classrooms and study bases
- Equipment needed for studies
- The route to school/college
- Use of public transport
- Times and timings
- Daily routines
- Uniform



Introduction

The transition into a new setting (from primary to secondary school or secondary school into college) and re-integrating back into a setting are big changes. However, transition is not just about major changes that occur in life, some transitions occur on a daily basis, for example moving from one task to another, e.g. from lunchtime to a lesson or from the bus stop to the library.

Helping students with SCI needs

Preparation is key to supporting students with social communication and interaction needs through changes. We can help to reduce anxiety by implementing change gradually, discussing and reviewing these changes and supporting the student's responses. Working alongside those who know their needs best such as parents/carers, current staff and supportive peers will result in a more successful transition.

Please remember it can take time for someone with social communication and interaction needs to get used to any change, therefore allowances need to be made for this and support provided.

What is a Social Communication & Interaction Friendly Environment?



Things to consider when identifying SCI friendly schools and colleges:

Visiting secondary schools and colleges in readiness for a child's transition can be a daunting task. Parents/carers and their child may be uncertain about what questions to ask and what to look for, and they may look to professionals to help and support them to make a decision about what is best for their child. Although parents/carers know their child better than anyone, and can often trust their instincts, the following information may help them to support their child during this key transition.

Environmental Factors

- Where possible, the school/college will be in the child's local area
- The school/college will be warm, calm and inviting
- There will be clear signs to enable the child to navigate more easily around the building
- Noise levels will be low or if/when there are increased levels of noise, there will be access to a quiet area and/or appropriate resources, e.g. earphones/headphones
- There will be alternative areas/spaces for the child to access, as and when required, during both structured and unstructured times of the day
- Appropriate facilities, e.g. disabled toilets, changing areas will be available for the child to access as and when required

What is a Social Communication & Interaction Friendly Environment?

Making it Visual

As students with social communication and interaction needs are usually visual learners and may have high anxiety around 'everyday' issues, providing them with visual references about the unknown can be very helpful.

Secondary schools and colleges should consider the value of producing a visual support for students with SCI needs. This information can be in booklet form and distributed to all prospective students with SCI needs during the Spring or Summer term. Equally this information can be produced in other mediums, e.g. video or PowerPoint format. Staff can involve students in producing parts or all of these documents as project work.

However you choose to produce the information, the focus should be on providing the information that will be important for students to be able to refer back to during the Summer holiday. Key points are listed below and an example checklist is given later in the booklet:

- Map of school/college
- Pictures of key locations around the school/college
- Photos of toilets and procedures of how and when to go



What is a Social Communication & Interaction Friendly Environment?

Making it Visual

- Photo of medical room and how/when to access it
- Photos of school/college office and other reference points
- Photos of entrances and which ones can and can't be used by students
- Where cycles/scooters can be stored safely
- Photos of a typical classroom from each curriculum department
- Information about bells, the number of lessons/tutorials and their times
- Sample visual timetable and an explanation of how a two week timetable works, if this is in place
- Photos of key staff, e.g. Head of Year; Tutor; SENCo; School Nurse/First Aider; Support Staff and who to go to/speak to if there is a problem
- Information on classroom rules
- Information about what to do if there are any bullying issues
- Details of late procedures



What is a Social Communication & Interaction Friendly Environment?

Making it Visual

- Details about where the dining hall/cafeteria is
- Details about break times, lunch times and clubs
- Information about support staff , the designated area and provision that is in place for students with additional needs to access
- Rules regarding the dining hall/cafeteria; assembly/tutor times; library; breaks; general movement around school/college
- Rewards and sanctions
- Information about the equipment/resources required and what happens at the start of each lesson/tutorial
- Information about uniform/PE kits/specific clothing for practical lessons/tutorials
- Homework/independent study systems and expectations and what to do if it cannot be completed



Creating a Social Communication & Interaction Friendly Environment

Having structure, routine predictability is really important to students with needs. Creating a learning environment and using supportive approaches that are accessible to all, will support those students who present with SCI needs.



The checklist on the following pages gives some suggestions about what to implement when organising your environment in preparation for students who are transitioning to, or returning to your setting.

What is a Social Communication & Interaction Friendly Environment?

Student Name:	DOB:	Key Worker:	
		Implemented? (Yes/No)	Achieved? (Date)
Suggested Provision			
Place the student in a tutor group with some supportive peers they already know.			
Identify a key worker or mentor to support the student. *Limit the number of additional adults as far as possible.			
Provide early lunch passes, corridor passes to explain absence from lessons, capacity to leave lessons early to avoid busy transitions.			
Provide a designated safe/calm space within school/college that students with SCI needs feel they can go at times that they feel overwhelmed or unable to manage. There should be structure and rules in place about how students with SCI needs will communicate their need to access such areas.			

What is a Social Communication & Interaction Friendly Environment?

Suggested Provision	Implemented? (Yes/No)	Achieved? (Date)
Identify an accessible space/locker in school/college for the student's belongings.		
Consider having a consistent seating plan in all classrooms to increase predictability and minimise sensory discomfort – consideration to be made to the position of the student's seat, e.g. away from distractions of windows and doors, not in front of a 'busy' display etc.		
Take into account sensory differences, so that adjustments can be made, e.g. loud noises, uniform, smells of dinner hall/canteen and toilets. Timetabling sensory breaks and/or calming activities may be required for some students.		
Provide access to personal ICT, Alternative and Augmentative Communication and other technology, e.g. dictaphones to facilitate success and motivation.		
Timetable calming and motivating activities either within the classroom or close by, to facilitate academic success.		

What is a Social Communication & Interaction Friendly Environment?

Additional COVID-19 Measures

In addition to the previous suggestions about creating a SCI friendly environment, consideration also needs to be made to the extensive COVID-19 measures that are required at this time.

This should include making measures explicit and visual wherever possible. Measures should be referred to frequently and consistently throughout the day, so that they become part of the daily routine:

- **Handwashing & other hygiene measures:** display Government and NHS visuals to support understanding
- **Social Distancing** (in all areas of the setting): consider floor markings, desk spaces, one way systems and the use of social areas
- **Use of resources:** personalised equipment should be introduced
- **Timetabling:** consider staggered start/finish times and breaks

Further support and guidance can be found on the Government website



Good Practice for Re-integration & Transition: Y6-Y7

It is really important that students transition or return to their setting with a sense of belonging, but also feel reassured and at ease. Much of this will be supported by positive engagement with parents and will require careful planning and preparation.

Suggested activities to help prepare students **prior** to them returning/transitioning to their setting:

- ✓ Build excitement and allow students to familiarise themselves with their environment
- ✓ Share messages of affirmation, e.g. 'we are looking forward to meeting you' and 'it is our priority to keep you safe'
- ✓ Make virtual introductions between staff, parents and students; this could include virtual Q&A sessions
- ✓ Offer students a virtual tour of their classroom and the wider learning environment
- ✓ Identify which students are likely to need extra support upon their re-integration/transition and consider their individual needs
- ✓ Share resources with parents and carers that can be used at home in order to reduce potential anxieties prior to returning to the setting
- ✓ Acknowledge and address any parent and student concerns by providing clear information about the support tools in place when students return to their setting

Good Practice for Re-integration & Transition: Y6-Y7

Key actions to consider during the Summer Term/Term prior to returning to the setting:

Parent

Meet with staff and share information and knowledge of your child

Share resources with your child at home and begin discussing the changes that will occur

Begin practising new routines, e.g. the walk or bus ride to school, choosing food from a menu, following a timetable

Provide and maintain a positive perspective about school for your child

Reassure your child and be open to answer any questions they may have about their re-integration/transition

Setting

Preparation work with the student including completing One Page Profiles/ Student Passports

Organise additional visits/virtual visits before the start of term/the new academic year

CPD/training for staff, particularly for those with little experience of teaching students with social communication and interaction needs

Dissemination of key student information to all staff

Provide welcome booklet/resources for the student to become familiar with, including a map, photos and timetable

Good Practice for Re-integration & Transition: Y6-Y7

Example checklist for settings to use to ensure good practice:

Student Name:	DOB:	Key Worker:	
Suggested Provision		Implemented? (Yes/No)	Achieved? (Date)
Ask students to complete the AET 'Priorities Questionnaire' (this can be found in the Useful Links/Resources section) in advance of re-integrating/returning to the setting.			
Ensure that Student Passports/One Page Profiles are in place <u>before</u> the start of term (example templates can be found in the Useful Links/Resources section) and shared with <u>all</u> relevant staff.			
Keep parents informed through phone calls, diaries or emails.			
Provide 'Information Cards' (examples of these can be found in: <i>Moving on Up – Supporting Transitions from Primary to Secondary School for Pupils on the Autism Spectrum, p27</i>) which the student can carry to scaffold communication in times of stress, e.g. lunch supervisor cards.			

Good Practice for Re-integration & Transition: Y6-Y7

Suggested Provision	Implemented? (Yes/No)	Achieved? (Date)
Ensure that all staff have clear systems in place so that students feel comfortable communicating their needs discreetly, e.g. for time out, that they need help, to express anxiety.		
Hold a spare locker key, bus pass and dinner pass in the office.		
Provide clear instruction cards, e.g. what to do if you lose your dinner money; what to do if it rains at break time. These could be put into student planner/diary.		
Encourage peer mentoring, and implement a buddy system and/or friendship programme.		
Have alternative plans in place for bad days or when changes are significant, e.g. supply teachers.		
Offer additional parents and student meetings at the start of term to discuss progress and issues early on.		

Good Practice for Re-integration & Transition: Y6-Y7

Suggested Provision	Implemented? (Yes/No)	Achieved? (Date)
Plan for reduction of homework to facilitate success.		
Use planners/diaries to advise students and parents of any scheduled changes or important dates. Homework must also be clearly recorded. Staff may need to record this or at least check that the information is correct, complete and legible.		
Make notes of letters sent home in planner/diary to ensure that parents can request another if lost.		
Inform students of the names of Key Workers, Support Staff and their subject areas; you could also provide photos.		
Provide learning breaks or disapply students from certain subjects or assessments.		
Ensure a clear system is set up between Learning Support Staff, Pastoral Staff and SLT for managing any behavioural issues that may arise.		

Good Practice for Re-integration & Transition: Post 16 Students

Considerations for Tutors to implement in Post 16 settings:

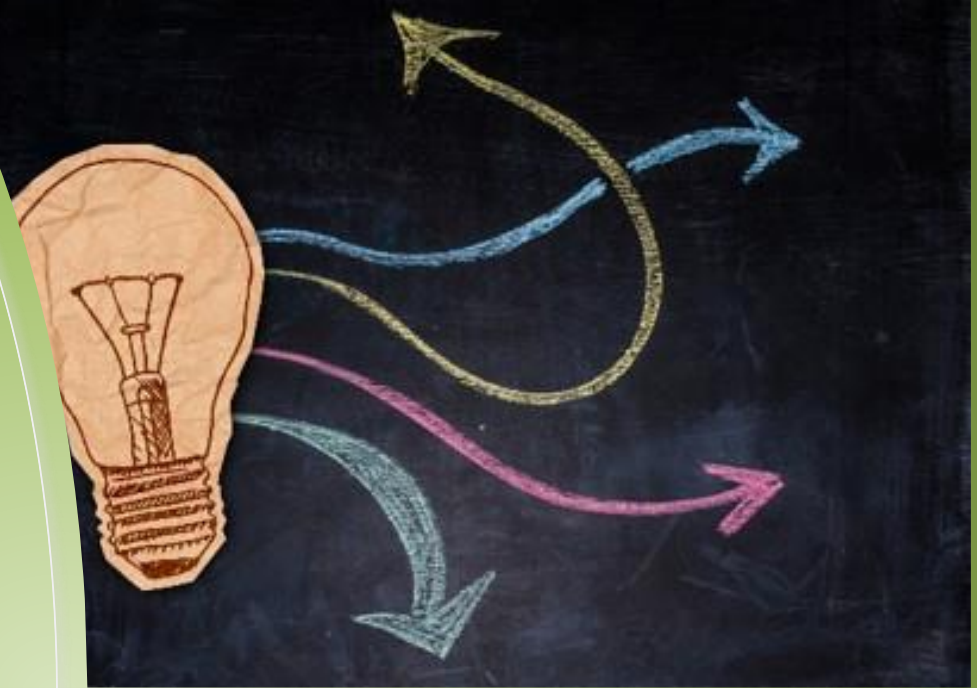
- Tutors should be prepared to meet with the student before the course to discuss any concerns or requirements; this can help to ease any anxiety the student may have
- Remember that visual information is favoured over verbal information, therefore try to use this wherever possible
- Strategies such as using bulleted lists to identify main points of tutorials or discussions can help the student to focus on relevant information
- Remember to give specific, concise instructions using short and clear language
- Written instructions should be concise, clearly highlighting any relevant points
- The student may benefit from being given written handouts prior to lessons to allow them to become familiar with key concepts or terminology; this will enable the student to participate more positively, by focusing upon the main points of study

Good Practice for Re-integration & Transition: Post 16 Students

- The student should be given clear and detailed written information about each aspect of the course, alongside practical arrangements, deadlines and assessment requirements
- A key adult, mentor or 'buddy', (in addition to tutor support), may be helpful for the student
- To help the student to prioritise and plan work effectively, use visuals such as diaries or wall charts with details of key events and deadlines as a useful tool
- Students may find it helpful if you discuss what is required in writing essays to ensure that they are focusing on the relevant points - sharing examples of essays and other course work could provide clearer guidance of good practice
- During lessons, fellow student 'buddies' could help with group work and taking important notes
- Offering email communication to the student may help them to feel more comfortable as opposed to them speaking to the tutor directly

Like with all students, specific and realistic goals together with reassurance and praise can assist motivation.

Top Tips!



- Where possible try to facilitate having friends in the same class; this will help students adjust to being in a new setting and create a sense of comfort for them when everything has changed.
- Spend time welcoming students back and build in time for discussions about their thoughts and feelings
- Provide additional support for students, either individually or in small groups. Include opportunities to access a identified key adult who is available if they need to talk
- Create daily checklists so students can ensure they have the correct equipment each day

- Allow time for the student to settle into their environment, as this will likely be very different to their usual routine; both physical and sensory aspects will have changed
- Be aware that students with SCI needs are likely to experience additional anxieties around returning to the setting following the COVID-19 Pandemic; consider using Social Stories© or other visual aids to support them and share these frequently with the student

Good Practice for Staff Wellbeing

The work of staff must be acknowledged when planning re-integrating and transitioning new and existing children into their setting. It is equally important that you have some time to think about how you can help yourself and your colleagues.

You could consider:

- Talk, Talk and Talk – use the staffroom to come together to talk and support one another (and enjoy some treats)
- Operating a buddy system in school – another member of staff you can check in with throughout the day
- Be aware, label and acknowledge your own feelings – this is important to then be able to support the children in regulating their own emotions and feelings
- Consider some mindfulness based activities - have some strategies on hand that you can use, for example deep breathing
- At the end of the school day take some 'me time' and plan to do something that you enjoy 😊



Useful Links/Resources

The following weblinks contain documents that you may find useful to support re-integration and transition for students:

- A selection of resources including question postcards and transition toolkits:
www.tes.com/articles/transitions
- National Autistic Society transition support tools:
www.autism.org.uk/professionals/teachers/transition-tips.aspx
- Transition from Y6 – Y7: <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-c-7469-secondary-transition-resource-pack>
- Arfur-Moe Y6 – Y7 Transition Booklet: <https://www.pdfFiller.com/90820506--arfur-moe-form>
- Transition to secondary settings checklist:
<https://schoolleaders.thekeysupport.com/covid-19/safeguard-and-support-pupils/pupil-wellbeing-and-mental-health/coronavirus-supporting-pupil-transition-to-secondary/?marker=full-search-q-transition%20to%20secondary-result-1>
- Moving On Student Passport Template:
[https://network.autism.org.uk/sites/default/files/ckfinder/files/Moving%20On%20\(Leaving%20School\)%20passport%20unprotected.doc](https://network.autism.org.uk/sites/default/files/ckfinder/files/Moving%20On%20(Leaving%20School)%20passport%20unprotected.doc)
- Free online training and support for school staff working with pupils with SCI needs:
www.schudio.tv/courses/preparing-autistic-send-children-for-going-back-to-school
- Government guidance about preparing for reopening schools:
www.gov.uk/government/publications/preparing-for-the-wider-opening-of-schools-from-1-june/planning-guide-for-primary-schools

Useful Links/Resources



Priorities Questionnaire

This questionnaire is to help you, and those who support you, decide which are important areas for you to be working on at the moment. These are things that are not related to specific lessons but which are helpful for life in and outside school. It will help with planning how to support you.

Name _____

Date _____

Things I like (including interests / hobbies):

My strengths and skills (things I'm good at):

Things I find difficult:

My hopes for the future:

Look at the following list. Fill in the chart to show which areas you think are important to work on and have support with this year. It might help to discuss them with someone who knows you well

Areas to work on	Yes	Maybe	No
Communicating my needs and ideas			
Listening to people			
Understanding what people mean			
Having conversations			
Being with other people			
Getting on with adults who support me			
Making friends			
Working in a group			
Understanding my sensory needs			
Managing my sensory needs			
Helping others understand my sensory needs			
Coping with change			
Moving to another activity, place (transitions)			
Joining in with things that aren't my special interests			
Working out what to do in different situations (problem solving)			
Understanding my feelings and behaviour			
Managing my feelings and behaviour			
Understanding others' feelings and behaviour			
Being confident			
Joining in with different kinds of activities / subjects			
Working by myself			
Organising myself and my time			
Understanding and following rules and expectations			
Keeping myself healthy			
Managing my personal care			
Understanding about puberty and becoming an adult			
Being more independent with tasks such as cooking, shopping, managing money, cleaning etc			
Keeping myself safe			
Travelling by myself			
Using my leisure time			

References

- The Key For School Leaders [online] *Coronavirus: supporting pupil transition to secondary*. Accessed: 07/05/2020
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- Autism Education Trust [online] *Transition Toolkit: Helping you support a child through change* by Alice Stobart. Accessed: 07/05/2020
<www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk>
- Autism Education Trust [online] *Priorities questionnaire*. Accessed: 21/05/2020 <
<<https://search3.openobjects.com/mediamanager/middlesbrough/fsd/files/priorities-questionnaire-1.pdf>>
- Leicestershire Autism Outreach Service [online] *Moving on Up – Supporting Transitions from Primary to Secondary School for Pupils on the Autism Spectrum* by Abi Steady & Rhiannon Roberts. Accessed: 07/05/2020
<http://attachmentfriendlyaward.weebly.com/uploads/4/6/0/0/46002847/autism_transitions_parents_pack.pdf>

Contact the Team

For further support please do not hesitate to contact us through the email link below:
educationinclusion@barnsley.gov.uk

Alternatively you can visit the below website and submit a query:

www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/children-families-and-education/schools-and-learning/education-inclusion-services/

Please include pupil name and the name of the member of staff supporting them (if you know it):

- Dr Naomi Robinson – Principal Educational Psychologist / SCI Team Manager
- Toni Harvey – Specialist Advisory Teacher
- Andrea Eaton – Specialist Advisory Teacher
- Louise Stringer – Specialist Advisory Teacher
- Lora Moore – Specialist Advisory Teacher
- Melanie Booth – Specialist Support Worker
- Lucy Shea – Specialist Support Worker
- Gemma Whitfield – Specialist Support Worker

**Please note that some team members work part time, however we aim respond to you within 7 days during term time.*