

SETTLING INTO SCHOOL

**Meeting the needs of parents and
children at transfer**

A Guide for Special School Staff

THE CONTEXT

The Good Practice Guide has been written as an additional resource for special schools to supplement the Starting School – information for parents resources developed by the DFES in partnership with the Family and Parenting Institute. Starting School resources are available for use at times when children transfer into special schools.

There are particular and different factors about entry to special schools which may differ from phase transfers in the mainstream

- Admission can occur at various times during the school year because admission is through a statement which can be completed at any time
- Children do not enter at a particular age so there is not always a group of children of similar ages admitted at the same time
- Schools are not always situated in the child's local community so induction sessions for groups of parents are not always appropriate.
- The diversity of provision provided by special schools affects the nature of the resources offered in each pack.
- The particular special educational needs of an individual child may require a more tailored approach.

It is with these points in mind that this guide and leaflet for parents have been designed.

THE AIM OF THE GUIDE

Many schools already have their own successful induction processes in place which will vary according to local circumstances and school policy. It is hoped that these materials will provide additional resources for those schools and that they will help others in developing induction and support for parents and children. The resource has been written as a framework for schools to use flexibly. It can be adapted for your own setting if needed but the aim is to promote and spread good practice across the country.

It is hoped that using these materials will strengthen the relationship between parents and schools while providing easy, centralised access to information for parents. It is anticipated that specialist information related to the specific needs of the pupils on roll will be included in each pack by the school so that parents receive advice and specialist support.

Using the content of the pack will allow schools the opportunity to build relationships with new and prospective parents, increase parent's knowledge and readiness to engage with the school and their child's learning.

The Starting School materials and Guide have been written with induction issues in mind and with the Every Child Matters outcomes as their central theme. Disability discrimination, equality, diversity and inclusion have been taken into account during the development of materials together with a short glossary for parents.

The Starting School toolkit available online at www.familyandparenting.org, was subject to independent evaluation to ensure the needs of disabled parents and children with special educational needs in mainstream schools were addressed. The core pack for mainstream schools includes a section on making transition meetings accessible for disabled parents and those with special needs in line with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THE PARENT'S LEAFLET

The pack could be given to parents before their child starts school and could also form part of the induction process for parents and new pupils.

The parents' leaflet is based on the Starting School toolkit materials for mainstream schools which staff can download and adapt using local resources and expertise.

STARTING SCHOOL INFORMATION SESSIONS FOR PARENTS FACTSHEETS FOR MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

- Settling in to school
- Moving on
- Bullying
- Child development
- Health
- Fathers
- Refugee families
- Childcare choices
- Safety
- Drugs and alcohol
- Sex and relationships
- Children living in a wired up world
- Effects of family conflict
- Foundation Stage to KS1 – curriculum information
- KS3 – curriculum information

These resources can be found on

www.teachernet.gov.uk > whole school > extended schools > core offer > parenting support > transition points.

Visit www.familyandparenting.org/startingSchoolProject where the full toolkit can be accessed free of charge.

HELPING CHILDREN SETTLE IN TO SPECIAL SCHOOL

While it is recognised that many schools have their own well established induction processes, after consultation it was felt that it may be useful to include examples of

best practice in this guide to support you in developing your own procedures. While the primary purpose of the pack is to help support parents through the process, here is a list of possible things that you can do to help support the pupils when they arrive at your school.

- Provide as many opportunities as you can for parents and children to visit your school prior to admission.
- Make sure you allow as much time as possible for parents to share informal information about their child with you e.g. likes and dislikes, any hobbies, family members, pets, favourite toys etc.
- Allocate a member of staff who will be able to develop a relationship with each family before they start school. They can carry out home visits and will find lots more to talk about with your child if they have met them on their own 'territory'.
- Agree the protocol for school and home visits before they take place.
- Have a list of the types of information that will help meet your statutory responsibilities e.g. risk assessments, health care plans, [samples of their current work annotated to give context DN this equates to any statutory responsibility], other professionals who have worked with the child etc.
- Always follow up any questions about the placement as soon as possible if you are unable to do so at the time.
- Reassure parents about health and safety issues as appropriate. Tell them about things like personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEPS), restraint procedures, safe administering of medicine, how you deal with bullying, how they can get in touch with the school and more importantly how you keep them informed about how their child is settling in. This is very important in the early stages of induction.. Information about progress meetings will be important but their child's happiness is likely to be their paramount concern initially.
- Involve other children in the induction process where appropriate. As well as being a valuable opportunity for them to develop their personal social skills it will be welcomed by new pupils and their parents if there is someone they can call a friend from the start.
- Many schools have created induction packs for pupils. One of the most useful things to include is photographs. These can include pictures of key staff they will be working with, the classrooms the child will be based in, where they will eat, the outdoor area, school uniform (be aware of child protection if using photos of children), their own work station and any other things that are relevant to your setting.

- Communication symbols are commonly used in special schools and the ones used most regularly could be sent home for children to familiarise themselves with. Parents will find the most common ones very helpful too.
- A model timetable where appropriate could help parents prepare their child for the lessons they will be having. If you have class rules you could include this for parents and children to discuss. A sample menu given in the pack may help allay possible concerns about mealtimes.
- It is important that transport arrangements are known to the child and to parents. Sending their child off to school to travel some distance can be quite distressing so perhaps include a picture of the bus or taxi and pictures of their drivers if appropriate.
- Many schools use social stories to prepare children for new events and situations. You could develop your own for children who arrive at different points in the year and at different ages.

SOME USEFUL SUGGESTIONS TO PROMOTE ACCESSIBLE MEETINGS

What you do to ensure prospective parents feel confident and supported when they visit your school will have a long term impact on the way they perceive the type of support their child will receive. The meetings can become the first factor in building up partnerships with parents that are based on trust. This was felt to be crucial for effective induction for students and their parents and carers. It is particularly important for disabled parents and the DDA requires reasonable adjustments to be made by services to allow access for everyone.

Ensuring that parents and carers are able to attend and actively participate in meetings about their children provides an ideal opportunity for schools to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the needs of the child. While it is acknowledged that as staff in special schools much of the following information may already be known to you, it has been included to help you ensure compliance with DDA and to promote best practice.

If you are in any doubt as to a person's status in terms of disability please refer to the DDA definition. Schools have to consider the Disability Equality Duty (DED) when making meetings accessible. The DED acknowledges the social model of disability which uses the agreed term "disabled people".

The full TIS materials available online contain a comprehensive range of advice and guidance to support disabled parents and parents with special needs. The information below is a summary of what is available online.

EASY READING

Text should be as **large** as possible – at least **14 font**

TITLES in capitals and **bold**.

Spread text out **across** the page as much as possible

Sentences should not have more than 15 to 20 words.

Each sentence should have one idea.

If you have to use difficult words or ideas you should say what they mean.

You should do this in the next sentence.

You can use a different colour. It should be a dark colour.

Here is an example:

Discrimination

This means treating someone worse than other people for some reason.

It is good to use full words instead of letters. For example, you should say “Disability Rights Commission” and not “DRC”.

Provide **pictures** to go with text where appropriate

Prepare resources with space left on the page for parents to **write their own notes** if they wish.

If the packs are given **in advance**, especially to people with vision and/or hearing impairments/ learning difficulties, parents and carers can then go through the materials beforehand. Having anticipated what is in them they can then be more confident to ask **prepared questions**.

Make sure that anyone who responds to enquiries can answer questions about access.

ACCESSIBLE REPLY AND APPLICATION FORMS

Asking people to complete and return application or reply forms is a common feature of transition and induction.

If you give a telephone number as your contact you should also give an email address, fax number and a postal address wherever possible. Offering more than one choice will mean more choice for everyone.

You can use the form to let people know what adjustments are already in place such as sign language interpreters, deaf-blind communicators and large font text and give a description of any physical features.

You can also use the form to ask all people about any further requirements they have. You should aim to welcome contact from attendees and aim to find solutions for requests which you have not planned for.

You could ask for a contact telephone number, email or address so that you can discuss any requests in person, using any method that best meets their needs. Make sure that this is printed in bold and place in a prominent position on the form.

Give people a choice of how to complete forms. Some people may prefer to do this on computer and return it to you by email and some people will prefer to complete the form by hand while some people may welcome the opportunity to pass on information over the telephone.

SOME USEFUL CONTACTS

You can get more information about how to arrange transcription services from several organizations, including;

www.deafblind.org.uk **DeafblindUK** Can help find interpreters to give communication support in formal settings.

Telephone number 01733 358 100

Email jan@deafblind.org.uk

www.mencap.org.uk **MENCAP** Provides services and advice on the needs of people with learning disabilities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Telephone: 020 7454 0454

Fax: 020 7696 5540

Email: information@mencap.org.uk

www.rnib.org.uk **Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB)** Provides help, advice and support for people with visual impairments.

Telephone: 020 7388 1266

Fax: 020 7388 2034

Helpline: 0845 766 9999

Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk

RNIB Transcription Service Business Liaison Team

Telephone: 01733 37 53 70

Fax: 01733 37 53 79

Email: busdev@rnib.org.uk

www.rnid.org.uk **Royal National Institute of the Deaf (RNID)** Provides information, advice and services for disabled people who are deaf, or hard of hearing.

Telephone: 0808 808 0123

Textphone: 0808 808 9000

Fax: 020 7296 8199

E-mail: informationline@rnid.org.uk