



Transition Matters

Guidance for schools in supporting children and young people during transition



Walsall Council

PROUD OF OUR PAST OUR PRESENT AND FOR OUR FUTURE

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1. Introduction

Background

Given the significant changes associated with transition (which will be discussed in more detail in the literature), especially from primary to secondary school, there is often increased anxiety from pupils, parents/carers and teaching staff. For some children, whilst they have coped relatively well in a smaller primary school, in which they may have had since nursery/reception to assimilate with their surroundings, concerns are highlighted around their ability to cope in a secondary school setting, alongside which a variety of changes take place.

To further compound this challenging period and associated anxieties, the current COVID-19 pandemic has led to school closures across the country, with schools being open only for those children of key workers and those identified as 'vulnerable' by school risk assessment procedures. In light of this, the majority of children and young people in Walsall (and the rest of the country), left school on 20th March 2020, unsure when, (and in some cases, if) they would see their teachers, school friends and classrooms again. During this unprecedented time of uncertainty, it is more important than ever that we support our children and young people not only through this time, but upon the transition back into school, whether that be into a current, or new school setting.

With this in mind, the aims of this guidance are to:

- a.) Provide general support and guidance for all 0-25 settings where transition takes place. Whilst we recognise that transition can take place at various points in the day, for the purpose of this guidance, 'transition' refers to the movement back to school, whether this be to the same class/year group, or from one academic year to the next, the transition from one mainstream school to another, the transition from mainstream school to a specialist setting or from a specialist provision to a mainstream school.
- b.) Given the current circumstances, this guide is also intended to provide additional help and support in transition following the COVID-19 pandemic, and recognise the additional challenges that may have arisen as a result of this situation.

Utilising evidence informed approaches such as restorative practice (Short, Case and McKenzie, 2018), emotion coaching (Gus, Rose and Gilbert, 2015), PACE (Hughes and Golding, 2012), and trauma and attachment informed practice has been shown to achieve better outcomes for children and young people. These include reduced exclusions, more positive relationships, increased attendance, increased staff and pupil well-being (Skinns, Du Rose and Hough, 2009), and increased attainment (Gus et al, 2017). Included in this guidance is an overview of the psychological principles and frameworks which underpin recommendations and suggestions made, alongside the resources which are offered here.

During April 2020, it was recognised by Walsall Educational Psychology Service (EPS) that once the period of movement restrictions, to ensure personal, local and national safety, began to change, it would likely result in government guidance for the approval of a return to school for larger populations of children and young people within potentially the Summer / Autumn terms. With this in mind, Walsall EPS felt that it was in a unique position to offer guidance and training, available to all education providers, to explore the current research within the literature around transition. As well as a literature review, research utilising the views of a variety of school staff across the Walsall Borough was completed to inform this guidance and to steer it to meet the identified needs that

the data revealed. The research project is detailed on page 6. Reflections on the data provided by school staff is referred to throughout this guidance.

2. Psychological Theories to Support Transition

Psychological theory/framework	Overview	Appendix
Post-disaster psychosocial care	Highlights five essential principles of post-disaster psychosocial care to be considered when supporting recovery following a serious incident or disaster. For some children and adults, the COVID-19 pandemic may be considered as such.	C Page 32
Restorative approaches	Restorative practice aims to strengthen relationships between people, in this case, between children and young people themselves, and the staff with whom they work. The development of new, and restoration of existing relationships are especially important given the return to school following the COVID-19 pandemic.	D Page 34
Attachment	Secure attachments and relationships have a direct bearing on a child or young person's capacity to succeed in school. These attachments may need a more direct focus following a prolonged period of absence from school, to ensure that the child and young people with whom we work are emotionally and psychologically available to access more formalised, academic demands.	E Page 35
Nurture	A nurturing approach offers a range of opportunities for children and young people to engage with missing early nurturing experiences, or those that may have been missed as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown. It supports children and young people to develop the social and emotional skills to interact positively with peers, as well as achieving academically, and can help to develop resilience. Further training on this approach can be sought from the Educational Psychology service.	F Page 37
PACE	PACE utilises four personal qualities allowing adults to support children and young people in developing their own self-awareness, emotional intelligence and resilience. The approach supports children and young people in understanding and regulating their emotions, which will be especially important following their return to school.	G Page 39
Emotion coaching	Emotion coaching is an evidence-based, whole-school approach which supports children and young people in recognising, labelling and managing their emotions through supportive relationships. Further training on this approach can be sought from the Educational Psychology service.	H Page 41
SWAN	The SWAN model looks at incorporating safe, welcoming, 'all-together' and nurturing approaches to the return to school following the COVID-19 pandemic. It provides a framework for school staff to use to support children in returning to school.	I Page 43
FACE COVID	Using the principles of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), this framework provides a set of practical steps for supporting children and young people in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.	J Page 48

3. Transition Guidance

3.1 General Advice

Whilst it is recognised that there are a lot of psychological theories and approaches within this document, this is advice that should be used as appropriate with your settings and individual children. **No one approach will work for all children and young people**, but it is hoped that the information contained in this guidance will support individualised and general approaches across your setting. Although the return to school may be a challenging one for children and adults alike, it is **important to try to recognise what work has been done with children in the past (both academically and socially), and how this can be built on**. Our COVID children will always be a unique generation and we do not know yet what the impact will be for them. It is our job to help to rebuild them, recreating strong foundations from which they can thrive and flourish. This will not be a 'short-term' job, but positive interactions now will help to build the foundations for this.

NICE guidance (2015) recommends that

“Educational psychologists and health and social care provider organisations should work with local authority virtual school heads and designated teachers to develop and provide training courses for teachers of all levels on:

- how attachment difficulties begin and how they can present in children and young people
- how attachment difficulties affect learning, education and social development
- understanding the consequences of maltreatment, including trauma
- how they can support children and young people with attachment difficulties.”

With this in mind, attachment aware training is offered by Walsall Educational Psychology Service, in which further information can be given regarding theoretical underpinnings of attachment, and how this can be utilised and used practically within educational settings.

Further training on approaches such as Emotion Coaching, Nurture in the classroom, Resilience, and Circle of Friends can be accessed from Walsall Educational Psychology Service, including follow-up 'reflection' sessions, on how the approaches can be best utilised and embedded within a whole-school context.

3.2 Early Years - Starting school

In 'normal' circumstances, starting school can be challenging for both children and parents. Some children respond to the stimulation, routine, socialisation and learning that school can bring extremely well. Some will have experienced this in a nursery/pre-school setting; others may have attended playgroups or early years sessions or had playdates with other children or siblings. Children come to the school setting with a plethora of different experiences under their belts at just 4-5 years of age. Under 'normal' circumstances, children take time to establish and learn new routines, what is expected of them and who is who. They may have encountered new learning at home (or in previous settings) or forgotten learning since it has occurred.

In current circumstances, this transition can be even more daunting for young children. Even those who may have had a relatively high exposure to other adults and peers will more than likely have had this significantly reduced during the lockdown and social distancing measures. Alongside this, additional time spent with key adults/carers and siblings in the home environment will very likely have strengthened these bonds and attachments, which is, of course, a positive offset of the current situation. However, with this, young children may then experience heightened levels of anxiety when expected to 'leave' these key attachment figures behind. With this in mind, the following recommendations are intended to give practical suggestions/recommendations for supporting this transition (potentially the biggest life event for many young children), but also in supporting parents and carers with coping with this separation too.

When Early Years settings in Walsall were asked to comment on their perceptions of the support required for transition during COVID-19. The following concerns, questions and requests for support arose:

- Ideas for EYFS.
 - Best practice ideas during these times appropriate to EYFS.
 - Share good practice from other settings, particularly for younger pupils.
 - How to social distance with a reception child with additional needs who doesn't understand the COVID-19.
 - How to avoid the risks of spreading the virus with younger children.
-
- In addition to your usual guidance on school readiness, **ongoing communication and support should be given to parents and carers** to support in their own transition and separation anxieties. Young children who see their parents and carers connecting positively will be more likely to develop strong relationships with key adults in the new setting.
 - **Additional information can be gained verbally from parents/carers**, and documents such as the transition pathway (in Appendix 1) can be used to record and share this information. For example, likes and dislikes, sleeping patterns, dietary requirements, medical needs, communication needs can all be included, as well as an action plan to support with transition if this is required.
 - Consider carefully the **transition processes that would be in place** regardless of social distancing and lockdown measures. For example, additional home/school visits, example timetable (visual), photos of the setting, named adults and access to information/photos of them. Many of these can be moved to a virtual platform, so that the information can still be shared, but whilst adhering to current government guidelines. For example, virtual photo books/video tours of key features of the setting including entrance, toilets, pegs, playground, outdoor area, and key toys/equipment which will be available for them to access post-transition.
 - **Familiar peers** may support young children in feeling more comfortable in their new environment. However, where this has not been possible, settings may be able to set up 'virtual meetings' so that children can meet their peers, share photos (subject to permissions/consent) and virtually get to know one another. Upon returning to school, young children may need more help and support to develop social skills in their new setting, and this should be incorporated into the school day and curriculum where possible.

- **Staggered/gradual starts**, allowing children, parents and staff time to become psychologically accustomed to the setting, routine, expectations. This will allow children to become more familiar with the setting whilst still having the support of parent/carers. For example, coffee mornings or stay and play sessions may support in familiarisation of the setting for both children and parents/carers. Continuous, child-led provision will support separation prior to young children being expected to adhere to more formalised routines.
- **The beginning and end of sessions** can be a particular challenge for some young children. As with normal circumstances, this can also be an anxiety provoking time for parents/carers leaving their children/returning to collect them. Practitioners will need to continue to demonstrate a soothing, understanding and empathic presence for young children, validating their feelings and supporting them in feeling safe, secure and grounded.
- All children will need to experience an optimum level of **support and nurturing care from key adults** within the setting.
- For those who are finding it particularly difficult to separate from key caregivers, attention should be paid to support in **building positive relationships with key workers**. Staff should be aware of the four characteristics of attachment so that these can be identified and supported in everyday practice. These include: proximity maintenance – where children seek out their key adult, preferring to know where they are and remain close to them on arrival, safe haven – where children look to their key people for comfort and reassurance when experiencing challenging emotions such as sadness/unhappiness, anxiety or illness, secure base – where children begin to branch out from their key people as they grown in confidence and feel safe enough to explore, separation distress – children who are distressed by the separation from a parent/carer will allow themselves to be comforted by key adults.
- To support transition, **transitional objects** may allow young children to feel a sense of connection with their home environment which they may likely have become more familiar and attached to. These may come in the form of ‘actual’ objects, or may be more ‘abstract’, for example, a sticker on their jumper, a kiss or a smile in the child’s pocket or an imaginary heartstring that connects them to their key caregiver.
- **Consistent, predictable routines** will support young children (and parents/carers) in knowing what to expect, and what the new ‘normal’ day looks like. Children may need increased opportunities to play, develop socialisation skills and to simply ‘be’ with less expectation on formalised learning during this post-transition period.
- Activities such as **story, drama, role-play and small-world play** may be incorporated to support children in exploring their own and others’ feelings and reactions to situations, and to enable them to recognise, identify and regulate their feelings with support. The use of fairy tales and other classic stories may be used to help to discuss human experiences such as change and uncertainty, and explore how characters overcome challenges and persevere through adversity. Examples of recommended stories can be found in the resources section at the back of this guidance.

3.3. Y6-Y7

Even under usual circumstances, **the transition from primary to secondary school is a pivotal moment** and can be challenging for pupils (Zeedky, et al., 2003). Figures suggest that around 10% of pupils experience frequent and persistent problems following transition to secondary school (Chedzoy and Burden, 2005) and problems encountered can lead to challenges at an emotional and educational level (Hanewald, 2013; Lucey & Reay, 2010).

Considering the period of absence from school for most Year 6 pupils during the COVID-19 lockdown, many of the methods usually employed to support transition may have been, and continue to be, unachievable in their usual format. Coupled with the additional impact of social distancing and lockdown on children and young people, good transitions to a new school setting is even more vital. Despite the change in circumstances, **the principles of successful transitions to secondary school still apply**: how well pupils could adapt to the social, institutional and curriculum changes during and after the transition process, and how much support pupils were given by schools to manage these adjustments (Evangelou et al, 2008).

When primary and secondary settings in Walsall were asked to comment on their perceptions of the support required for transition from Year 6 to Year 7 during COVID-19, the following concerns, questions and requests for support arose (staff language has been used to reflect concerns):

- The transition of pupils moving to secondary school is a major concern.
- Visits from secondary staff if pupils in primary before summer holidays.
- Common guidelines and procedures for contact and transition for Y6-Y7.
- The concern is not knowing what secondary schools intend to do.
- Y6 leavers – unlikely extra visits will be arranged.
- Guidance/suggestions from secondary schools.
- Secondary schools need to be contactable.

Pre-transition strategies to support the transition to secondary school:

During social distancing, some of these approaches may need to be conducted virtually.

Environment	Additional visits to school if possible or virtual ‘taster’ sessions and visits with secondary teachers
	Open evenings – video/website/Rix wiki which can be shared with future pupils
	Photos/video of key areas in school
	Access to summer school where possible
Routine	Timetable
	Floor plan
	Equipment list
	Information about school behaviour policy
Relationships	Link pupils/buddies from secondary school to provide support to primary pupils e.g. ex pupils speak to pupils from their old primary school
	Secondary SENCO to attend Y6 annual review (if child has an EHCP). This could be via phone or video conference.
	Photos of key staff e.g. via website or online photo book
	Introduction to head of year, form tutor and SENCo e.g. via online chat
	Online FAQ forum
	Access to named/key adult
	Opportunities to discuss concerns and access honest and practical advice
	Opportunities to submit their own one-page profile/what they want teachers/key staff to know about them
Community engagement – ask CYP and families about their experiences, worries	
Emotions	Opportunities to develop their independence skills prior to leaving primary school

Identity	Relevant referrals made prior to summer holidays
	Additional info shared for vulnerable pupils
Other	Liaison between primary and secondary SENCOs
	External agencies available to parent/carers
	Identify key staff responsible for managing transition in primary and secondary schools and share contact details.
	Share information via secure means e.g. encrypted email and video call platform supported by online working policy.

Post-Transition:

Environment	Additional time allowances for movement around school
	Allowance made to school behaviour policy during 'settling in' period
Routine	Gradual introduction for Y7s only
	Different lunchtimes for year 7s
Relationships	Peer mentor/buddy system
	Settling-in updates for parents
	Friendship/social development opportunities
	Access to named/key adult
	Opportunities to get to know key/regular members of staff, and for them to know pupils
Emotions	Nurture group provision where possible
	Opportunities to discuss feelings linked to relationships and transition
	Build resilience of pupils and staff
Identity	Celebrations of achievements
Other	Key information shared with relevant staff
	Relevant staff training for additional needs
	Monitor and review transition arrangements using an assess –plan-do-review cycle

Specific advice for parents/carers to support their children:

- Talk about the move positively whilst recognising any concerns
- Discuss the move as a 'fresh' start for those that may have had a challenging experience in primary school
- Support them in developing independence skills over the summer break – including organisational skills – frame this as a positive
- Support them in familiarising themselves with the floor plan/timetable/map/key staff and roles
- Walk or drive past new school or practice route to school with them to support them in becoming more familiar with this
- Support them in developing budget skills over the summer if they will be buying their own lunch/snacks etc.
- Support communication with friends over the summer – both those they may be leaving behind and those who are going to the new school with them. This may be virtually or in person but should be in line with social distancing rules from the government.
- Check equipment/uniform needs are met. If you are struggling financially with these, contact the new school for advice and support with this.

3.4. Secondary – post 16 and beyond

For YP leaving secondary school or post 16 education, they may be facing uncertainties about their next steps and have a sense of loss over missed transition rituals, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst the current guidance from the government in England suggests that some YP in secondary and post 16 education should begin to receive face-to-face education, not all will transition back to settings before the summer. There are changes to assessments, course-teaching approaches and living arrangements that make this key time of transition into adulthood more challenging for some. **Supporting belonging and relationship building** will be vital for this group of YP as they transition back to, or on to new, settings (Beeke et al., 2020).

Transition support:

Some of these approaches may need to be adapted to virtual formats due to social distancing.

Environment	Familiarisation with environment - Extra visits to setting/workplace, taster experiences, timetable, floor plan, video of setting, photos of staff
Routine	Prior information about expectations and rules
	Ensuring all YP have access to ICT resources required for learning if any courses are to move online and supporting them in gaining access and skills if required
Relationships	Opportunities to have open and frank discussions with current students/colleagues
	Develop and share a frequently asked question bank/forum in a format accessible to students
	Contact with staff/managers before start e.g. video call, establishing a positive relationship with personal tutor
	Support to develop new and maintain existing friendships
	Identify and share key information about themselves with key adults e.g. using one-age profile, digital storytelling or Rix Wiki
	Relationships and community aspects of PfA embedded into the curriculum
Emotions	Identify safe spaces to go to seek support if required
	Health and wellbeing aspects of PfA embedded into the curriculum
Identity	Independence aspects of PfA embedded into the curriculum
	Education and employment aspects of PfA embedded into the curriculum
	Have regular conversations with CYP about their aspirations and plans for the future
Other	Effective liaison between CYP, families, staff, agencies and other education/work providers
	Training and information sharing with staff as required
	Graduated use of transition planning e.g. universal, targeted and individual based on needs of the YP. Ensure plans include participation of YP and their families
	Ensure access to information about future options is shared in an accessible format and YP and their families have opportunities to ask questions and seek clarity

For YP with SEND:

In addition to the guidance for vulnerable learners (found on page 31) some specific approaches are important to consider for YP moving into post 16 education and beyond.

- Include **preparing for adulthood (PfA) principles**. Access resources here <https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/>
- Continued **continuity and forward planning of multi-agency support** as required See <https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/SiteAssets/Downloads/x3qxy1xr636379670314536294.pdf> for NICE guidance on transitions into adult services. Recommendations include:
 - Identifying a key worker to coordinate for the YP
 - Being planning early (by Year 9 focus should be on preparing for adulthood)
 - Draw up/include transition plans and review and update these annually

- Set **goals in collaboration with the YP** focused on the PfA areas – education and employment, health and wellbeing, community, independent living
 - Alongside the YP create a **personalised folder** of information to share with relevant professionals
- **Create a vocational profile for YP with SEND.** A workbook for building a vocational profile can be found here <https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/SiteAssets/Downloads/wpykaifl636379632195713341.pdf>
- **Ensure annual reviews focus on PfA outcomes.** Resources to guide PfA outcomes from an early age are available here <https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/downloads/education-health-and-care-planning/pfa-outcomes-tool.htm>
- **Facilitate true participation for YP** (employing the principles of the Mental Capacity Act, 2005)

3.5. Returning to school after a prolonged absence

Children will have left school abruptly in March 2020, and while the government plans outline that many primary, and some secondary age, children will return before the next academic year this will not be true for all children. For example: those who are shielding due to their health or that of a family member; year groups who do not return within the timeframe; or children whose parents choose not to send them to school.

In primary school, children who are returning to the same school would benefit from **spending some time with their some of their previous class and/or teacher where possible**. This would enable them to talk about their experiences in a familiar environment with teachers who know them well (so that the child's resilience and coping can be evaluated), can support them to share how they are feeling and to also bring some closure to their experience with that teacher and class. **A gradual transition** with the new class could take place during this time through the **sharing of information and preparation activities** outlined in other sections. This transition may need to continue into the next academic year depending on the return dates and proportion of children who have returned to the class. In secondary schools, this time may be best facilitated by familiar subject teachers and form tutors.

This transition time would be useful to focus on a number of issues such as **re-connecting, sharing of experiences, nurturing wellbeing, celebrating achievements, remembering the year gone by, preparing for the new class and teacher**. This would also be a time to re-establish expectations, rules and boundaries. The principles of nurture, attachment and emotion coaching may help with this.

Activities that might help:

- A **reunion bag** containing some key representative items.
- Alphabet list of **what we appreciate** about being back
- **Time capsule** - memories of our time away
- A chocolate box of our **joint strengths**
- **Sharing the umbrella** - how we support one another
- **Tea party** with last year's teacher

How to support all children leaving their current class

- **Letter from teacher** to include something individual about the child
- **Acknowledgement of range of feelings** children might have which could include feelings of loss and positive feelings. The principles of emotion coaching may help with this.

How to support all children prepare for their next class/ change of class teacher

- **Video or letter** from the receiving teacher
- Share with children **information** about the exciting areas of learning that will be covered next year

These recommendations have been adapted from the guidance produced by Katrina Burns, Senior Educational Psychologist at Birmingham Educational Psychology Service.

3.6. Vulnerable Learners

Coronavirus “has disrupted life in every corner of the world and will likely disproportionately affect those children with pre-existing vulnerabilities” (UNICEF, 2020). **Universal transition practices have been found to help all children, including these from vulnerable groups** (Evans et al., 2010); although it is acknowledged that vulnerable pupils are likely to **benefit from additional targeted support**. Research generally indicates that pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to encounter more difficulties during their transitions and that a difficult transition may have a long-term effect on pupils’ attainment, wellbeing and mental health (Evans et al., 2010). It is, therefore, vital that transition for vulnerable children and young people is well **planned for, monitored, reviewed and adapted** in an ongoing process to meet their individual needs.

Schools will be aware of children and young people who are vulnerable due to their specific strengths and difficulties, or personal circumstances. However, this does not mean that all of these children and young people will find the transition back to school, or to a new setting, challenging. Nor indeed that they are the only ones who may be identified as needing extra support before, during or post transition. Still, schools should **aim to identify** children who may be ‘high risk’ or vulnerable to difficulties at transition for a preventative approach.

When primary and secondary settings in Walsall were asked to comment on their perceptions of the support required for transition for vulnerable children and young people during COVID-19, the following concerns, questions and requests for support arose (staff language has been used to reflect concerns):

- For vulnerable children to visit school, meet staff or key worker. Not able to do at moment but hoping to link children through Teams.
- There will be a large number of children who will struggle with transitioning back into school, let alone different year group with different staff etc.
- Children who will not be in school before the summer term.
- Support for children with EHCPs transitioning.
- Information about SEN pupils, LAC, Pupil premium recipients.

During the COVID-19 pandemic schools should consider:

- **Children who have experienced known trauma** during COVID-19. This may include loss or bereavement, heightened mental health difficulties or secondary trauma
- **Children at key transition points** as noted elsewhere in this document
- **Children who may be considered ‘vulnerable’** for example due to: special educational needs and disabilities, child in care, child protection, previous bullying, emotionally based school refusal, or known difficulties in the family
- **Children who were experiencing absences prior to COVID-19**. Where possible categorise absence data e.g. demographically (by gender, age, ethnicity, year group), by degree of absenteeism (chronic, emerging etc.) and by high risk or vulnerable groups (students with social, emotional or learning difficulties). An understanding of which groups at school are most at risk for absenteeism helps to identify where to assign preventative resources.

[Advice to support transition back into school for children and young people who may be vulnerable \(e.g. SEND, CiC\)](#)

Lockdown experience: Plans for vulnerable children may need to be individual and where possible linked to their views. It is likely that staff have been in regular contact with vulnerable children and families and will have up to date information regarding their well-being and feelings about returning to school. Settings can learn from parents, and children and young people, about their experience of home education; there will have been a large spectrum. Continue to nurture relationships, have conversation and be curious about the success and challenges experienced and what they feel about returning to school. Resources such as digital storytelling, ‘My lockdown experience’ from <https://reachoutasc.com/resources/transition-to-new-class>, or platforms such as Rix Wiki can help facilitate these

discussions and enable pupils to share their views. The process of children and families feeling listened to will support partnership working and contribute to their return to school.

A transition period: Routine will be different for a while and may then change again; there are many unknowns. Settings need to work within government advice, but they still know their pupils and what is right for them. For some vulnerable children and young people, this may include a phased return, staggered drop off and collection times etc. Establish short term and long-term goals with the child or young person and their family so that everybody is clear on the plan moving forward, with the recognition that these are fluid and possible to change if required.

Communication: communication can be expressive (preferences, needs, opinion) and receptive (understand, process, act). The experience of communication at home will be very different to school. Some children and young people will have had experienced little communication during lockdown, others will have enjoyed the transition to more virtual communication. The increased or different approached to communication during a transition into or between schools may be a challenge to some children. Schools need to plan to support children with communication needs, such as using visual communication e.g. for expectations and routines, as well as time additional processing time and quiet time to avoid sensory overload. Social stories which are direct and factual, with small chunks of information, visuals, no ambiguous language may be helpful to explain what is happening and why for children and their families.

Social interaction: returning to school will likely involve an increase in social interaction for children and young people. For children and young people with special needs in this area, previous learning about social interactions at school may have been lost or superseded by the rules for social interaction during lockdown, and new learning about measures such as social distancing may need to be required. Children and young people may cope with this via masking, trying to fit in, or hiding difficulty at school and releasing their difficult emotions at home. Phased return, clarity over new rules and expectations, and social stories are helpful strategies. A peer buddy and/or key adult may also be helpful for the child or young person, so they have someone to speak to about their feelings, play with or be greeted by as they come to school.

Sensory needs: the experience of social isolation, lockdown and transition back into a school environment may pose particular challenges of sensory seeking or sensory overload for some children and young people. A trauma informed approach also suggests that for others their experiences during the pandemic may have caused a heightened alertness. Children with sensory needs may be more sensitive to noises, crows, smells etc. or they may try to self-regulate by sensory seeking such as stimming. Initially reduced numbers of children may be helpful, as will a focus on wellbeing, chunking new information, sensory spaces/breaks, sensory curriculum, emotional and social support and minimized classroom displays etc. as meets the needs of individual children. More information on sensory diets can be found here:

<https://www.reachoutasc.com/blog/what-is-a-sensory-diet-and-how-do-i-implement-one-in-my-busy-classroom>

Independence and adapting to change: the COVID-19 pandemic has brought and will continue to bring major changes for children and young people. Some children, such as those with autism, may find this more challenging. Communication and grounding in the familiar are key. Give clear, chunked information about what will happen and make links to previous structures e.g. workstation, teachers to link back to what is known and re-familiarise the child or young person. Problem solving with the child or young person can be helpful e.g. using a mind map to work through outlining the problem, what do we know, what don't we know, reasons for this, and solutions for this. Visual timetables, now and next boards and task boards can be useful in promoting independence skills.

Emotional support: some children and young people may have experienced emotional and mental health difficulties prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and for others the experience will have raised new emotional challenges. Families may have experienced difficulties which have impacted on the parents/carers' own wellbeing. This can lead to secondary trauma for the CYP, who after prolonged exposure to the acute suffering of others can internalise the trauma of those they care for or are close to. Normalising a range of emotional responses, including coping, will be important. As will support for those who need it in emotional literacy, emotional regulation. Some children and young people find it difficult to recognise and/or process emotions, whilst others are hyper-emotional,

and feel emotion in a huge physical way so a personalised plan of support will be important. The principles of emotion coaching, PACE, nurture and attachment can be useful.

Curriculum: Resources such as the briefing by the children’s commissioner

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/cco-tackling-the-disadvantage-gap-during-the-covid-19-crisis.pdf> address challenges to the disadvantage gap at this time. As children and young people transition back into face-to-face learning it will be important to address well-being needs as well as academic attainment. Approaches such as Recovery Curriculum focus on a relational model, which meets the needs of children and young people as they return to school. This includes relationships, community, transparent curriculum, metacognition and space and further details are available online at <https://www.evidenceforlearning.net/recoverycurriculum/>.

Pre-transition strategies to support vulnerable learners:

During social distancing, some of these approaches may need to be conducted virtually.

Environment	Additional visits to new classes or schools if possible or virtual ‘taster’ sessions and visits with secondary teachers
	Information to aid familiarisation with school environment (including changes to a previously familiar environment during social distancing measures) e.g. photos, virtual tour, floor plan
	Prepare environments so they reduce sensory demands if applicable
Routine	Information to aid familiarisation with routines e.g. timetable, equipment list, floor plan, behaviour policy
	Social stories
Relationships	Link pupils/buddies to provide support
	Introduction to key adult(s) e.g. support staff, class teacher, head of year, form tutor or SENCo
	Photos of key staff
	Build relationships with key team of adults
	Opportunities to discuss concerns and access honest and practical advice
	Opportunities to submit their own one-page profile/what they want teachers/key staff to know about them. This could be in a format the pupil is most comfortable with e.g. electronically so they can add photos, audio and video (using standard programmes to create a digital story or specialist platforms such as Rix Wiki).
	Sensitive organisation of tutor groups, seating and classroom groupings
	Use Walsall behaviour policy and relationships guidance to ensure a nurturing and inclusive approach is planned for
Emotions	Opportunities to share concerns and questions with adults and peers
Identity	Identify learners who may require extra support to the universal transition offer
	Additional information shared for vulnerable pupils in clear, conscience way e.g. using visuals, social stories etc.
	Gather views and experiences of the child, young person and their family
Other	Liaison between SENCOs, teachers, families and Child or young person
	Support of external agencies if applicable e.g. educational psychology service, virtual schools, CAMHS
	Targeted or individualised plan of support in line with a graduated response, including a risk assessment if required
	Clear communication between school and parents including support for parents if needed
	Staff given key information and necessary training as required

Post-transition strategies to support vulnerable learners:

During social distancing, some of these approaches may need to be conducted virtually.

Environment	Movement breaks and outdoor activities
	Provide a sensory diet or reduced sensory experience as needed
Routine	Key staff to meet and greet the young person to check in with them and discuss the day ahead
	Relaxing of some rules and expectations during early days post transition and gradually introduce until all are familiar to child or young person
	Early or assisted transition during the school day e.g. to lunch
	Supports for independence with routines e.g. visual timetable, now and next cards, task board etc.
Relationships	Ensure that the young person has access to supportive staff or mentors
	Structured opportunities to learn and apply social skills, including making new friends and maintaining old friendships
Emotions	Identified safe place to go to seek help
	Targeted or individualised support with wellbeing if required e.g. PACE approach, emotion coaching, nurture group, emotional literacy
	Opportunities for play to support overall wellbeing and emotional regulation
Identity	Celebrate successes
	Plan activities and curriculum that uses opportunities to link to the pupil's interests
	New setting as a 'fresh start'
Other	Liaison between SENCOs, teachers, families and Child or young person – problem solving and sharing of successes
	If difficulties do persist over time or worsen, despite appropriate interventions, then consider accessing appropriate services if the child and parent consent to this e.g. early help, educational psychology service, virtual schools, CAMHS
	Targeted or individualised plan of support in line with a graduated response
	Regularly review transition plans with key staff in school
	Recognise that initial progress could be slow and that there may be highs and lows over time.
	Curriculum designed to meet wellbeing needs e.g. recovery curriculum, and prevent widening of the attainment gap. The 'Walsall SEN Toolkit' and 'Walsall right for SEND' documents offer support with providing quality provision for CYP with SEND.

Adapted from Lynn McCann's (2020) 'Preparing Autistic and SEND children for going back to school', Katrina Burns' guidnace 'Supporting Children with Transitions During the Extended School Closures' and Oxfordshire Country Council's (2019) 'Transition for vulnerable learners' documents.

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5. Appendices

Appendix A: printable resources

MY TRANSITION PATHWAY

What you need to know

About Me

My name is

I am called

at home

I live with



Children's Services - Education

SEN Advisory Support Team – Early Years

MY TRANSITION PATHWAY

Name of Child:		Date of Birth:		Date of Plan:	
Present setting/school:					
Receiving setting/school:		New Year Group:			
Attendance List	Agency/Designation		Telephone Number		
Other Supporting Professionals not attending the Plan meeting: (e.g. social worker, (looked after children) Consultants, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, etc.					

Date of Transfer:		

I / We give consent to information being passed to the above setting/school.

Signed: _____ **Parent/Carer**

About Me

My favourite things

I don't like

I let you know I'm upset by.....

If I'm upset I like to be

How/where/when do I sleep?

Equipment I need/preferred positions

How am I going to get to school?

What I eat/drink. How/when?

Anything else you might need to know about me ...

My medical needs

How do I communicate?

I respond by

Sounds I make

Objects I understand/use

Gesture/signs/words I understand/use

How I make choices

How I say yes or no

Next steps to help me settle into my new setting/school e.g. home visit, visits to setting, photograph book, familiar objects	Date

Training needs for receiving setting/school	
Parents/carers comments/questions regarding transition	

Follow-up Action

Review these at the next meeting to check that they have all happened.

Agreed Actions	Who will do it?	Date to Achieve	Outcome

Appendix B: Resource links/recommendations

CYP:

<https://www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/calm-zone/> - Support for children and young people to regulate particularly challenging emotions and feel calmer

Parents:

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/NEPS-Guides/Transfer-from-Primary-to-Post-primary/> - Transition to post primary support and resources from National Educational Psychological Service, Ireland

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak> - Guidance for parents and carers on supporting children and young people's mental health and well-being during the coronavirus, COVID-19 outbreak

Teachers:

<https://youngminds.org.uk/resources/school-resources/?f2=10143#listing> – Resources and materials for teachers and school staff to build their skills and make mental health and well-being a core, rewarding part of the job

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/teacher-resources-for-students-transitioning-to-secondary-school/zb68y9q> - Teacher resources for students transitioning to secondary school

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/NEPS-Guides/Transfer-from-Primary-to-Post-primary/> - Transition to post primary support and resources from National Educational Psychological Service, Ireland

<https://marymered.wordpress.com/> - 5 ways to harness emotional contagion when schools reopen, by Mary Meredith (add details about Mary Meredith)

<https://barrycarpentereducation.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/recovery-curriculum-loss-and-life-for-our-children-and-schools-post-pandemic.pdf> – A recovery curriculum – loss and life for our children and schools post pandemic

<https://www.apta.ac/webinars/free-webinars-for-mental-health-professionals.html> - Free webinars for mental health professionals

<https://www.seainclusion.co.uk/post/the-many-problems-of-returning-to-school> – The many problems of returning to school

<https://www.boingboing.org.uk/use-resilience-framework-academic-resilience/> - Resilience framework for children and young people

<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/10-practical-tips-for-school-staff-to-help-children-settle-when-starting-primary-school/> - 10 practical tips for school staff to help children settle when starting primary school

All:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/teach/transitioning-to-secondary-school/zkc9pg8> - Starting Secondary School – a new campaign from BBC Bitesize aimed at 10-12 year olds, their teachers and parents.

<https://youngminds.org.uk/resources/school-resources/transition-tips-for-pupils-with-send/> - Transition tips for pupils with SEND

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/learning-disabilities/our-work/employment-education/moving-on-to-secondary-school/> - Support for pupils with SEN, parents and teachers for the transition to secondary school

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/pals/research/clinical-educational-and-health-psychology/research-groups/school-transition-and-2> - Information, downloads and materials for pupils, parents and teachers following a research study focusing on transition

<https://www.aep.org.uk/coronavirus-guidance-resources/> - Coronavirus guidance and resources for children, young people, parents, teachers and other professionals

<https://www.annafreud.org/media/11322/supporting-the-most-vulnerable-children-and-young-people-interactive-160420.pdf> – A guide to supporting vulnerable pupils and students during periods of disruption

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=op50Fe1qKmQ&feature=youtu.be> – Supporting bereavement in children and young people – a video from the Ceredigion County Council

https://nosycrowcoronavirus.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/Coronavirus_ABookForChildren.pdf - Coronavirus - a book for children

<https://nursedottybooks.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/dave-the-dog-coronavirus-1-1.pdf> - Dave the Dog is worried about coronavirus – a book for children

Appendix C: Post-disaster psychosocial care

Hobfoll (2007) highlighted five essential principles of post-disaster psychosocial care to be considered when supporting recovery following a serious incident or disaster. For some children and adults, the COVID-19 pandemic may be considered as such. These principles are discussed further in psychological frameworks throughout the document.

Safety: Staff, parents, carers and children/young people need to feel a sense of safety, both physically and emotionally, when returning to school.

Calm: Staff, parents, carers and children/young people will all be experiencing a wide range of emotions, both pleasant and challenging, on the return to school. All emotions are a 'normal' way of processing life events, and this normalisation should be communicated to all and supported through a nurturing and non-judgemental approach.

Self and collective/community-efficacy: Given the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown, many of us, including staff, parents, carers and children/young people, will have felt a huge lack of control over the situation and what has happened. A return to school will need to focus on giving some control back to children and young people, along with supporting them to believe that their actions will lead to generally positive outcomes, as opposed to the fear that they may have been feeling as a result of the lockdown and social distancing measures. Opportunities should be sought where children and young people can feel a sense of belonging, in a group which can also experience positive outcomes, thus achieving a sense of collective efficacy.

Social connectedness: As mentioned above, it is imperative that staff, parents, carers, children and young people begin to regain a sense of connectedness, a feeling of belonging following a period in which physical distancing guidelines have resulted in social distancing and isolation for many. Settings should work to ensure that staff, children and young people are able to re-build social support networks within school.

Promoting hope: Given the sense of fear, anxiety and despair that many may have felt during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important that we work with children and young people to help them to believe that things will get better, and reassured that, in the long-term, life will return to more of a 'normal' state.

With these principles in mind, transition support needs to be provided through a trauma-informed lens, which revisits the developmental and attachment needs of all pupils, belongingness and connectedness within the school community; ensuring that pupils and staff have feelings that they belong, they are safe and will be kept safe, and focuses on relationships first. More than ever, schools and settings need to be a place where children and young people feel safe, secure, needed, and where they belong. Staff and pupils will need to re-connect following separation and children allowed to 'just be'. It is imperative that children are able to heal, rather than have potential issues exacerbated by more expectations. Practitioners working with children returning to school should ensure that all children are treated as new starters, with transition arrangements being stripped 'back to basics' and new routines, structure, expectations and rules co-created to ensure that all children and young people feel safe.

Alongside this, staff need to have an increased level of support, as, they too, may have experienced some of the traumas listed above, and we need to help to 'contain the container'. Staff will need

time to re-connect with each other, time to feel safe, fit and ready so that they can model their behaviour. Additional support for school staff can

be sought from the Walsall Educational Psychology service, including remote training on bereavement and loss and staff well-being.

Appendix D: Restorative approaches

Embedded in Walsall Council approaches is the aim to move away from traditional and sometimes punitive approaches to behaviour management and promote more of a relational, attachment and trauma-aware approach to encouraging positive behaviour. This is especially important following the COVID-19 pandemic, following which, as discussed above, children and young people will need a safe, nurturing and supportive return to school. As a result of the lockdown period, children and young people may have different behaviour presentations when they return to school. Practitioners should endeavour to keep in mind that behaviour is form of communication, and that it may be expressing a myriad of emotions.



Restorative practice is an approach which aims to strengthen relationships between people, in this case, between children and young people themselves, and the staff with whom they work. The aim of this approach is to better understand the needs of children and young people themselves, and empower them to make positive changes and secure more sustainable outcomes (Zehr, 1990). As discussed above, the use of this approach allows children to begin to restore a sense of control over their lives which, recently, has been taken away from them. Restorative approaches aim to reduce conflict and build relationships, seeking to repair harm and turn negatives into positives, whilst enabling children and young people to develop their own skills in relationship management and conflict resolution (McCluskey et al., 2008). These factors are especially important given the return to school following the global pandemic.



Appendix E: Attachment

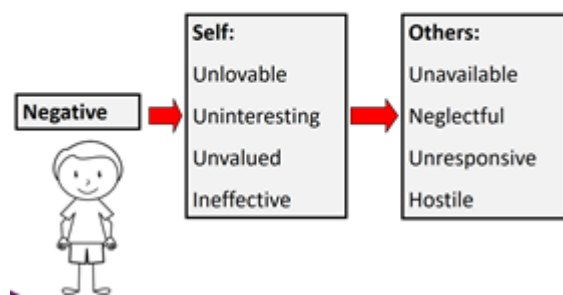
Theories of attachment come from two key figures; John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. Following his research with children who had been separated from their families, Bowlby concluded that:

“Children are not slates from which the past can be rubbed by a duster or sponge, but human beings who carry their previous experiences with them and whose behaviour in the present is profoundly affected by what has gone before”.

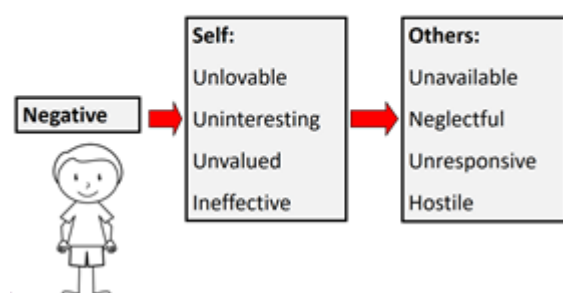
Although key attachments are developed in the early years, the brain’s ability to continue to develop means that daily interactions can impact upon social and emotional development. Bowlby talked about the importance of a ‘secure base’; which is provided through a key relationship/ attachment with somebody who is able to meet the needs of the child or young person, and provide somebody who they can turn to when anxious or upset (Bowlby, 1988). For many of the children and young people with whom we work, school is often a safe place, a place of consistency, routine, and one where key attachments can be made and unmet needs be met. In the current context, these attachments will need to be re-built, and children and young people develop new feelings of safety to underpin these attachments.

Secure attachments and relationships have a direct bearing on a child or young person’s capacity to succeed in school. A sense of belonging, seated within positive relationships are key to positive mental health and essential for children and young people, particularly those who have been, or are currently involved in the care system, and may have identified attachment difficulties (NICE, 2015), and ACEs. With this in mind, our ability to form positive attachments with the children and young people with whom we work is key to developing their ability to feel safe, secure, and ready to learn.

Internal Working Model: Insecure Attachment

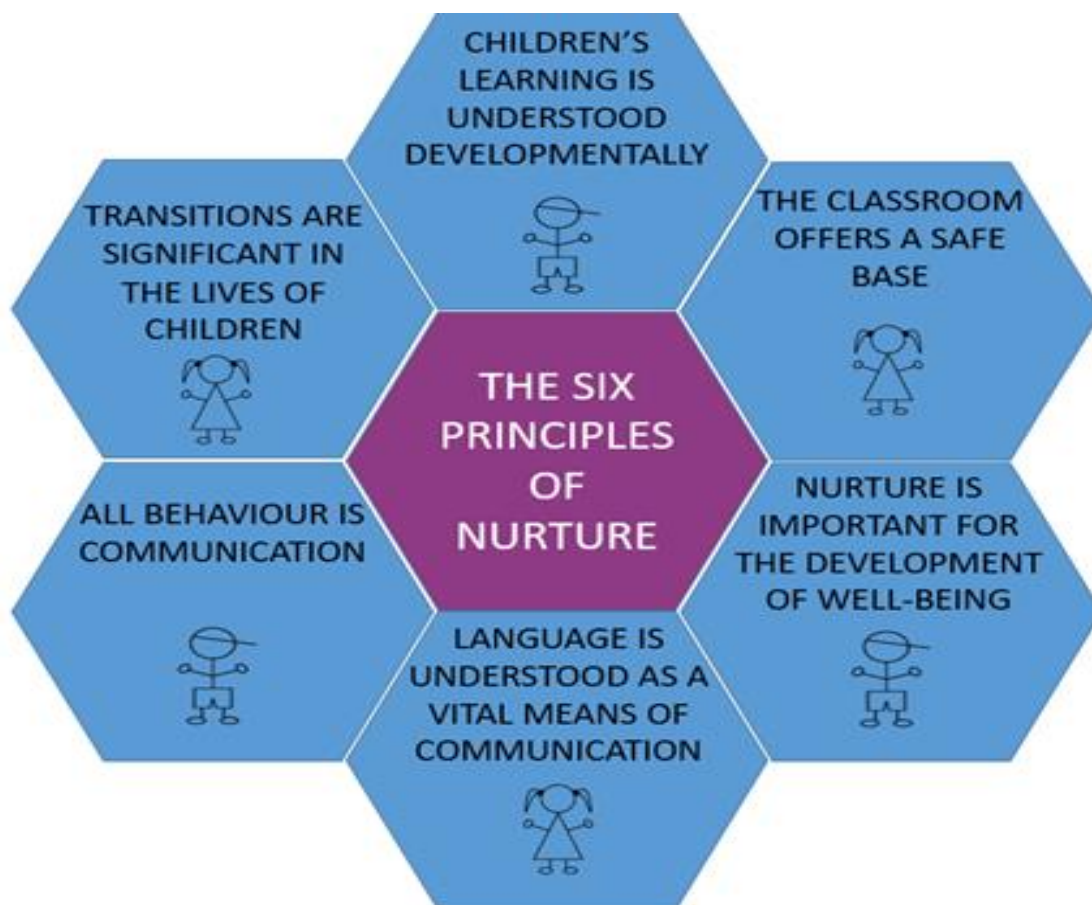


Internal Working Model: Insecure Attachment



Children and young people with insecure attachment styles have increased risk of:

1. Weakened physicality (*Rees, 2007*)
2. Poor social, coping and problem solving skills (*Newman and Mares, 2007*)
3. Custodial sentences (*Fonagy and Levinson, 2004*)
4. Low self-esteem (*Malekpour, 2007*)
5. Social functioning disorders (*McCarthy and Maughan, 2010*)



Transitions are significant in the lives of children

Children and young people undergo a variety of transitions in their lives, including ‘more significant’ transitions such as those moving from other countries, local authorities, and schools (including from primary to secondary school), but also those daily transitions such as home to school, between different classes and different teachers. Changes in routine can be particularly challenging for vulnerable children and should be managed with preparation and support. This is especially relevant in the current context and should be taken into account when children begin to return to school. Transition is a process, not an event, and children, young people, staff and parents/carers will need continued support throughout this process.

Children’s learning is understood developmentally

Nurture principles focus not on expectations around achievement and attainment, but more in terms of ‘developmental progress’, as assessed through tools such as the Boxall Profile. Staff are expected to respond to the child or young person ‘as they are’, demonstrating an accepting and non-judgemental attitude. This will be particularly important following the return to school, when children and young people may need time to settle, feel safe and secure, and ‘just be’, with no immediate pressure on achievement and attainment.

The classroom offers a safe base

Organisation of the classroom (and school) can support in containing and managing anxiety. A variety of educational and 'life-skill' experiences can support not only the development of children and young people, but also their relationships with each other, and with staff. It is expected that children and young people are exposed to a predictable day (where possible), with structured routines, and reliable and consistent approaches from members of staff. What this looks like following the return to school may be co-constructed with children, young people and parents/carers, again to instil a sense of belonging and community, and to ensure consistency with each other's expectations.

Nurture is important for the development of self-esteem

The principle of 'nurture' as a whole involves active listening, empathy, and calm and attuned responses. There is a focus on everything being 'verbalised', with adults having responsibility for engaging with children and young people in 'reciprocal activities', which could include eating together, reading, social groups and play. Children respond well to being 'held in mind' and being valued as individuals, with even minor achievements being noticed and praised. Again, this will be particularly important following the return to school, with children and young people needing to know that they are valued, welcomed back into the setting and that staff want them there. This will support parents and carers as well. Children and young people may need additional support to learn how to participate in social activities such as eating together, reading, and social groups.

Language is understood as a vital means of communication

Alongside being able to articulate speech, language skills involve being able to communicate feelings verbally. Some children and young people may not have developed the ability to do this, or may lack the vocabulary to do this, and therefore may present as 'acting out' their thoughts and feelings. Other children may need to re-learn this skill upon their return to school. On-going opportunities for talking and sharing can support the development of language in social situations, and support children in recognising and being able to label emotions, thus enabling them to communicate these verbally. This can support children in developing feelings of belonging and connectedness, as well as leading children and young people to begin to be able to express their feelings through words, instead of actions, with continued opportunities to extend conversations or encourage imaginative play/life skill practice, to understand the feelings of others.

All behaviour is communication

As discussed in the above principle, the presenting behaviour of a child or young person is a way of them communicating feelings, some of which they may not have the ability to verbalise. It is then the responsibility of the adult working with the child or young person to attempt to understand what it is that they are trying to communicate. In this instance, some professionals may find the metaphor of the iceberg helpful, or the graphic shown alongside restorative practice information. The ability to understand what a child or young person is attempting to communicate through their behaviour can then support staff in responding in a firm, but fair, non-punitive approach. When a child or young person senses that their feelings are understood, or are attempting to be understood, this can often help to diffuse particularly challenging situations. It is with support from the adult that the child or young person may be able to begin to make sense of their internal and external worlds. This may be supported through approaches as discussed below.

Appendix G: PACE

PACE (Hughes, 2004) is an approach which utilises four personal qualities allowing adults to support children and young people in developing their own self-awareness, emotional intelligence and resilience. The approach supports children and young people in understanding and regulating their emotions, which will be especially important following their return to school. Key to this is a deep-seated respect for the child or young person's own experiences and inner life. Whilst all children have experienced the same situation broadly (i.e. a global pandemic including a lockdown and social distancing), all will have experienced this in different ways. A PACE approach allows adults to provide a supportive space within which children and young people can develop and hone their own thinking skills, thus helping them to reflect upon, understand and manage their emotions more skilfully, thus giving them ownership and increasing their levels of self-efficacy.

PACE can be used by a key adult to validate, explore and understand young people's feelings. It is an approach which limits shame, promotes compassion and brings a sense of mutual support, strength and resilience. When an adult spends time and demonstrates an interest in a young person's inner life, the adult contains and regulates the young person's emotions. Eventually the young person will learn to do this themselves. The use of this approach can support children and young people in shifting from fight, flight, freeze and collapse positions.

PACE stands for PLAYFULNESS, ACCEPTANCE, CURIOSITY, EMPATHY.



Playfulness – an open, interested, ready, calm, relaxed and engaged attitude

When children and young people laugh, giggle, and encounter humour, they can become less defensive and more reflective. Playfulness can help keep it all in perspective, as well as being used to diffuse a difficult or tense situation. This is especially important following the recent lockdown and the fact that many children and young people may have missed episodes of play with others, thus being unable to form and develop important social bonds. The Division of Educational Psychology (2020) have produced a video to provide advice for parents, carers and professionals to explore the psychology behind play and how it helps children and young people to manage their emotions. The video can be found at the following link: <https://www.bps.org.uk/coronavirus-resources/public/psychology-play>

Acceptance – unconditionally accepting a child or young person makes them feel secure, safe and loved

Actively communicating to the child or young person that you accept the wishes, feelings, thoughts, urges, motives and perceptions that are underneath the outward behaviour (as previously discussed as part of the 'iceberg' model). It is about accepting, without judgment or evaluation, his or her inner life, which 'simply is' - it is not right or wrong. As previously discussed, staff, parents, carers, children and young people will be experiencing a mixture of pleasant and unpleasant emotions and all of these should be accepted non-judgementally as ways of processing difficult life circumstances. Adults may be very firm in limiting behaviour while at the same time accepting the motives for the behaviour. Here it is important to separate the behaviour from the child or young person themselves and bear in mind potential differing boundaries between home and school.

Curiosity – without judgement, children become aware of their inner life

Curiosity involves a quiet, accepting and wondering tone that conveys a simple desire to understand the young person and the behaviour that has been presented: "What do you think was going on? What do you think that was about?" Curiosity allows the child or young person know that adults want to, and are attempting to, understand. It also supports children in understanding that all emotions are valid, and represent a feeling of some sort. Allowing a curious framework for children to explore these emotions help to increase their feelings of self-efficacy and understanding their own behavioural reactions.

Empathy – a sense of compassion for the child and their feelings

Here, the adult highlights that he or she recognises how difficult an experience or emotion is for the child or young person. The adult stays with the child emotionally, providing comfort and support, and letting the child or young person know that they do not have to deal with the distress alone. Here, the adult also communicates strength, love and commitment, with confidence that sharing the child's distress will not be too much and that, together, they will get through it.

More information on the PACE approach can be found at <http://www.danielhughes.org/p.a.c.e..html> and <https://www.epinsight.com/attachment-trauma>.

Appendix H: Emotion Coaching

Emotion coaching is an evidence based, whole-school approach which supports children and young people in recognising, labelling and managing their emotions through supportive relationships. It was first introduced in the USA (Gottman, 1997) as a way of supporting parents with behaviour management and can be used by children, young people and adults as a way of better understanding and regulating their emotions (Gus, Rose and Gilbert, 2015). It should be noted that, although behaviour can be improved as a result of emotion coaching, the focus is on emotion management, with behaviour being a secondary factor. This is particularly important in the current context, where, as previously discussed, children and young people may be experiencing a range of different emotions. Emotion coaching uses theories of attachment (some of which are discussed above), including the premise that all emotions are natural, normal, and not always a matter of choice, and that behaviour is a form of communication. Emotion coaching has links to neuroscientific research with the aim of supporting children in building positive attachments with key adults.

Emotion coaching builds an emotional bond between children/young people and adults, creating a safe haven and a place of trust, alongside respect, acceptance and a sense of self. This can in turn, support children and young people in accepting and determining boundaries, and respecting the impact that their behaviour has on others. Research has found that the use of an emotion coaching approach can promote sustained improvement in pupil, staff, and family well-being, with positive effects noted upon teacher-pupil relationships. In the current context especially, it is imperative that these relationships are developed and enhanced. The approach has also been found to increase academic outcomes for pupils as a result of improved emotional well-being, emotional literacy, and relationships in and out of school (Gus et al, 2017). As briefly discussed above, this may be linked to the idea that, when children feel safe, calm, supported and emotionally regulated, they are more able to engage with higher-level cognitive processes in the brain.

Emotion coaching uses four main steps to support co-regulation and emotion management, each of which are detailed below.

Step 1: Recognising the child's feelings and empathising with them – "Connect before Correct".

- Genuinely empathise with the child or young person from their point of view
- Recognise all emotions as being natural and normal and not always a matter of choice
- Recognise behaviour as a form of communication
- Look for physical and verbal signs of the emotion being felt

Step 2: Validating the feelings and labelling them – "Name and tame"

- Use words to reflect back the child or young person's emotion and help them to label the emotion
- Observe – say what you see rather than asking probing questions to which children and young people may not know the answer
- Show an understanding of the child or young person's emotional situation

Step 3: Setting limits (if needed) "Rapport before reason"

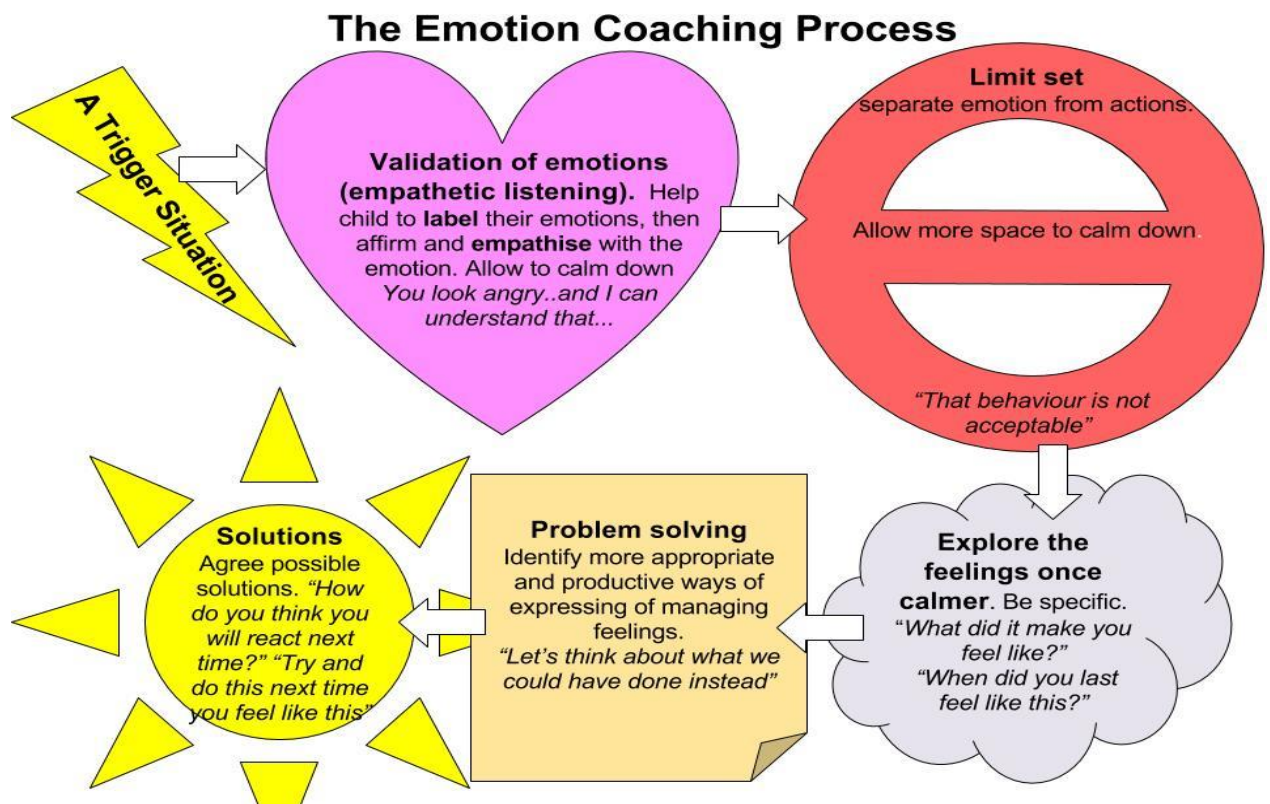
- State the boundary limits of acceptable behaviour (positive limit setting)

- Set the social and emotional tone – not the adult reflecting back the anger or distress of the child or young person, but the child or young person being able to respond and reflect back the calm and empathic face of the adult
- Make it clear that certain behaviours cannot be accepted
- Ensure the retention of the child or young person’s dignity. This includes a commitment to avoid shouting, ‘put downs’, criticism, threat or shaming, and endeavouring to support the child or young person in feeling calm, soothed and safe.

Step 4: Problem solving with the child or young person

When the child or young person is in a relaxed, rational state,

- Explore the feelings that gave rise to the behaviour/problem/incident
- Scaffold alternative ideas and actions that could lead to more appropriate and productive outcomes
- Empower the child or young person to believe that s/he can overcome difficulties and manage challenging feelings/behaviour



Appendix I: SWAN - supporting a safe and successful return to school

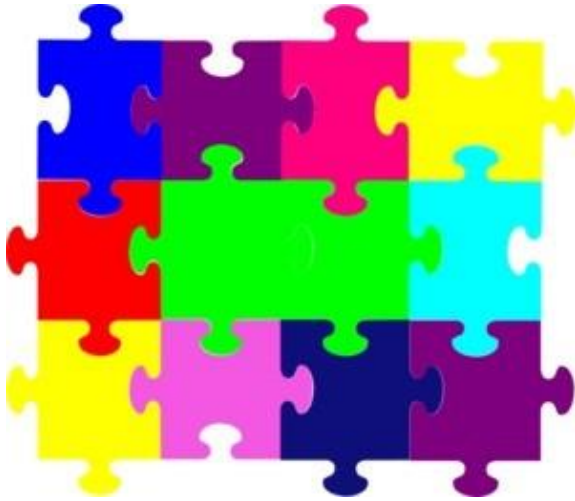
The SWAN model (2020) has been created by Dr Pooky Knightsmith; a mental health educator, speaker, author and advisor. The aim of the model is to provide a framework for school staff to use to support children in returning to school. It uses the acronym 'SWAN' not only for guidance, but also as a metaphor and reminder that, as educational professionals, it falls to us as the adults to emulate the swan – seeming to children and young people that we are calm and in control, regardless of how we may feel underneath the surface. Children look to us for safety, support, calm and reassurance, and to be told that things will be 'OK'.

S – Safety



Without feeling safe and secure, and whilst in a heightened state of alert, children (and adults) are unable to function properly, instead focusing on fight/flight/freeze responses. This will prevent other, higher-level cognitive functions of the brain from being activated. By supporting children and staff to feel safe, this will enable them to move towards being able to feel settled and gradually move towards academic expectations. The aspect of safety (both physical and emotional) may focus on rules, which should be limited, simple and consistent and could involve children in the co-construction of them, supporting them in understanding the rationale for these rules. Children generally respond positively to rules, predictability and consistency, and they, along with their families and other adults will need to be clear about what expectations of them are.

Adults will need to model new rules explicitly and all should be praised when they follow rules but supported when they don't. Children and staff are not simply 'returning to school' but returning to something new, something changed, a new normal, and may need additional support with this. Families may also feel concerns and anxieties about children returning to school, and what the expectations are on them. Where possible, families may benefit from supporting with the development of new rules and expectations to enable them to feel more confident in sending their child to school, thus impacting on conversations had at home.



Ideas for supporting feelings of safety

- Education – supporting children to understand the current situation. Resources to support with this include: Bombini the Bee, Julia Donaldson COVID-19 stories, The Hug, 'While we can't hug (Fabia Children's books). Further websites and resources are available online; please speak to your link EP for further information.
- Remind and reassure children that they are safe.
- Key members of staff to provide familiarity.
- The use of a transitional object (which can be cleaned down).
- Routine – timelines, now/next.
- Incorporating children's own interests where possible.
- Pictures of classrooms, school staff, the layout of school.
- Emotional containment, nurture areas, safe spaces within school.
- 'New rules' discussed and co-constructed with children.
- Children having their own 'zones'
- L-shaped tables.
- Shoe boxes of items that can help children to feel connected.
- Calming activities (for children and adults)

W – Welcoming

How do we create a safe environment that also feels warm and welcoming? Children and young people (and their families) need to know that staff feel delighted to have them back, and feel a sense of belonging to be back in their school community.

Strong relationships between children, staff and families will need to be re-built, alongside the new normal – social distancing rules which can impact on social interaction. Each school will be different in how they can create an environment so that, when children return, they, alongside parents and carers, and staff feel welcome and a part of things again.



Ideas to promote welcoming

- Key/familiar members of staff.
- Check-in prior to children’s return, i.e. phone call, letter.
- Hold children in mind, let them know that adults are thinking about them and looking forward to their return.
- Relational dosing for children and adults to know that you are there for them.
- Ensure routine and rituals are still in place, i.e. the register.
- Hand-washing and other measures in visual timetable as part of daily routine and rituals.
- Use of apps to provide ongoing communication with children and families and celebrate achievements, i.e. Marvellous me, class Dojos.

A – All together

This is where personal and professional boundaries should be broken down for children returning to school. School staff, outside agencies and families will need to work together to support children in feeling safe when returning to school and so that they feel that they can rely on the adults around them. It is here where we may remember that the impact of COVID-19 will be different for everyone – each person will have their own different lived experience, yet, despite this, we can all work together to support not just children, but each other.



Ideas to promote all-togetherness

- Brief and de-brief for staff, children and parents.
- Daily posts/briefings so that all staff have relevant information about specific children.
- Emotional containment – support well-being and confidence of all staff. Consider daily check-ins, peer supervision etc.
- Provide information to parents/carers around what the first day ‘looks like.’
- Maintain contact with parents/carers, keep them involved.
- Boundaries set with staff so that all staff feel comfortable with the ‘new rules.’

N- Nurture



Whilst there may be a temptation for some staff, parents and pupils to jump straight back into 'achieving', children returning to school following the lockdown will need time and space to 'be', to settle back into routines gradually. As mentioned above, when children are in a heightened state of arousal and anxiety, they are unable to focus on learning or higher order cognitive functions as the body is preparing to 'protect itself'. With this in mind, time will need to be taken to create an environment where everybody can thrive. Some children may need to re-learn how to learn, how to be in school, how to be around other children socially, in a similar way to what we may need as adults.

In the same way that children need to be settled after returning to school following the summer holidays, they will need to be settled following this, with an awareness that it hasn't been a holiday for them, and will have been experienced differently by each child. This aspect highlights the importance of play, so that children can learn to feel safe and secure in their new setting and develop positive attachments (or re-attachments) with key adults. Learning and making up for academic losses is important, but we must remember that, in order to do this, children must feel safe, and have space to 'be', and to play.



Ideas to promote nurture:

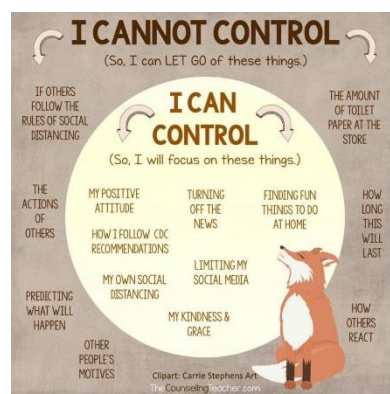
- Transitional objects (that can be cleaned down)
- Nurture corner and 'safe spaces'
- Normal nurture routines (such as physical contact etc.) replaced with alternatives, i.e. elbow bumps, an alternative movement which symbolises a hug, non-touch high 5s, Bumping feet, nod of the head, hand on chest, 'Namaste'/praying hands, Makaton, Thumbs up.
- Circle time
- 'Worry puppet'/toys
- Time for play and fun

- Check-ins throughout the day
- Adults joining in with lunch times
- Shared exercise, i.e. wake up, shake up, cosmic kids.
- Mindful meditation
- Be mindful of tone of voice
- Self-hug

Appendix J: FACE COVID

This acronym has been created by Dr Russ Harris, author of 'The Happiness Trap' as a set of practical steps for responding to the COVID-19 crisis. The guidance uses the principles of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). Here, the guidance has been amended so that it is applicable to educational settings, whilst remaining authentic to the original principles in place.

F – Focus on what is in your control – Children and young people will naturally feel a range of emotions, including fear and anxiety, as a result of the COVID pandemic. Whilst this is a normal response, unpleasant feelings can lead to unhelpful ruminations about the future, and “what if’s”. With this in mind, children and young people returning to school may need to be supported to identify what aspects of life as it is that they can control, and to focus on this. Being aware of our thoughts, feelings and subsequent behaviours can prevent children and young people from getting ‘swept away’ with these unhelpful feelings. A practical way of supporting children and young people to do this is to a.) acknowledge thoughts and feelings, b.) come back into your body and c.) engage in what you are doing. These will be explored in further detail.



A – Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings – Some children and young people may find it particularly difficult to identify or label different feelings or emotions. For these children, it may be that the approaches of emotion coaching and PACE, alongside emotional regulation scales and supports, may help them in beginning to recognise how different emotions feel. This acknowledgement is just this - “I feel frustrated” or “I am worried”, with as little judgement as possible. It is easy for us as adults, and for children, to see emotions such as this as being ‘negative’ emotions, and to try to get rid of them. In reality, emotions such as these are just as equally valid and as important as the more preferred emotions such as “happiness” or “excitement”.



C – Come back into your body – This is a technique used to ‘reground’ the body and return to the present, to prevent, where possible, becoming trapped in ruminations of the future. This principle may be different for different children/young people, some may prefer breathing exercises, mindfulness, yoga, or simply be led by the following points. This principle is not to take the child/young person away from the feeling/thoughts, but to gain as much control as possible over the physiological aspects of the body, thus making it easier to focus on rational cognitions.

- Push your feet into the floor
- Straighten up your back
- Press your fingertips together
- Stretch – arms, back, neck, shoulders
- Breathe slowly



E – Engage in what you are doing – Again, this could be dependent on the child/children who are using this framework, but could include some of the following methods to re-focus attention and re-ground:

- Name 5 things that you can see
- Name 4 things that you can hear
- Name what you can smell or taste
- Notice what you are doing
- Continue with the activity that you are doing



Ideally, the ACE cycle should be followed three-four times to support re-grounding. Audio clips to support this activity can be found: <https://www.actmindfully.com.au/free-stuff/free-audio/>. Following the ‘FACE’ process, children and young people may also want to utilise the ‘COVID’ acronym as follows to further support emotional regulation.

C- Committed action – Once a child/young person has grounded themselves using the ‘FACE’ principles, they may need support to do the things that matter – both practically and from a self-care perspective. For example, these might be things including social distancing, frequent handwashing which relate directly to the current situation, but also aspects which may make children/young people feel better emotionally – playing a game, reading a book, cuddling a toy, drawing a picture – something that the child enjoys doing that will begin to promote positive feelings following the FACE principles.

O – Opening up – Opening up is the opportunity for children and young people to make way for difficult feelings and treat themselves kindly. Difficult feelings are bound to come up for children, young people, staff and families, as a result of the COVID pandemic and this principle highlights the importance of recognising and opening up about these feelings. For some children, this might mean talking about them, for others it might mean writing them down, feeding them to a ‘worry monster’ or drawing a picture to express them. Whatever it is that helps, this principle can support children in accepting particularly challenging emotions.

V – Values – This principles reflects the core values that underpins a child/young person, or their core constructs. These may include kindness, openness, honesty, courage, patience, humour, love and respect. They will be different for everybody and by trying to incorporate these into everyday life, we can reminded and supported to demonstrate these and care for ourselves and those around us. It may be that children are given an extra job to do in school, or buddied up with another child to enable them to utilise these core values in day-to-day situations.

I – Identify resources – This principle supports children and young people to look for resources around them which may be able to support them. This may be a key adult in school or at home, a specific area in school which supports them to self-regulate, or a specific transitional object or toy, which helps them to feel safe. It may be the gradual development of peer networks again which are built up with the support of key adults, or internal resources which utilise the child or young person’s strengths. These can be identified alongside children and young people and can help to empower them to identify what it is that can help them, from a solution-focused perspective.

D – Disinfect and distance physically – As previously discussed in this guidance and as a result of government guidance, children, young people, staff and parents/carers are still advised to wash hands regularly for 20 seconds, wear face masks where necessary and social distance where possible. It should be highlighted here that the term ‘social distance’ focuses more on physical distance, and children, young people and families should be encouraged not to ‘socially isolate’ or cut off emotionally, but to ensure safety by keeping distance physically.

Appendix K: Literature – Transition

As part of the Educational Psychology doctoral training course, a literature review was carried out which explored the views and experiences of Y7 children following transition. Whereas the majority of literature has focused on specific transition interventions and their effectiveness, this review focused solely on the lived experiences of those who had experienced the transition themselves.

The following themes were highlighted as being important to children during, and following transition:

School environment – This included the size of the school and classrooms as well as the increased amount of pupils and teachers when compared to the majority of primary school settings. Children highlighted fears of getting lost in their new environment alongside anxieties related to the movement between one classroom and another and the time expectations linked to this.

Routine – Children discussed challenges in terms of expectation shifts including timetabling (changing lessons, differing length of lessons and variety of lessons), exposure to different teachers and differing pedagogical and behavioural management approaches as a result of this.

Relationships – This was perhaps one of the most prominent and discussed aspects of transition, and included the following subthemes of friendship, teachers and family.

- i.) *Friendships* – Children highly valued the support from the peers, including emotional, practical, academic and social support. Included here were the challenges highlighted of leaving some friendships behind, thus creating a sense of loss and bereavement, changing friendships and associated dynamics, and initiating and sustaining new friendships.
- ii.) *Teacher-pupil relationships* – Given that, in primary school, children were often taught by one main teacher for the majority of their lessons, a move to secondary school to being taught by several teachers can be a significant change. However, pupils highlighted the advantages of being able to forge new relationships with a variety of new teachers. Within this, pupils identified the challenge of teachers' not knowing their names, or anything about them, which then impacted on their ability to forge positive relationships. This is a particular challenge for staff in secondary schools, who may be teaching hundreds of children from across the school.
- iii.) *Family relationships* – These were identified as a protective factor, with children identifying both practical and emotional support from parents, and also highlighting the increased autonomy offered to them by family following the move to a secondary setting. Children identified siblings in the same secondary school as being an advantage.

Emotions – Children discussed the emotions around transition as being 'constant' and 'mixed', with some excitement prior to, and relief following the transitional period and successful relationships being formed. Others' discussed feelings of loss (as mentioned above), following the loss of identity as a primary school pupil, as well leaving well-formed relationships behind. Children also felt stress, anxiety, nervousness and worry about the upcoming transition. In terms of management of these emotions, some children felt that

these were 'repressed' by schools, and highlighted the importance of being able to open up and discuss how they felt about transition.

Identity – The metaphor of 'big fish in a small pond to small fish in a big pond' is one which can be particularly challenging for children. Linked to this is the idea that some children felt that, during primary school, they were treated as a child but following a summer break, they felt they were automatically treated as adults – a change in expectation which many found difficult to manage. This theme in particular highlighted the differences between children overtly wanting to be 'treated as adults', but still requiring the nurture and support that they were previously exposed to.

Support and strategies – protective factors during, and following transition:

- i.) *Pre-transition* – Students noted how they would have preferred more honest transition advice about social, environmental and emotional aspects of transition and practical advice about how these changes could be managed. Pupils valued the option of talking to primary staff about their feelings around transition and highlighted the impact of parent/carers anxieties being reflected onto them. Students noted that summer school (especially located in the secondary school) supported them in feeling more prepared.
- ii.) *Post-transition* – Children felt that new rules, routines and expectations were 'thrust' upon them, with little time to prepare for or get used to these. There was a sense of need for the development of positive teacher-pupil relationships which then serve to enhance effective learning. Finally, children highlighted the importance of being able to develop positive peer relationships to support them academically, socially and emotionally.

Whilst it is recognised that some of these themes, and the anxieties associated with them, are difficult to change (for example, size of school, amount of teachers), it is hoped that this guidance will support recommendations for how others of these can be supported and anxieties eased wherever possible.

Although the literature discussed above focused solely on children's experiences from Y6 to Y7, many of the factors highlighted will be relevant for differing age ranges, and will be discussed in more detail throughout this guidance. Given the COVID-19 pandemic and the school closures as a result of these, transition to school, (whether this be the same or a different school) will affect all children and young people in different ways. Added to this, there are some children who may have experienced additional traumas during the lockdown period (social isolation, bereavement, family mental health issues, domestic violence, financial challenges, and others), for whom a return to school may be an added challenge. Some children may have internalised the view that 'others are a threat to life' given the social distancing and lockdown measures which may have been a large part of their recent life. Leaving home attachments behind and developing those in school may then be even more challenging for children, regardless of whether they demonstrated these difficulties prior to the pandemic.

Appendix L: Research Project - Supporting Walsall schools with transition following COVID-19 lockdown

Following on from the systemic literature review, a research project was designed by Joanne Mumford, Emma Dove and Helen Regan from Walsall EPS. The aims of the research are:

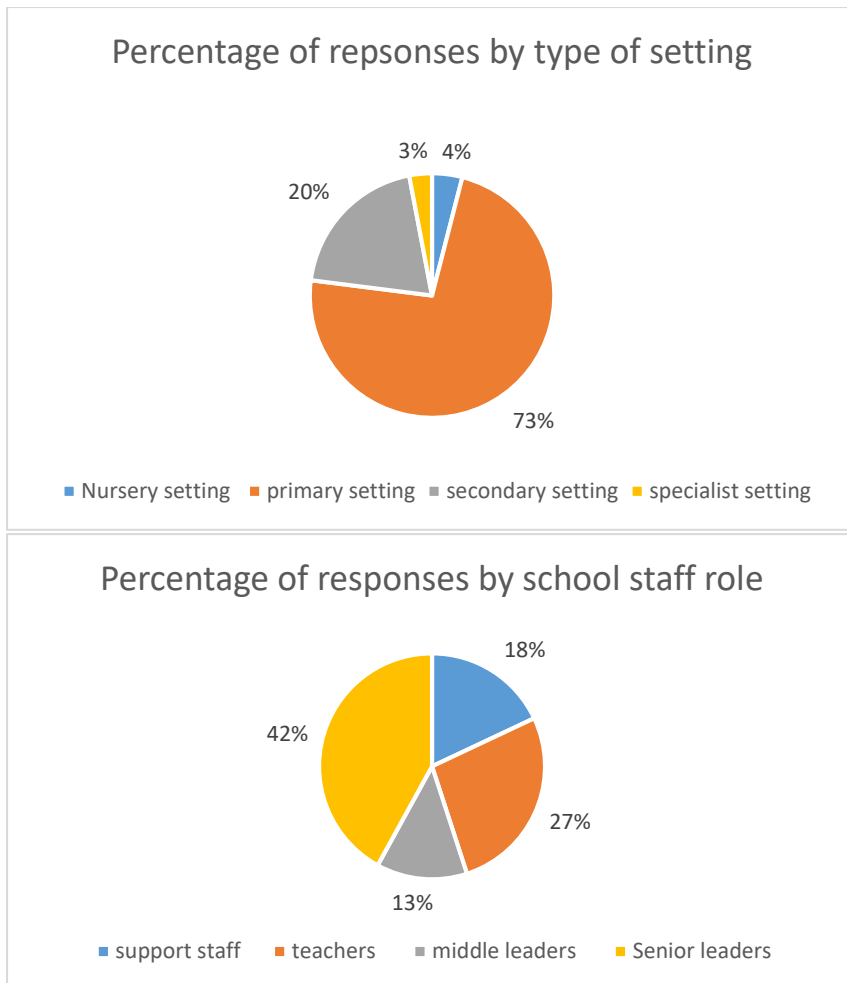
- To explore previous and current transition plans of local schools
- To assess the confidence of staff supporting children with transition
- To inform guidance and training to support schools with pupils returning to school post COVID-19

Settings in Walsall were previously contacted to request completion of a survey to identify what support they required in supporting children and young people returning to school following the COVID-19 pandemic. Once responses were gained, the researchers completed a thematic / statistical analysis on the data set. The responses from school staff were used to inform this guidance, to ensure that specific concerns and requests for support were fulfilled. From the guidance, training was then developed and made available to all education settings in June 2020. The purpose of the training is to provide additional transition support alongside the guidance. Psychological theories and frameworks, for example, the PACE model, and practical strategies, which are linked to developmental stages, are provided within this training to ensure that it is accessible across a number of age ranges.

Following the training and guidance dissemination to education settings, further information will be gained to measure the impact that the support this guidance and the training has had on the school staff within the Walsall area.

Participants who completed the questionnaire?

The charts below identify the 108 respondents to the research questionnaire and the settings they work within.



The responses gathered were from a variety of settings, but predominantly from primary schools within Walsall. The questionnaire was initially sent to Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, with a request that this would then be shared with all members of staff. 42% of responses came from SENCOs, with additional information being provided by teaching staff, support staff and those in leadership roles.

Thematic analysis of transition questionnaire feedback: Using Braun and Clarke, 2006

From the information collected from questionnaire data, question responses were separated into distinct phrases/sentences related to different topics. Initial themes from participant responses included: *Y6/7 transition, communication across schools, specific COVID related logistics, EYFS and general support needed*. Further analysis revealed that staff had identified the following as being important areas of transition support: *SEMH of pupils, supporting staff, external agencies, need for guidance, communication between schools, communication with parents, EYFS, primary-secondary transition, EHCP/SEND, general advice, meetings, sharing good practise*.

A thematic map (see Appendix E) of the support required for transition during COVID-19 from school responses was then gathered. These responses are referred to within age and need areas within this guidance.

Appendix M: Thematic Map of Walsall Transition Research

Support required for transition during COVID-19 from Walsall Schools Transition research – data collected May 2020

Superordinate theme	Theme	Definition	Exempla Data
Information	Do not know	Where the individual did not know what support was needed in their school for transition during the COVID 19 pandemic.	Too early to tell what support is needed. Unsure of what children are returning and in what capacity.
	Contact details	Requests related to contact information of other schools during COVID-19 pandemic.	Contact details of schools children are transitioning to.
	General support and advice	Identification of need for, or requests for, generic advice, support or guidance on transition for schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.	Just any advice would be helpful.
Specific Groups	Supporting staff	Identifying staff support needed to enable transition during COVID-19.	Gathering the narrative of the staff. Supporting staff to enable them to support children
	SEND and EHCP	Support needed in schools for the transition of children with SEND, including EHCPs, during the COVID-19 pandemic.	Support for children with EHCPs transitioning.
	Vulnerable CYP – other	Support needed in schools for the transition of vulnerable CYP other than those with identified SEND or specific SEMH needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.	There will be a large number of children who will struggle with transitioning back into school, let alone different year group with different staff etc.
	EYFS	Support required for the transition back to settings, and attendance at settings, for pupils in the EYFS during the COVID-19 pandemic.	Best practice ideas during these times appropriate to EYFS too.

	Primary to secondary	Concerns, challenges and support required by schools for the transition of pupils from year 6 to year 7 during the COVID-19 pandemic.	The transition of pupils moving to secondary school is a major concern.
	SEMH	Supported needed in schools to enable to transition of pupils with SEMH needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.	Advice on how to support children with SEMH, particularly challenging behaviour.
Collaboration	Communication	Identified needs or supports required in relation to discussions, sharing of information, and correspondence between schools, for transition during COVID-19 pandemic.	Better communication between schools to discuss ways transition can take place.
	Parents	Support or actions required by schools to support transition during COVID-19, related specifically to parents.	Clarity of information for parents.
	meetings	Challenges identified, or support required, for meetings to support transition during COVID-19 pandemic.	Difficult to support Annual reviews.
	External agencies	Challenges identified, or support required to support transition during COVID-19 pandemic, related specifically to external agencies e.g. EPS, SALT.	Sharing of information from other agencies e.g. safeguarding board, health visitors, speech and language therapists
	Sharing good practice	Actions, or support required, for sharing good practice and learning from others, to support transition during COVID-19 pandemic.	Continued support and sharing of good practise though Microsoft Teams meetings in locality groups.

6. Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the school staff in Walsall who have contributed to this document by sharing their good practice and ideas for support needed, especially during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Further thanks go to the members of Walsall Borough Council, who supported and assisted in the development and dissemination of this guidance.

Finally, we would like to thank the hard work of our colleagues in other psychology services and professional bodies who have produced a wide range of information and research on supporting children and young people through a range of transitions. This wealth of quality research and practice has been an invaluable resource in our own professional development, and the development of this guidance document.

Walsall Educational Psychology Service

