



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Supporting Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)/Social Communication Difficulties

Transition from Primary to Post Primary School

**An information and support pack
for parents and teachers**

Developed 2013, Revised 2015

This Good Practice Guide was developed by professionals in the areas of health and education. It is based on current knowledge in this area. It is intended as a guide only. Not all the suggestions here will apply to any one student or situation.

Foreword and Acknowledgements



Waterford HSE Autism Team, Waterford National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), Waterford

This good practice guide was developed to support students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) who are transitioning from primary to post-primary school. It is hoped that the material here will be on benefit to schools, parents and students.

The guide is the product of a HSE/NEPS collaboration. The compilation of material was completed by Katherine Deegan, Liaison Worker with the HSE Autism Team and Shirley Murphy, Senior Educational Psychologist with NEPS, Waterford.

Information and support came from a variety of sources. We would like to thank and acknowledge these sources for their help, support and permission to include their resource materials in this pack.

- Members of the Waterford HSE Autism Team and NEPS Waterford Team
- Lisa Power, Senior Occupational Therapist, Waterford HSE Autism Team
- Jane Carter, Service Development Manager, Warwickshire's Integrated Disability Service Autism Team

There are related resources which were also developed by the above named team.

Transition to Post-Primary- Practical Ideas and Resources for Students Organisational Skills and Self- Regulation

Transition to Post-Primary School- Sample Transition Programmes

We hope to have these resources available of the NEPS website shortly. In the meantime, you can access them by contacting the NEPS team in Waterford on 051 310028 or the HSE Autism Team in Waterford on 051 842 800.

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Introduction

During a pupil's educational career, there will be many times of 'transition'. For example, from preschool to primary school, from class to class, from primary to post primary and so on. There will also be times during a lesson or class when children will be asked to 'transition', and move from task to task.

Transition has been defined as *the process of changing from one state or condition to another and a period of such change* (Oxford English Dictionary, 2012). It may be thought of as the move from one activity to another, from one place to another and/or from one stage of life to another. All of these processes involve change which, for an individual with an ASD can present difficulties and needs to be carefully and sensitively managed. It is helpful to consider that although there may be a definite time when a change occurs, a 'transition' is a process. Preparing for this moment of change should be seen as a medium or even, long term process.

Therefore, transition has been described as both a *process* and an *event*.

Two types of transition have been discussed in the literature on transition; 'vertical transition' and 'horizontal transition' (Stoner, A.H. and Bock, J., 2007). 'Vertical transitions' have been described as 'developmental and predictable' and include moving on from one setting to another at the appropriate stage in education/life. Examples include from pre-school to primary school or primary to post primary school. 'Horizontal transition' refers to the movement between activities during the course of a normal day which can result in significant levels of stress and difficulties for pupils with ASD. As a result, significant behavioural issues may arise at these times.

Given these issues and concerns, this pack has been put together to support pupils, parents and teachers at times of transition with the particular focus on movement from primary to post primary education. Many of the strategies and interventions presented are also relevant and effective at other times of transition, including both 'vertical' and 'horizontal' transition situations.

Preparing for Transition

It has already been suggested that 'transition' should be seen as **not just an event** that occurs at a particular time in a pupil's educational career or during the course of a day, but that **it is a process**. Preparation for change and being able to manage times of change should be seen as a long term process and something that needs to be worked on over time.

Developing Skills

Ensuring that pupils have the skills to cope with change and transition is something that teachers and parents can work on through the development of life skills. For example, pupils can be taught skills in the following areas:

- Being independent in everyday activities such as looking after their own materials, clothes, toys
- Being independent in dressing, eating, toileting
- Basic social skills including how to ask for help, how to greet others
- How to cope when things do not go as they expected
- How to calm down when worried or upset
- How to use visual means to help with organisation, such as using timetables, diaries

Teaching these skills is an ongoing part of a child's education, both at home and in school. Children with ASD may need these skills to be broken down and taught explicitly with lots of opportunities for practice and re-enforcement. They are also likely to need many of these skills taught in a variety of situations, due to difficulties with generalising from one situation to another. Schools can work with children and parents to prepare for transitions drawing on their existing resources and knowledge. There are many programmes available to help support the teaching of these skills and include:

- **Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)** – 'supports the personal development, health and well-being of young people and helps them create and maintain positive relationships' (SPHE website)
- **Social Skills Training** – this may take the form of individual social skills work or the use of a structured social skills programme delivered in a group. The aim of these is to teach and help children develop and use social skills such as listening, turn taking, sharing, asking for help, starting conversations, dealing with feelings and emotions

NEPS have developed various resources to promote the development of social skills and these can be accessed through the NEPS resources section on the DES website.

NEPS Continuum of Support

As well as these programmes, the NEPS 'Continuum of Support' process is available to help schools plan assessment and interventions for all children, with particular regard to children with special educational needs. The Continuum of Support is available in all schools. There are primary and post-primary documents, with accompanying resources, as well as a document dedicated to supporting children with behavioural emotional and social difficulties.

The Continuum of Support process is advocated as a means by which to support all children in school through early intervention, preventative approaches and implementing targeted interventions when a child is experiencing difficulties. The three stages of this process are Classroom Support (Support for All), School Support (Support for Some) and School Support Plus (Support for a Few).


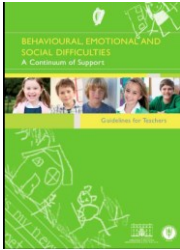

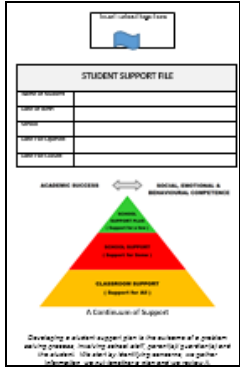
The Student Support File

The Student Support File allows the school to track the student's pathway through the Continuum of Support – right from the start of the support process, and onwards, if necessary, through to the School Support (for Some) and School Support Plus (for a Few) levels. It allows the school to document progress and needs over time and ensures continuity of support for a student, including transition from primary to post-primary school. It is intended to encourage parental collaboration and parental engagement in the student's learning. Such a file keeps together all the information about the support of the student: information gathered, plans and interventions, consultations and reviews.

Support from the NEPS Psychologist

Schools are further supported in the implementation of this process through consultation with NEPS psychologists. During transitions, NEPS psychologists may be involved in an advisory way, discussing possible transition programmes, strategies and/or other interventions to support the child during the process of transition.

The following NEPS documents may be helpful to schools

<p>Primary and Special Schools Special Educational Needs: A Continuum of Support: Guidelines for Teachers & Resource Pack for Teachers</p> <p>http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/neps_special_needs_guidelines.pdf</p> <p>http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/neps_special_needs_resource_pack.pdf</p>	
<p>Primary and Special Schools Behavioural, Emotional & Social Difficulties: A Continuum of Support – Guidelines for Teachers</p> <p>http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/neps_besd_continuum_teacher_guide.pdf</p> <p>For a leaflet outlining how to support children in primary schools: http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Resources-Guidance/sped_guidelines_pupils_difficulties_p.pdf</p>	
<p>Post-Primary Schools A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Teachers & Resource Pack for Teachers</p> <p>http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/neps_post_primary_continuum_teacher_guide.pdf</p> <p>http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/neps_post_primary_continuum_resource_pack.pdf</p> <p>For a leaflet outlining how to support students in post-primary schools: http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Resources-Guidance/sped_guidelines_pupils_difficulties_pp.pdf</p>	
<p>All Schools</p> <p>This link brings you directly into the Student Support File document: http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/Student-Support-File-Form.docx</p> <p>This link brings you directly to the Guidelines for use of the Student Support File http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/Student-Support-File-Guidelines.pdf</p>	

Supporting the Transition Process

At the actual time of transition, it is very important that parents, school staff and other professionals involved with the child (e.g. psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, clinical psychologists, paediatricians) work together to ensure that the transition period runs as smoothly as possible. This will ensure that any potential anxiety and distress that may arise as a result of this period of change is minimised and managed in an effective way. In order to support this process, several documents and strategies are suggested:

Checklist for Parents

This checklist is intended for use by parents as an 'aide memoire' as they prepare themselves and their child for the point of transition. It is also intended as a prompt for parents to alert them to issues that they may need to consider, such as:

- Type of school placement
- Contact with the new school
- What information needs to be shared (including relevant professional reports and documentation)

Post Primary Transfer Profile

This is suggested as a means by which parents and school staff can review the child's current special educational needs in preparation to transition to post-primary education. By gathering all relevant information to pass on to a new educational placement, there is better continuity. The Post-Primary Transfer Profile appears in the NEPS Continuum document, although the version presented here has been edited to be specific to the needs of students with autistic spectrum disorders and other social and communication difficulties.

Transition Workbooks/ My New School

In order to directly support parents and children at this time, two samples are provided here of materials that aim to prepare a child for transfer. The *Transition Workbook* includes a range of structured activities while the *My New School* offers a pictorial introduction to a new school, with reassuring text. These materials provide practical support and information to the child who is transitioning in order to reassure them and help them to feel more in control at this time of many changes. They are produced in a separate workbook:

Transition Programmes- Planning to Move to Post-Primary School

Organisational Skills for Students

Many children experience difficulties with organisation, they can forget instructions, have difficulty with sequencing and become anxious when they are not familiar with certain routines. Visual schedules (such as those used by the TEACCH system) can be very helpful. Providing the child with visual timetable can help to act as visual reminders of where s/he needs to be. By using colour coding to mark their books and copies, this will help the child to organise which books and copies they need for individual subjects. Parents and school staff can start to use colour coding with the child while still in primary school so they have adapted the concept by the time they are introduced to post primary school.

Visual reminders can also help to organise the child's routine at home, for example instead of constantly having to verbally remind the child to start their homework, take a shower, etc, a visual timetable for home will assist the child to carry out activities in sequence. It also builds in facility to mark off the passage of time and completed activities, by removing each activity from their list, or by ticking off each activity as they have completed it.

Information about helping students be more organised can be found in a separate workbook, primarily designed for use by students:

Transition to Post-Primary- Organisational Skills for Students, Practical Ideas and Resources

This resource can be found on the NEPS website, or by contacting the HSE Autism Team in Waterford.

Self-regulation Programmes

Self-regulation is the ability to attain, maintain, and change arousal level/state appropriately for a task or situation. The term "Arousal" can be used to describe how alert a person feels. To be able to attend, concentrate and complete tasks in an appropriate manner, a person's arousal level must be in an optimal state for that particular task. Typically, arousal levels are described as low arousal, high arousal and just-right arousal. A low level of arousal is needed to watch TV, while a higher level of arousal is needed to compete in team sports. The just-right level is therefore a level that needs to change, relative to the situation. This pack contains a section about tools and strategies to help children and young people develop 'just-right' arousal levels.

Social Stories

A Social Story is written for a particular pupil about a particular situation that the pupil may be having difficulty with understanding or managing. The Social Story is written in such a way that it can provide helpful information and advice to the pupil and thereby help to reduce stress and anxiety. It is intended to be used as a reference for the child when they are feeling unsure about a situation and to remind them:

- What is happening and why
- What to do
- How to get support
- Keeping calm, self-soothing

At the time of transition, a Social Story can be helpful in that relevant information about the move to post-primary school, the organisation of the new school, who's who in the school and other concerns can be addressed. Photos should be included. The child can then use this story during the summer as a reminder of how they might address issues when starting a new school.

Preparing Children for Transition to Post Primary School

Checklist for Parents

Introduction

Given that transition is a **process** not just an event that happens from time to time, it is important that preparation for transition is an ongoing activity. This will allow any additional interventions or strategies needed to be completed in a timely fashion. This is particularly important when a child is moving from one educational placement to another, such as from primary school to post primary school.

Placement decisions need to be made early, if at all possible. This will help to ensure that the child can attend the most appropriate placement. There are sometimes a limited number of places available in schools and especially in special classes for children with ASD. Once a school placement has been decided upon and a place has been confirmed, it is then possible to start a transition programme aimed at that particular school placement.

It is recommended that this checklist is started before the end of Fifth Class, to ensure that there is time to address all areas of preparation in a calm and considered way.

1. Have you thought about post primary education for your child?

Yes

No

2. What placement/school options are you considering?

Mainstream post primary school with no support

Mainstream post primary school with support
(special needs assistant and/or extra teaching support)

Special class for Autism attached to a mainstream
post-primary school

Special class for Autism attached to a special school

Special school

3. Have you identified a school?

Yes

No

4. Have you contacted the school?

No, not yet

Yes, phone call only

Yes, visited for an Open Day/Open Evening

Yes, visited the school and spoke to school staff

Yes, an application for a place has been made

5. Have you given the post primary school all relevant reports and documents?

Yes

No

6. Have you been involved in a review for post primary school with the primary school staff?

Yes

No

7. Have you completed the Post Primary Transfer Profile or similar transition document with the primary school staff?

Yes

No

8. Have you started a Transition Programme with your child?

Yes

No

9. Do you have any questions about your child's transition to post primary school?

Question	To Whom? (e.g. primary school staff, post primary school staff, Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO), Autism Team, psychologist)

**Post Primary Transfer Review
Confidential**

Name:

Home Language:

Address:

Date of Birth:

Present School:

SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

• **Assessment**

Has student undergone assessment/s? Yes No

Date(s) of Assessment(s):

Nature of difficulties indicated?

Has the student been involved with any agency providing
Psychological/Psychiatric Services, Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy
etc ?

Yes

No

If yes, please give details:

Exemption from Irish? (Please circle) Yes No

Access to specialist IT supports? Yes No

If yes, please give details:

Specify what (if any) equipment will transfer with this student.

- **Results of recently administered tests**

AREA	NAME OF TEST	DATE OF TESTING	STANDARD SCORES/ QUOTIENT	PERCENTILE RANK
Ability				
Reading				
Spelling				
Numeracy				
Other				

- **Strengths/ needs and recommendations**

Strengths:

Identified Needs:

Recommendations:

SECTION TWO: PROVISION IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

Type of Support

Special Class/ Learning Support/ Resource/SNA

Frequency/ Grouping

Key Areas of Learning/ Behaviour Addressed:

Any special programmes/ methodologies/materials used? (e.g. Specific reading programme, Social Skills groups etc)?

Any special arrangements in place? (e.g. differentiated homework/ use of technology/ positioning in the classroom)

Please attach copy of recent IEPs/ ILPs/ Reviews.

SECTION THREE: PLANNING FOR TRANSFER

Curriculum Needs (able for a full subject choice/ reduced timetable/ subject strengths & difficulties)

What programmes have been used with him/her (e.g. TEACH, Toe by Toe, Social Stories, Social Skills groups etc)?

Are there any special arrangements in place for this student (e.g. use of technology, differentiated class work/homework, positioning in the classroom)?

Learning Skills (following instructions/ reading/ writing/ contributing to oral work)

Does he/she experience any difficulties in relation to his PE sessions?

Organisational Skills (ability to find way around the school/ manage locker/ keep equipment)

Social Skills (particular friendships/ ability to get on with others)

How does he/she cope with large numbers of people moving on corridors?

What does he/she do at break times in his current school?

Has he/she any friends/acquaintances, relatives in 6th class who will also be coming to this school?

Are any of his/her friends and/or acquaintances and/ or family members in the school at present?

Other (any particular issues/challenges)

How does he/she respond to the noise of a bell (end of class periods)?

Does he/she have any particular habits, obsessions and or preoccupations?

Does he/she have any particular sensitivities (e.g. sound, colours, foods etc.)?

What does he/she find calming/comforting?

Are there any particular issues/challenges re: classroom that we need to know about?

Names of persons involved in review:

Do parents give consent for this information to be passed to post-primary school? Please name school _____

Date:

Principal's signature: _____

**Parents/
Guardians' signature/s:** _____
