

Advice for schools to support parents/carers with the return of their child to school

The return to school is likely to be a time of significant change for many parents/carers. For most, they have been at home with their child for an extended period of time, and the parents/carers themselves may have worries about the return to school.

They may have concerns about:

- Their child settling into a new class or new school.
- Any enduring emotional impact of recent events, including experiences of loss and bereavement.
- Any lasting impact of the disruption to their child's learning and progress
- Their child being able to re-establish friendships and relationships in school
- Their child's safety, particularly if they have any existing health concerns

It is important that schools and professionals really listen to and appreciate the thoughts and worries of parents/carers and pro-actively seek to reduce anxieties which may transfer to the individual child. It is important to reassure parents/carers that feelings of worry are understandable and to be expected in the current circumstances.

Some parents/carers may struggle to have confidence in the arrangements they are hearing in the media and from the Government. Clear, strong leadership is even more important than ever at this time.

Schools are at the heart of communities and as such, they provide a community of care for children and young people, and through their relationships with families are able to help them to begin to recover from events and adjust to the new normality.

Research in the area of resilience frequently cites school staff as trusted significant adults and positive role models for children and young people. School staff have the skills needed to support children, young people and their parents/carers through difficult times, to help inspire their resiliency and hope and to help them to recover and find comfort in their community.

By school staff modelling optimism, and encouraging parents/carers to see the strengths and coping skills they have, and also encouraging them to notice acts of courage and kindness will help develop a sense of personal efficacy and hope for the future.

It is not uncommon for children and young people to have a less optimistic view of the future after events such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. Parents/carers who remind themselves and their children of their strengths, and provide opportunities for setting goals and achieving them will help them to take a positive view of their lives. Remember that optimism can be taught and that it is contagious.

We hear extraordinary stories of how different individuals, families and communities have come together and have acted with kindness, courage and initiative. By encouraging

parents/carers to share their stories about ways in which their community has helped each other can really help to re-establish connections.

Advice for supporting ALL parents/carers.

- Ensure there is effective and enhanced communication in place in the lead up to any return to school. This should include contact from the pupil's new class teacher (if this has changed) and key workers (if relevant). This will enable the sharing of information on both sides, and offer parents/carers an opportunity to share information that may impact on their child's return to school (for example, have they experienced bereavement and loss as a result of Covid 19, have there been any changes within the family, are parents/carers key workers etc.).
- Ensure parents/carers are aware of all plans that are being implemented for transitions and the enhanced arrangements on offer. Explain what is different about the process of transition this year.
- If social distancing and safety measures remain in place at the point of the return to school, make sure that parents/carers know how these are being implemented in school.
- Parents/carers may appreciate information being shared with them about changes that they can prepare their child for: new staff, classroom, routines, and any changes that have occurred in school.
- Offer a key point of contact for questions and concerns. Parents/carers may have more queries than would typically be expected at a transition point.
- Once children return to school, parents/carers may continue to need an enhanced level of contact, and the space and opportunity to talk to staff about the settling in process more frequently than might typically be planned.
- Share information with parents/carers about the emotional support and provisions that will be in place for all children in the weeks (and months if necessary).
- Ensure parents/carers are aware of how any impact on learning will be addressed over the coming months.

Additional advice for supporting parents/carers of children entering Reception / Year 1

For parents/carers of children formally entering school for the first time, the current situation may result in increased worries and the possibility of separation anxiety occurring.

- Schools may consider replacing the typical 'home visits' that support transition, with virtual meetings and video calls where this is possible.
- Parents/carers are likely to find the use of virtual video tours of the setting, including points of entrance, cloakrooms etc useful.
- Consider how you can enhance home-school communication in the initial weeks.
- Parents/carers may need greater sensitivity and flexibility in how they separate from their child at the start of the day. Work with parents/carers to make this an emotionally supportive process for them, as well as for their child.
- Staff should ensure they are available to talk to parents/carers at the start and end of day. Parents/carers may need more contact, and over a longer period of time than is typically expected. This may mean that an extra member of staff is required to support classroom routines at that time in order to make key staff available.
- Resources such as 'The Invisible String' can also help parents/carers to feel connected to their son or daughter when they are separated.

Additional advice for supporting parents/carers of children leaving the school (Year 6, or moving to a different school)

- Consider how staff can say 'goodbye' to parents/carers, as well as the pupils, even if this is done retrospectively.
- Let parents/carers know what information has been shared with the new school, so that they feel assured that information has been effectively shared.

Additional advice for supporting parents/carers of children moving from primary to secondary school

- Ensure that parents/carers are given adequate and enhanced opportunity to share their views and information about their child in advance of transition.
- Personal contact (by telephone call or email) from the form tutor / head of year will likely be appreciated by most parents/carers
- Make sure parents/carers are aware of the contact that there has been with the primary school (or previous school) so that they feel assured that information has been effectively shared.
- Share information about routines and what the first few weeks will look like.
- Make sure that parents/carers know who the key points of contact are and assure them of their readiness and availability to answer questions and talk to them.
- All of the above points may need to offer at a further enhanced level of those pupils with identified needs and known vulnerabilities. Make sure parents/carers understand and know about the support and provisions that are being put in place (as appropriate).

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