



Transition Guidance



WORCESTERSHIRE
VIRTUAL SCHOOL

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Foreword

Worcestershire Virtual School works with partners and stakeholders to ensure that the Local Authority's statutory duty is fulfilled to promote the education of children and young people in care, previously in care and those with a social worker in order that they have the highest aspirations and the best possible educational experience and outcomes.

Of all of the hurdles in a child/young person's educational journey, significant transitions (such as, to new carers or schools/settings) are amongst the greatest. Transitioning to a new school/setting presents a significant challenge for all children and young people. For those who have experienced trauma, transition can pose far greater and more numerous challenges.

Through this guidance, we aim to enhance practitioners' knowledge and skills in understanding these specific considerations and in providing the best support to ensure that children and young people belong and thrive.



Matt Stiles
Virtual School Headteacher

Transition

Introduction

A young person's educational journey has a number of key transitions – moving from Nursery to Reception, Primary to Middle or Secondary school, and ultimately stepping into further education, training or the working world. There may also be unplanned transitions such as an in-year school/setting move. Whatever the situation, each transition marks a new chapter, bringing excitement and opportunity, but also uncertainty and change.

Change, by its very nature, can be unsettling. It asks us to let go of familiar faces and places, to step beyond the comfort of what we know and embrace the unknown. While this shift can be challenging for anyone, it can be particularly overwhelming and stressful for our young people who are supported through the care system, or who have previously been in care, as these moments of transition may trigger deep-rooted feelings of instability, insecurity, and loss.

A transition to any new school/setting can disrupt that sense of safety, triggering stress responses that may not have been visible before. This overwhelming emotional strain can push the body's stress regulation system into overdrive, leading to behaviors rooted in survival instincts rather than intentional actions.

A person's anxiety is often visible through their behaviours and the feelings that they are displaying – this is part of our survival instinct and triggers our fight/flight systems. These systems allow us to act quickly, without thinking to fight the threat, avoid it or hide and freeze.



A young person who has experienced trauma will have built up connections in their brain in response to a world that feels unsafe and unpredictable. These brain adaptations mean many young people are primed for danger and feelings of stress and hypervigilance may remain, even when the young person is in what we would perceive to be a safe and nurturing environment. Therefore, anxiety around moving from one school/setting to another may prompt unexpected responses. As part of a trusted team, we should be able to mitigate some of the anxieties by providing a well-structured transition plan that is individual to each young person's needs and situation.

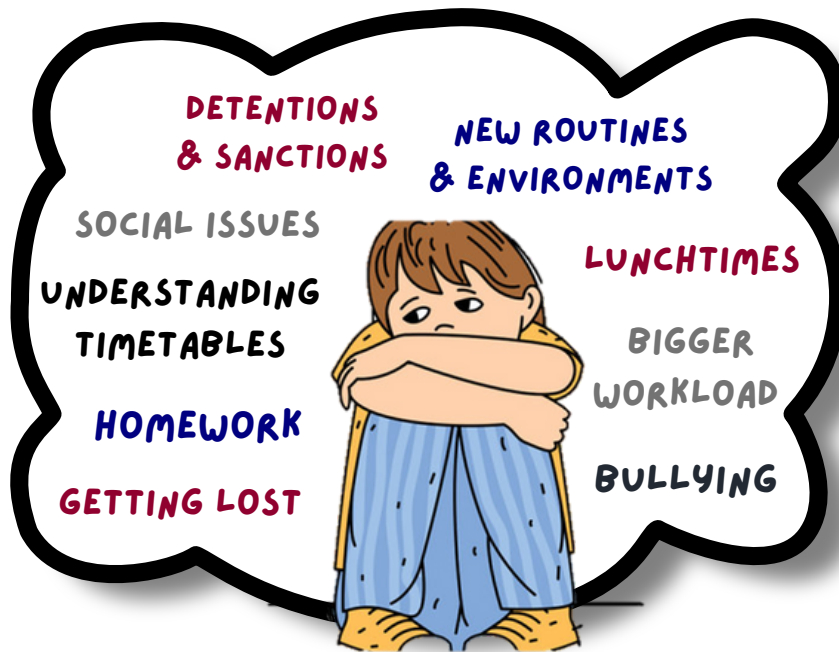
Introduction (continued)

Understanding a young person's behaviour and responses through a trauma-informed lens is essential in providing the right support, ensuring that transitions are not just managed, but navigated with care, empathy, and an awareness of past experiences. For this reason, transition planning for Children Looked After (CLA), Previously Looked After (PLAC) or those with a social worker (CWSW) must prioritize emotional safety, even for young people who appear to be coping well on the surface. Creating a structured, predictable, and compassionate transition process can help mitigate stress and provide a foundation for success in the next stage of their education.

The Virtual School plays a vital role in ensuring that these vulnerable young people are given the support and opportunities they need to achieve their full educational potential. This handbook is designed to highlight key areas of support that may be especially relevant for young people transitioning between schools/settings. It focuses on assessing each individual's readiness for change and offers a structured approach to planning ahead. The guidance aims to help prepare for potential challenges and to recognize and celebrate the achievements of our young people as they navigate this important stage in their educational journey.



What our young people worry about;



What the research tells us about;

The need for social and emotional adjustments: Evangelou et al. (2008) highlight the need for support during school transitions, particularly for Children in Care, to develop social and personal skills.

The impact of anxiety and trauma: It can be argued that anxiety is not only an inevitable part of the experience but that it is essential to the development of longer-term coping strategies (Lucey & Reay, 2000), but Children in Care may lack the resilience to manage anxiety due to past trauma, potentially leading to dysregulation (Evans et al., 2018).

The impact on learning: Heightened anxiety can hinder cognitive focus, impairing academic performance and classroom engagement.

The likelihood of bullying: Children in Care are twice as likely to face bullying (Brewin & Statham, 2011), and interventions like 'Friendly Schools' can reduce bullying and improve emotional well-being (Cross et al., 2018).

The impact of the language we use: Language used by teachers around transitions can heighten anxiety for children in care (Jindal-Snape & Cantali, 2019) Bagnall et al. (2020). Throughout the period of transition, all professionals should be realistic, yet positive about future experiences for example the use of language around increased expectations at Secondary School may be used by primary staff but the impact of this could be to increase anxiety and should be done sensitively.

The importance of friendships and peer support: Research by Ng-Knight et al. (2018) states that friendships have a direct impact on school attainment and positive behaviours Transition disrupts social networks, impacting academic focus and well-being. Strong peer relationships buffer anxiety (Evans et al., 2018), while peer acceptance predicts academic success (Keay et al., 2015).



Transition Planning

Transition planning for our Children Looked After (CLA), Previously Looked After Children (PLAC) and those with a social worker (CWSW) must be personalised to meet each young person's individual needs. While they will encounter many of the same challenges as their peers during school/setting transitions – and benefit from the same general support – it is essential to recognise the unique difficulties arising from their personal experiences, which may heighten their vulnerability.

This guide supports young people through the transition process by emphasising the importance of relationships—acknowledging farewells and fostering new connections with both peers and adults. It also focuses on building self-efficacy and resilience, helping young people develop confidence in their ability to succeed and manage change. Additionally, it considers the role of executive functioning, particularly the ability to regulate impulses during times of stress and anxiety. The guide outlines practical steps to ensure that the young person, their home environment, and the receiving school/setting are all well-prepared and equipped for the upcoming transition.

Assessing readiness

This readiness scale is based on materials devised by Rebecca Doyle (2001) and Jane McSherry (1999) for reintegration of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties into mainstream classrooms. (Rebecca Doyle, Norfolk CC - BJSE vol 28, No3 (September 2001). The scale has been adapted for use with Children Looked After (CLA) and Previously Looked After Children (PLAC) by Irene Tymkiw Senior Educational Psychologist, Ealing Virtual School.

This assessment is a screening for readiness for secondary transition and gives a diagnostic developmental profile. Used over time it gives a clear measurement of a pupil's skill development in each area. It is a specific, quantitative assessment tool to help analyse behaviour; measure readiness to transition; and highlight specific areas that need further development.

The profile considers five main areas:

- Self-control and management of behaviour
- Social skills
- Self-awareness and confidence
- Skills for learning
- Approach to learning

The profile obtained will indicate areas of relative strength as well as areas for further development. The profile can therefore be used to inform targets, track progress and inform planning for transition.



1. Self-control and management of behaviour				
Can accept discipline without argument or sulking	1	2	3	4
Can arrive in classroom and settle down quietly and appropriately	1	2	3	4
Does not leave the room without permission	1	2	3	4
Can accept changes to plans or disappointments with an even temper	1	2	3	4
Shows some self-discipline when others try to encourage deviation	1	2	3	4
Is aware of normal sound levels and can be reminded of them and respond appropriately	1	2	3	4
Does not seek confrontation during unrestricted times e.g. break	1	2	3	4
Behaves in socially acceptable manner in public e.g. outings	1	2	3	4
Can maintain appropriate levels of behaviour when the classroom routine is disrupted	1	2	3	4
Will abide by accepted rules of an organised game	1	2	3	4
Goes to and stays in designated areas when requested e.g. playground, hall etc	1	2	3	4
Controls emotions appropriately when faced with difficulties e.g. does not fight, strike out immediately, run away and hide or become excessively withdrawn	1	2	3	4
Behaves appropriately in all areas of the school building	1	2	3	4
Score				100

(APPENDIX 1)

Transition Timeline

On the following pages is a suggested timeline of activities, which may be useful to carry out when planning transition for our vulnerable young people who have experienced trauma. The timeline starts in the final term of Year 5 and ends in Spring of Year 7 and reflects a transfer between primary and secondary school. However, it can be adapted to any transition between schools/settings at any time. Some young people may require support beyond this timescale or above and beyond the resources and ideas it references. Where the timeline references certain resources that might be used to support the work of education staff, additional information and hyperlinks are given on the appendices page at the end of this document.

Key people to involve:

- The young person
- Young person's carer
- Young person's social worker
- Designated Teachers (DT) for CLA and PLAC (from primary and secondary school). *The primary school DT has responsibility for liaison with all concerned and coordination of activities and support; this responsibility will be handed over to the secondary school DT*
- Year group lead in secondary school
- Pastoral lead in secondary school
- Young person's key transition person from primary school
- Young person's Virtual School Learning Advocate

Year 5:

If the young person has an EHCP:

- Ensure the Annual Review takes place in good time to inform discussions around Year 6 and the secondary school transition. If possible, hold the Annual Review early in the year.
- Request updated Education Psychologist (EP) advice and advice from other relevant professionals as appropriate.

Summer Term:

- Encourage young person and carers to start researching local schools.
- Summer PEP- Carry out assessment of young person's transition readiness and create profile of need. ([APPENDIX 1](#)).
- Ensure Pupil Premium Plus funding reflects the young person's current and early transition needs.
- Gather pupil voice around transition and the support they feel they might need.

Transition Timeline (continued)

Year 6:

If the young person has an EHCP:

- Ensure the Annual Review takes place in first half of the Autumn Term and informs the phase transfer process.
- Request updated Education Psychologist (EP) advice and advice from other relevant professionals as appropriate- consider using the Virtual School's Educational Psychologist drop in service.

Autumn Term

- Young person and carer/s to visit local schools, attend open evenings, etc.
- Complete phase transfer application by specified deadline. (see [Local Authority school applications webpage](#))
- Autumn Term PEP to focus on identified areas of need from the readiness assessment.
- Where there are concerns- create a transition plan, led by key person and regularly reviewed and consider using the Virtual School's Educational Psychologist drop in service.
- Young person to work through the Virtual School Transition Workbook and other transition activities with their key person ([APPENDIX 2](#)). Consider intervention programs to support resilience, executive functioning and self-efficacy.
- Gather pupil voice around transition, the support in place so far and anything further they feel they might need.
- Ensure Pupil Premium Plus funding reflects the young person's current and early transition needs.

Spring Term

- Spring Term PEP- review the transition plan/progress towards targets consider using the Virtual School Educational Psychologist drop in service.
- Gather pupil voice around transition, the support in place so far and anything further they feel they might need.
- Ensure Pupil Premium Plus funding reflects the young person's current and early transition needs.

Summer Term

- Initial contact with secondary school to confirm young person will be attending and share key dates eg. Summer Term PEP, CLA review, Annual Review of EHCP.
- Secondary school Designated Teacher for CLA to be invited to attend the Summer Term PEP.
- Summer Term PEP to review and update readiness tool/assessment to share with secondary school.
- Gather pupil voice around transition, the support in place so far and anything further they feel they might need. Consider creation of a Pupil Profile to be shared with secondary school. ([APPENDIX 3](#)).
- Plan additional, personalised transition support eg. *extra visits to the secondary school, meeting existing Y7 pupils, transition-focused social stories, opportunities to develop familiarity with key pastoral team members etc.*
- Ensure Pupil Premium Plus funding reflects the young person's current and early transition needs.
- Share Transition Resources for Carers with young person's carers. ([APPENDIX 4](#)).

Transition Timeline (continued)

Year 7:

Autumn Term

- Transition PEP to be held within 20 school days of the start of term in order to allow early identification of emerging needs and ensure carers have been provided with a contact/s in secondary school, so they have a good understanding of how the school works and how to communicate any concerns.
- Ensure all relevant log in details and information for homework, behaviour, attendance and other school systems to be shared with carers.
- Continued transition support eg. regular check-ins from identified key person.
- PEP to focus on reviewing the transition plan/progress towards targets and consider using the Virtual School's Educational Psychologist drop in service.
- Gather pupil voice around the transition so far, the support in place and anything further they feel they might need.
- Where a Pupil Profile exists ensure this is shared with all key adults.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Worcestershire Virtual School Transition Readiness Questionnaire and Profile for CLA and PLAC

Appendix 2

Worcestershire Virtual School Transition Workbook

Appendix 3

Worcestershire Virtual School Pupil Passport Examples

Appendix 4

Worcestershire Virtual School Transition Resources for Carers

Additional Resources and Information

Worcestershire Virtual School: Transition Social Story Examples

Worcestershire County Council: Transition Information and Support

Worcestershire County Council: Transition Information and Support (SEND)

Beacon House: Top Tips for transition for parents, carers and teachers (pdf)

Image or information courtesy of Beacon House Therapeutic Services & Trauma Team | 2024 | www.beaconhouse.org.uk

Beacon House: What Survival Looks Like in Secondary School

Image or information courtesy of Beacon House Therapeutic Services & Trauma Team | 2024 | www.beaconhouse.org.uk

Anna Freud: Moving Up! The transition to secondary school (Toolkit)

Autism West Midlands: Anxiety and Stress Relief Exercises (Visual Guide)

PAC-UK: Saying Goodbye to Primary School

PAC-UK Education Service- Example Transition Plans and Strategies