

Working Together

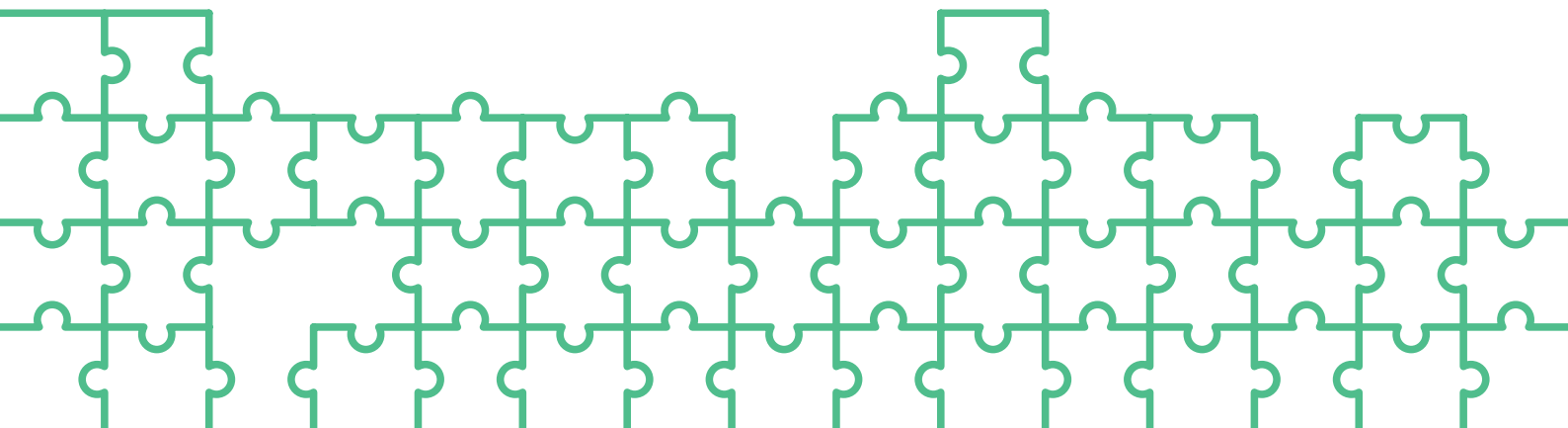
Supporting positive communication between education professionals and parents and carers of children with additional support needs



Module 9

Supporting positive communication with parents – additional factors to consider for secondary schools

This module will explore some of the challenges and opportunities presented when children with additional support needs transition to secondary school, and how families can be supported throughout a child's learning journey





Background

“My daughter suffers from anxiety and we’ve been worried about her moving from primary to secondary school. The school was very supportive and took time to help us understand the process and how we could make things easier for her”

Parent

“High school has been great for my son. He’s found new subjects he’s enjoyed, like computing, and we’ve had lots of support from staff”

Parent

Moving to secondary school

The progression from primary to secondary school can offer new opportunities and challenges for all children, however these can often be intensified for pupils who require additional support with their learning.

The changes involved in the transition from primary to secondary can sometimes be challenging for pupils with additional support needs. These changes include:

- Getting to and from a new school
- Becoming familiar with and navigating a new school building
- Busier, noisier school environments
- New teachers with different approaches
- Meeting new classmates and changes to existing friendships
- A new timetable, new routines and new subjects
- An increased number of school subjects.

This transition can have a significant impact on both parents and children. However, if managed well, education staff can reassure families, help to reduce anxiety, and start to build strong partnerships with parents.

As highlighted throughout these modules, relationships are of key importance to supporting children with additional support needs and their families. As pupils progress from primary to secondary school, they often move from regular contact with one or two key teachers who know the child well to a larger network of staff and multiple contacts. This can pose challenges for parents to build and maintain strong relationships with education staff and feel fully involved in their child’s learning.

Starting a new school can also present new opportunities for children with additional support needs. It can offer a fresh start, the chance to develop specialist interests in new subject areas and opportunities to develop new relationships and friendships. Parents may also find positives such as access to specialist resources or a new peer support network.

A pupil's secondary school journey

As a child with additional support needs progresses through secondary education, anxiety can sometimes build for both children and parents as they move closer to examinations in S4, S5 and S6 and start to make plans for leaving school. Building positive relationships with families from the start and maintaining good communication throughout secondary school will help to ensure parents and children feel well supported.

Exercises



Film: Listen to a parent explain the transition to secondary school and what helped to make this a positive experience.



Duration:
3 mins 24 secs

Consider the two **scenarios** below which focus on the transition from primary to secondary school for two young people.



Alycja has a neurodevelopmental condition called Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD), sometimes referred to as 'dyspraxia'. Alycja's DCD affects her movement and co-ordination which means activities such as running, jumping and walking up and down stairs can be difficult for her. It also impacts Alycja's concentration in class, and her ability to follow instructions and organise herself. She currently has a bespoke timetable to support her, and she takes regular breaks during lessons.



What issues might be of concern for Alycja's parents ahead of her move to her new school?

How can the school support Alycja and her family with the transition?

Alycja's parents may have a number of concerns about her starting a new school including how Alycja will navigate the building, how she will adjust to her new timetable and how the support Alycja currently receives will change as she enters secondary school. Talking to Alycja and her parents will identify positive aspects of the move and any areas where they have concerns or worries. Involving Alycja and her parents in the planning process will help to build on her existing strengths and help them feel informed and empowered.



Both **Ethan's** parents identify as members of the LGBT+ community. Ethan has experienced bullying from children in his neighbourhood because of his family situation. The discrimination that Ethan has faced has had a significant impact on his mental health and attendance at school. Staff at his primary school have been working with Ethan's family to support him to attend school on a reduced timetable, and this is having a positive impact.



What worries might Ethan and his parents have as he prepares to move to secondary school?

How can staff at the primary and secondary school work with Ethan and his parents to support his transition to secondary school?

The relationship between Ethan's parents and his current school is working well but Ethan's parents may be worried about how the support he receives will change as they get to know new teachers and navigate new ways of communicating with staff. Because Ethan has been on a reduced timetable, his parents may have concerns that he will be behind his peers, or they may be worried that bullying will restart when he moves to a new, larger school. Understanding their concerns and helping them to build relationships with staff at the new school will be crucial in providing consistent support for Ethan and his parents.

If they haven't already, education staff may want to refer Ethan's parents to local or national charities who may be able to provide advice and support for the family.



Evidence & information

Key concerns for parents as children move from primary to secondary school

Our work with parents has highlighted many of the key issues and concerns for parents as their child moves from primary to secondary school. Parents have spoken about this period being stressful and challenging.

Key concerns include:

- > Parents feel that their child's needs will be lost in a large, busy secondary school
- > Parents have new contacts to make, new relationships to build and new school systems to learn and navigate
- > Maintaining good and regular communication networks
- > Parents worry that not all of their child's teachers will understand the support needs of their child
- > Parents may have less frequent meetings with key staff who support their child
- > Parents have concerns about bullying. This is likely to be amplified if families have experienced discrimination in the past.

In addition to this, parents may find that in the transition to secondary school they lose an important part of their own support network. This could mean losing vital peer support and friendship groups that they have relied on for support. It could also mean losing contact with supportive and understanding education staff from the child's primary school.

What schools need to do

Getting support right for parents can prevent children and families from feeling overwhelmed by the transition to secondary school and as they progress throughout the school.

The Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Act places specific duties on local authorities in Scotland, with clear timescales for transition planning and practice for children identified as having additional support needs.

Local authorities are required to plan for transitions early if a child:

- > Has a co-ordinated support plan
- > Attends a specialist unit, a day or residential special school
- > Has additional support needs arising from a disability (as defined in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995)
- > Is at risk of not making a successful transition for any other reason.

Planning must begin no later than 12 months before a child is due to start secondary school. The local authority must consult with and consider advice from professionals as part of this process (this includes, health services, social work, voluntary organisations and the school). Parents' and children's views must also be included as part of this process.

No later than six months before a child is due to start at the school, the local authority must provide information to appropriate agencies or others.

Despite the legislative requirements in place, a recent [Growing Up in Scotland report](#) found that children with additional support needs were more likely to experience a negative transition into secondary school (32% compared with 19% of children with no additional support needs).

A key recommendation to support positive transitions from the report was to “foster and maintain good school-parent relationships through timely and relevant communication, to ensure parents are fully supported to help their child with the transition.”

Key stages for parents in the enhanced transition process

By end of P6	<p>The primary school identifies children requiring enhanced transition and starts to gather information.</p> <p>School staff should speak to families about the process at this stage.</p>
Start P7	<p>The primary school assesses the needs of children requiring enhanced transition and begin developing transition plans.</p> <p>This should include discussing needs with relevant professionals, the child and the child's parents.</p>
During P7	<p>The lead professional will draw up a transition plan identifying the pupil's strengths and providing details of what additional support will be required.</p>
6 months before starting new school	<p>The school must share information it has gathered with parents and, with their consent, any other agencies (like health or social work).</p> <p>The parents and the child should be given time to review the plan, comment and ask any questions.</p>
During P7	<p>School shares information with new school.</p>
During P7	<p>Enhanced transitions arrangements for children may be different in every case.</p> <p>The child and their parents may make extra visits to the secondary school, have separate meetings with staff members and parents may be involved in discussions about additional equipment that is required.</p>
Towards the end of P7	<p>Education staff support additional strategies at home to ensure children and parents are prepared for the transition.</p>

Maintaining positive relationships throughout secondary education

Developing positive relationships in the transition to S1 is hugely important. However we know that children with additional support needs and their parents can also find transitions throughout secondary school difficult. This could be the transition from S1 to S2 or later in the school when pupils are moving towards examinations in S4, S5 and S6. Supporting children and parents to be involved in planning and decision-making processes will help families to navigate these changes.



Remember, **My Rights, My Say** is a free service that supports children in Scotland aged 12-15 with additional support needs to exercise their rights to be involved in decisions about their support in school.

Despite the structural and procedural changes in secondary school, the key elements of support and communication identified in these modules remain the same whether a child is in early learning and childcare settings, primary or secondary education.

Throughout the course of secondary school, staff must continue to:

- > Create inclusive environments where all pupils and parents are valued and feel welcome
- > Create environments where all pupils' successes and achievements are celebrated
- > Take time to properly listen to pupils and their parents to understand their perspectives
- > Work together with children and parents as equal partners
- > Make sure they are effective communicators
- > Personalise communication with parents
- > Help parents to access guidance and support
- > Respond to disagreements professionally and constructively.

As pupils progress through secondary school, there is often an increased focus on qualifications and exam results. However, it's important to remember that success is different for every pupil, and for some children, especially those with complex additional support needs, progress may be made in very small steps. All pupils' individual achievements, experiences and progress should be shared regularly with parents and celebrated across the school community throughout their time at secondary school. There are many positive examples of this happening in secondary schools across Scotland with staff using creative and innovative ways (including pupil-led films and displays) to share pupils' learning experiences and celebrate successes.





Film: Listen to a Deputy Head Teacher explain how their secondary school celebrates the success and achievements of all learners



Duration:
4 mins 12 secs



Practice reflection

Reflective questions

1. How does your school support parents of children with additional support needs to feel less anxious with the changes during transition to secondary school?
What has been successful? Is there anything more that could be done?
2. How does your school support staff to understand pupils' additional support needs?
3. How do parents know where to go to access help and discuss their child's support needs?

Next steps



Take time to reflect on the learning from these modules.

- What key elements stood out for you?
- What simple steps will you take to develop your practice?
- What will you share with staff at your school or setting?