Supporting Transition to Secondary for Young People with ASD

Changes of any kind are difficult for children and young people with ASD and Social Communication Difficulties. A transition to secondary is often particularly traumatic. It can be difficult to accurately gauge support needs for a young person in the new environment. This is often because by the time they have reached Primary 7 staff and peers support, understand, respond to and accommodate their needs almost unconsciously. Familiarity with the environment and the routines of class and school life has become second nature. This can make identifying potential problems and support needs for secondary very difficult.

There are already a number of processes and tools which support staff and parents to make transition successful. This information sheet sets out to compliment existing arrangements.

Questions to consider

Reflecting on Primary

In thinking about the difficulties the young person may have with transition it is sometimes helpful to remember what is was like when they first started school

- What level of difficulties did this young person have in settling into primary and what provisions were made when they first started primary?
- What levels of adaptation to the curriculum were required at that time?
- How important are relationships?
- What were their anxiety levels?
- How, where, what did they do to calm down?
- Did they benefit from regular breaks?

Planning for secondary

Because of the difficulties young people have with imagination and generalisation in order for young people to understand how every aspect of secondary will “feel”, they often actually need to be there and to experience it. They often need to go to the classes and meet the teachers.

The frequency and length of induction needs to be planned to address individual needs. They may benefit and need the opportunity to attend all the classes and experience break and lunch times, registration and assembly.
You may want to use the Transition Booklet to further inform the transition plan.
It may be helpful to also consider:

- Is it important for them to have a recognised “safe place” and “trusted person” in the first instance
- How important are relationships with teachers/support workers? How can we make these positive?
- Will the young person cope with all day, every day?
- What subjects/classes will the young person enjoy? Do you need to start with these first?
- Is it better for the young person to go to all classes or would it help substitute some subjects to incorporate opportunities for down time (What's In It For Me time (WIFM) or individualised/group learning)?
- Are staff clear about how anxiety/anger presents at an early stage and has this been communicated?
- What visual supports need to be in place?
- How concrete do rules and boundaries need to be, should they be written?
- What level of support will be available for the young person in class?
- Can the young person ask for help in class when they do not understand or will they disengage/disrupt?
- Will the young person respond to verbal instruction from the class teacher/support worker or will they disengage/disrupt?
- How does the young person feel about having obvious support in class is this likely to make things better or worse?
- How good is the young person's organisational skill, are they likely to leave things behind or not have the things they need for classes?
- Do they need prompting to write in homework?
- Will homework be too much?
- How well can the young person communicate about the school day?
- Do they have an identified person to go to with issues?
- Does this need to be a regular process?
- What is essential information to communicate between home and school? When and how should this be communicated?
- Does the young person completely separate home from school? Does this make school letters and similar information difficult?