

# SENDiass



information advice  
& support service

## Returning to schools and colleges this September

As lockdown has eased, and plans have started to evolve for Children and Young People to return to their educational placements, parent/carers are finding more questions about transitions and how they can support their child to return to school in September.

SENDiass4BCP will be here over the summer to answer your questions, but we've put some information together for you to hopefully reassure you to begin with. If you have any questions, or need any support please just email us at [sendiass@bcpcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:sendiass@bcpcouncil.gov.uk)

There have been a variety of updates published by the government: you can see links to the main ones, and our summaries of the changes at <https://www.sendiass4bcp.org/COVID19.aspx> This includes Government guidance on schools re-opening, temporary changes to SEND law, and various helpful guides from multiple organisations.

### **What are the plans when children go back to school in September?**

As things stand, all children and young people are due to go back to school in September, in the new school year. That includes those in nursery and alternative provision, and will be on a full-time basis.

Educational establishments will be expected to have done their own risk assessments to ensure they are following health & safety guidance. There are some things that they must do to keep everyone safe, including things like:

- Regular hand washing
- Extra cleaning
- Informing people about testing + isolation guidelines should they become ill

An important thing they'll need to do is work out how to reduce the amount of contact between everyone in school-staff and children. That may include things like:

- Grouping children into 'bubbles,' and then keeping those bubbles separate, where possible.
- Social distancing for those children able to do so
- Social distancing for staff – student interactions; for e.g., teaching from the front of the class, and not walking around to individual desks.
- Rearranging classrooms to avoid face-to-face seating

- Provide info to parents on what to expect, and what would happen in the event of someone displaying symptoms or testing positive

Children who have complex needs or who require close contact for health or other support, should receive their care as normal. Staff should take extra safety precautions, such as wearing PPE (personal protective equipment).

Some children with SEND may need help with the changes to routine that this will involve, so their teachers and SENCOs should be planning to meet these needs.

There may also be other changes:

There won't be assemblies or collective worship in large groups.

Start and finish times, as well as break times, are likely to be staggered so that not everyone is attending at once.

Movement around the school will be limited. Children may stay in their form or class groups in the same room for most of the time, only moving for specialist lessons such as science.

Activities such as after-school sports clubs or choirs, where different year groups would usually mix, are unlikely to happen for now.

Support staff (such as specialists, therapists, clinicians) for pupils with SEND can give interventions as usual. These visits may happen outside of school hours.

Educational visits may proceed again if they're not overnight. This includes any trips for children with SEND that are connected with their preparation for adulthood such as, workplace visits, travel training, etc.

Breakfast clubs and after school support may start up again where possible.

If your child usually goes to more than one school, for e.g. if they spend time both in a mainstream school and a special school, those schools should work together to keep their risks as low as possible.

### **Does my child have to go back to school?**

In short, yes. During the early part of the pandemic, the legal requirement for a child to be in school was put aside, but from September it is being enforced again. Legally, your child will need to be in school. If not, you could eventually be fined or taken to court due to non-attendance.

However, the last six months have not been normal. Schools know that some children will find going back extremely difficult. They are expecting some challenging behaviour and should have support in place to manage this.

If you think that your child will be very anxious about going back, is likely to find it particularly difficult or if you are worried that they may refuse, now is the time to speak to the SENCO or head teacher about your concerns.

Schools will be expected to put support in place to help children who find the move back to school challenging. They should put plans in place to help children who are anxious, those who were not in school much before the pandemic and those who have had little contact with school during it. For some children with the most difficulties this might include considering “blended learning”, which is some online learning and some time in school as a temporary measure to help with the move back into school.

The Government also said that it expects schools to use the extra funds given to them to provide support, alongside existing pastoral and support services. Pupil premium funding can also be used to put measures in place for those families who will need extra support to make sure their child goes to school regularly.

Children (and adults) who have been shielding won't need to do so after August 1st. That means that children with health issues who are on the shielding list are expected to go back to school as well. If your child can't be in school because you're following their doctor's advice, the school should be able to give them access to education at home straightaway.

### **What can I do to help and support my child as they go back into school?**

The most important thing to do is to keep talking to staff at your child's school or college. Tell them how things are and have been at home, what's been positive and what has been a struggle. Stay in regular contact and tell them if your child's needs have changed or you need more support.

You can ask for your child's school plan to be reviewed and updated before they go back. If they have an EHC plan, ask for a meeting to talk about their support. Work with staff to plan your child's return to school, thinking about what they're likely to be able to manage. Some children and young people may need a gradual return to school to make sure they settle back in as well as possible.

Some of our local educational psychology services have been writing helpful information for schools and parents about how to support children whatever the transition. Here are some of their top tips for how you can help your child in the run up to going back to school:

Involve your child or young person as much as possible in planning for going back to school and in some cases for getting back into learning. There are some tools to help you do that on the SENDiass4BCP website.

Find ways to celebrate your child's achievements and successes, however small they are. Many children will have lost confidence in their abilities so you can help by boosting their self-esteem. They could make a book or scrapbook, keep a diary, or fill a box with the things they have made and memories of their achievements.

Revisit and go over some of the things they knew well or did regularly and practice some of their skills. So, depending on their age, they could practice sports skills, revisit tying laces and using scissors, practice times tables and spellings, get in some typing practice or get themselves ready for bed on their own.

Give them lots of structure and predictability. Try and follow a similar routine during the holidays to when they were going to school – get up at the same time, follow the same steps getting ready and having breakfast, have a similar bedtime routine and lights out.

Help your child to share how they feel about going back to school. You can ask them to keep a journal, write a letter, draw a picture, or record a video. Many children may have mixed feelings about going back to school – they may be looking forward to seeing friends but be worried about being away from you. Some may be scared to leave the house or may have enjoyed being at home and not want to go back to the formality and rules of school.

Find out as much as you can about what it will be like in school and share that with them. Or ask your young person to find out and then talk about it with them. Many schools are sending out letters to students, making videos and sharing information. School will be different and will feel different and the more prepared your child is, the easier it's likely to be. The school's website is the best place to go for information.

Help your child catch up with friends. If it works for your child, you could set up a video call or a socially distanced meet up so that they can talk to and see their friends before school starts. Chatting to other parents might help you to feel less anxious and more prepared too.

When it gets closer to the day of going back in, practice your morning routine as if you're going to school or college. Get their uniform out and ask them to try it on – lots of children will have grown upwards (and outwards) over the last few months so make sure it fits!

For younger children (and older one where it's helpful) you can arrange for your child to take a small transitional object with them from home. This can help them remember that you're thinking about them. They could take a special toy, a photograph, a keyring, or something of yours that smells like you, such as a squirt of perfume on a hankie.

Try your best not to pass on any anxiety you have about them returning to school. It's natural to have some concerns yourself and children and young people can pick up on these very easily. Talk to other adults about any worries you have when your child isn't listening and be as calm and relaxed as you can.

### **What is transition?**

Transition is when a child moves from one thing to another and during that move there is a change from one state to another. Some transitions are small such as the move from one lesson to another, from home to school or even from activity to activity. Other transitions are much bigger for children to manage, such as moving schools or moving from children's services to adult ones.

In the current situation, some transitions will be harder than others for children to manage:

Big transitions are those where your child is moving school, such as finishing primary school and moving to secondary school or going to a further education college.

Tricky transitions are those where your child may be in the same school but moving onto a new stage, such as moving from year 5 to year 6 or from year 9 to year 10 and the start of work for GCSEs.

### **Transitions for everyone.**

Whatever happens, all children will be moving into a new year in September and most children will be going back into school after time spent at home.

Change is difficult for many children and young people to manage and for those with SEN it can be even more challenging. And the last few months have seen some of the biggest changes any of us have been through.

You know yourself how unsettling, confusing and worrying life has become, so if you multiply that by 10 or 100, you'll probably have an idea how your child is feeling.

That said, at some point all children will make the move back into school or education and working with school or college staff, you will need to help them manage it as best they can.

### **My child is due to go to secondary school in September and I'm worried about the plans for their move. What can I do?**

The first thing to say is that you're not alone. Many parents and children are worried about the move to a new school and a new stage in their lives especially during such difficult times. This move is a big one and this year it's going to look and feel different for both schools and students.

It might help to think about transition as a journey that's going to take time. There are many things you can do to prepare your child before they start at the new school. Then you will be supporting them in the first few days and weeks and after that, helping them to feel settled and safe throughout the whole of year seven. A successful transition that works well will set the tone for the rest of their time at secondary school.

Talk to school staff about transition for your child now

If you haven't had direct contact with the SENCO or staff at the new school about the support that will be in place for your child, ask for a meeting as soon as the new term begins. Ask staff at your child's current school to be involved too, such as their class teacher, TA, and SENCO.

It's unlikely you'll be able to meet face to face, but you can ask for a video or telephone call or talk by email if that is better for you. Ask to discuss your child's transition, what their needs

are and what kind of support they're likely to find helpful. If you need help to do that you can talk to the staff at your child's current school or contact us for advice.

Before the meeting, be as prepared as you can. If your child has an EHC plan, go through it and make notes of the main things they will need help with. So, for example, if your child finds relationships with others difficult, they're likely to need to support to meet key staff and make new friends. If organisation and planning are challenging, they may need extra support finding their way around or need to make use of breakfast club to get organised before school starts.

If your child doesn't have an EHC plan, ask for a copy of their school plan or make your own list of the areas where they will need support. All secondary schools do enhanced transitions for children with special educational needs where extra support is planned for each child.

Transitions are in two parts and it's important to prepare for both

Your child is leaving one school and going to another and the ending of one school life is as important as the beginning of the next one. That means remembering and celebrating the things that happened in primary school and what life was like there, as well as preparing for a new start.

For many children with SEND, the staff at primary school and the relationships that have with them are hugely important too. Saying goodbye to teaching assistants, teaching and support staff is likely to be very hard for some children, especially where those relationships are long standing or close. Some schools ask teaching assistants to write cards, postcards and memory books with their students as well as going on school visits where possible, before and after they move to their new school.

### **What kind of things are schools and colleges doing to help with transitions?**

These are strange times and the staff at schools and colleges are having to think differently about how they prepare children and young people for transitions.

These are some of the things we have heard about:

Staff from primary schools are sharing information with secondary schools about all students and their needs. Many will need extra or different support from what may have been planned before.

Year six students are writing pupil passports or profiles which tell new staff more about themselves and what they're looking forward to, what helps them learn or what they're are worried about.

Many schools are offering virtual tours and creating films address concerns and to allow staff introduce themselves and their subject areas. Have a look at the school website for information.

Some schools will be bringing students in gradually when term starts in September to help them settle in more easily.

Pastoral support staff and support services like counsellors will be on hand to support students as needed too.

Some schools are creating and using social stories to help children and young people understand what is happening, what the new school arrangements are and how things might be different.

### **I'm worried that my child will have fallen behind and won't be able to manage when they get back to school.**

Every child will have had different experiences of being at home instead of school. Some will have thrived having one to one time with parents and none of the stresses of school, whereas other will have found it much more challenging. Every child stopped being in school at the same point and not every child will have been able to do all or even any of the learning provided. Teachers and support staff know this and won't be expecting children and young people to just step back into school as it was.

Lockdown has been stressful for everyone and every child will have been affected in some way. The focus for school staff will be on emotional and mental health and well-being and helping children and young people manage all the change. It's going to take time to adjust. Teachers are likely to go over old ground first to make sure children feel confident and are back into a learning and school mindset before starting on anything new.

If you're worried about any part of your child's development or learning, talk to staff before your child returns to school, or contact us for advice.

### **What about support for children with EHC plans and those in special schools?**

If your child has an EHC plan, the support that is in the plan must be given. The law around this was recently relaxed but that legal change comes to an end on 1st August. From this date schools must make sure they are able to deliver the support that is specified in the EHCP.

Schools and colleges should be contacting parents and involving them in planning for their child's return to school. They should also have contacted young people over 16 who have EHC plans. If that hasn't happened, get in touch with the SENCO as soon as you can and ask how your child will be supported in September.

Extra support might include things like visits to school, a gradual return to school and social stories. They may also try approaches that are normally used to enable a child with SEND, who has spent some time out of education, to get back into school.

### **What about school transport from September?**

Children and young people travelling on dedicated school buses don't usually mix with the general public and the journeys tend to have the same people on them. So, the Government

has said that social distancing on these types of buses won't apply from the autumn term and many children won't need to wear a mask.

Bus companies should do as much as they can to reduce the risks from coronavirus. That might mean grouping children together in year groups, doing extra cleaning, providing hand sanitisers, or asking older children (over 11) to wear a face covering.

Schools and colleges will also be encouraging children and young people to use other ways of getting school wherever possible. That will include walking, using a walking bus, going by bike, and being driven to school.

### **How can SENDiass4BCP support me during this time?**

Currently, SENDiass staff are working remotely. We have changed our answerphone message to advise parent/carers to email their enquiry to [sendiass@bcpCouncil.gov.uk](mailto:sendiass@bcpCouncil.gov.uk) rather than telephone, as our offices aren't being staffed as per normal.

SENDiass staff will continue to offer telephone and/or email support rather than face to face, with the need to maintain safe distance between individuals.

So, we are changing our methods of contact based on wider advice – but at the current time it's business as usual in terms of offering information and advice.

Please check our website, [www.sendiass4bcp.org](http://www.sendiass4bcp.org) - it will contain updates, as the situation changes. Our website also contains links to information that you may find helpful at this time, and a wide range of other information resources.