

Inclusion works

Moving from primary to secondary school for children with special educational needs.

Moving from primary to secondary school is an important time for every child. Many children, and their parents, find it worrying. Careful planning and preparation can help children cope with it. This may need to start earlier for children with special educational needs.

What changes will there be?

- Everything will be bigger and more complicated, more classrooms, more staff, more rules and more children.
- There will be different sorts of classroom and some new subjects.
- The building will smell, sound and look different.
- Children will make new friends, they may lose some old friends too.
- In primary school children may have worked with a teaching assistant they have known for some years. In the secondary school there will be a range of support staff working in different subject areas.
- Children may have to get the bus to school.
- Children have to move around school and get to the right place at the right time.
- Routines change e.g. what happens when you are ill.
- Some of the language changes, playtime becomes break, lessons may be called periods.
- There is more homework.
- Children need to use a diary or planner.

How can I help my child?

Adults can help to break the change down into bits and deal with them one at a time. It is helpful if children do not have to cope with other big changes at the same time.

Get your child to talk about any worries they have. They may be bothered about what happens if they miss the bus, get lost or can't do their homework. You can help them to think about what they could do or where they could get help. This can be done before they change school.

Your child will have a form tutor or a Key Worker to support them in the secondary school. It is useful for you and your child to meet them before the summer holiday.

Out of school clubs can be a good way of making friends with children from other primary schools who may be moving to the same secondary school.

Find out what clubs are going on in your area, the Children's Information Service (01709) 0800 073 0230 may be able to help.

Which school is best for my child?

Get in touch with the secondary schools you are thinking about. You can make an appointment and go to the secondary school to talk to someone personally. Parents of children with special educational needs often do this in Year 5.

Questions to ask schools

- How do they help children in school already with the sort of difficulties my child has?
- What will my child do at lunchtimes and break-times?
- How does the school tackle bullying?
- How will I find out how my child is doing?
- How does the school match work to pupils' abilities?
- What will happen if my child cannot do the homework?

It is important to think about how your child will travel to school, if their friends will be moving to the same school etc.

Your child's views are important too. Please let them help in making this decision. Find out what things are going to be important for them.

How does it work in Rotherham?

Most children go to ordinary secondary schools. There are lots of children with special educational needs in our secondary schools. These include children with learning difficulties, children who are blind, children who use wheelchairs or who have an autistic spectrum disorder.

There are a number of special schools in the borough for children with severe or complicated difficulties. If you believe your child should move on to a special rather than an ordinary secondary school please talk to the Special Educational Needs Coordinator while your child is in year 4. Extra time may be needed if your child moves to a special school. It is best if this is all sorted by the end of year 5. That way the child knows what is going to happen for them before the whole class start to prepare for the move to secondary school.

Many schools have Learning Mentors who can help pupils get ready for these changes. Services such as the Learning Support Service, Autism Outreach Team and Behaviour Support Service have programmes to support children in moving from primary to secondary school.

When do things start happening?

Some secondary schools in Rotherham start getting to know the children in the primary schools when they are still in Year 5 but most wait till Year 6. Most Year 6 pupils visit the secondary school before the summer holidays, often teachers from the secondary school also visit the primary school to meet the children and take a few lessons.

When your child is in Y6 you will be asked to fill in a form to say what secondary school you want your child to go to. You will be asked to do this some time between September and December. You need to do this even if you want a place in a special school.

Every secondary school in Rotherham has an open evening for parents around this time. The school nearest your child's primary school will invite you to their open evening. You can ask to meet the special educational needs co-ordinator at another time for a more private chat.

If you are interested in other secondary schools get in touch with them to arrange a visit or ask for information (telephone numbers are in the phone book).

What can I do once my child has gone to secondary school?

Some children need extra help during their first term at school. Every secondary school has arrangements for this, although these may be different for each school. If your child is having difficulties please let school know so they can quickly put help in place.

- Make sure you listen carefully to your child, check out what you are told to make sure your child has got the facts right before deciding what to do if there is a problem. It may be hard for your child to be accurate when there is such a lot going on.
- Encourage your child to join any clubs in the secondary school. Some are at lunch time and some are after school. These could be about sport or drama or simply be a chance to do their homework. This helps them make new friends.
- Bullying happens most when children are on their own. You could encourage them to go where there are lots of other children or staff around. Most schools let children use the library at lunchtimes and there is usually an adult in charge.
- Check their homework diary. Can they tell you what they have to do? If not get in touch with school to ask for advice.

Albert's Story

The story of Albert shows what has been done to help one Rotherham child manage the move to secondary school.

Albert had special educational needs. Everyone was worried about how he would manage. He had been diagnosed as having autistic spectrum disorder. He had some problems with learning as well and sometimes got into bother. Albert was not the only one in his year group at primary school who had special educational needs.

Staff from both primary and secondary schools worked with his parents, the Educational Psychologist and Autism Communication Team to put a transition package into place for Albert. This included:

- ✓ Making sure the secondary school staff knew about him and the sort of difficulties he had, well before he went there
- ✓ Working with a small group during the summer term so he got to know some lads who were going up to the same school
- ✓ Making sure he had someone in charge of helping him in the secondary school and that his teachers and his parents could talk to first if anything good or bad happened
- ✓ Extra visits to the secondary school in the summer term of Year 6 so he could get to know some of the staff there
- ✓ Looking at 'What if I lose my bag?' type questions with both his primary teaching assistant and his new key worker. His parents were able to go over these with Albert during the holidays.
- ✓ Giving him a planner to practise with while he was still in Year 6
- ✓ Arranging set times for secondary school staff to get in touch with Albert's parents in the first term
- ✓ Training for teaching and support staff in the secondary school so they knew about autism
- ✓ Arranging for Albert to have a place in the secondary school where he could go if he was feeling very anxious and needed to calm down.
- ✓ Thinking about what to do if things went wrong

As a result of this work Albert, his family and school staff were prepared for the move and were less anxious. Albert made a great start at his new school.

Where can I get more information?

Ask people in your child's primary school about exactly what will happen for all children and any arrangements for special educational needs children in particular. The special educational needs co-ordinator is a good person to start with.

The Parent Partnership Service has a wide range of information for parents including an information sheet on moving from primary to secondary school.

For a copy contact the service on Tel: 01709 823627 or download a copy from www.rotherhamparentpartnership.com. The Service can also provide copies of information from the SEN Regional Partnerships on Autistic Spectrum Disorders which has a section on Transitions.

National Autistic Society has a range of resources including a very practical guide 'Moving from primary to secondary school'. It is available from NAS Publications, 020 7903 3595 or www.nas.org.uk