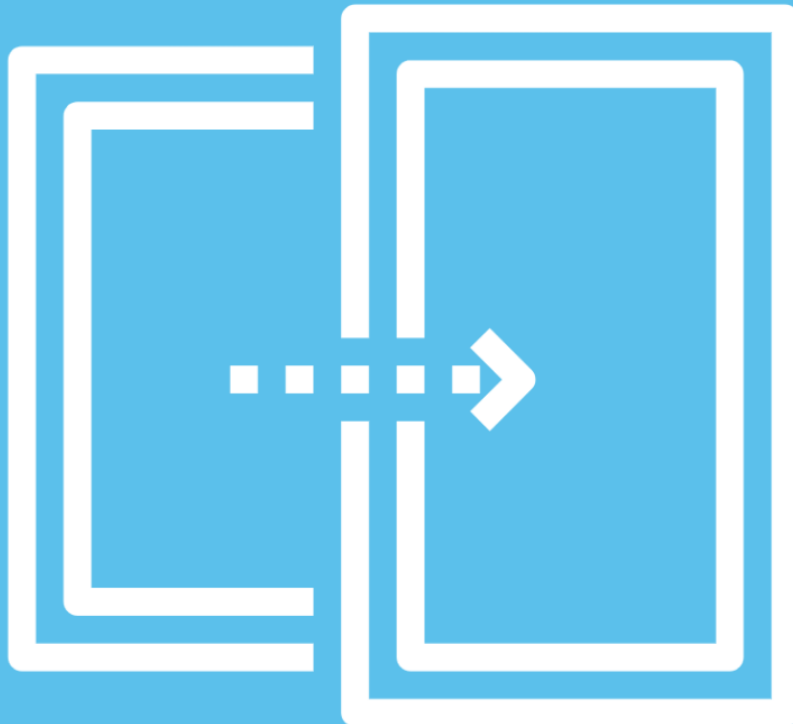


**A ROUNDTABLE CONVERSATION**



# TRANSITION

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## Forward

The following material is a summary of two roundtable conversations discussing some of the issues around transition in schools. It is not intended to be a final solution but to provide suggestions for possible actions and encourage wider debate.

Huge thanks go to those who participated in the discussion. If you wish to participate in similar conversations then make sure to follow @edroundtables on Twitter.

The conversations took place on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2020 and 28<sup>th</sup> April with contributions from so many great school leaders.

Angela, Aly, Lesley, Ricky, Janey, Jennifer, Fraser, Steve, Coral, Lee, Jonathan, Jenny, David, Kate, Ian, Nicky and Sarah

## Context

In this case, the focus was on the issues experienced by schools in supporting learning at home.

The discussion was broad and covered several areas, most of which are covered in this document.

I have tried to organise the ideas and comments into a more coherent piece than the original transcript and hope that you enjoy reading it.

I apologise to any of those involved if I have misunderstood any of the conversations, these mistakes are mine – don't hesitate to offer clarification.



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## **Introduction**

Transition is an important part of moving through school, growing up and at the end of Y6 a rite of passage, a marker that shows you are closer to adulthood.

The conversations that form the basis for this write-up were based on the premise of a September restart for schools.

If schools open sooner, then existing plans may be adapted to allow for some form of transition for key groups.

This document should still prove useful, as some of the ideas may reduce demands

on pupils and staff if action is taken now.

Transition should be “oven-ready”, to quote something someone said recently. It is too important to wing it, getting it wrong can have damaging consequences, particularly for vulnerable children.

Throughout schools, some common elements are true regardless of the transition, whether it is EYFS/Reception/Year 1 or Year 6/7 transitions.

These common elements with suggested actions will be covered first.

## **Common Themes**

Transitions affect a large number of people – children, parents & teachers – as a result, there is a lot of information to process and different aspects to consider. They are a big deal. Most of us can remember our first day at “Big School” and as parents, we also remember our children starting nursery or reception. The element discussed in this section should support the common human element of all the people involved.



## Communication of Information

Huge amounts of information have to be transferred during the transition from school to school, from school to parent, from school to child, from teacher to child and from child to child. This is even more challenging if schools are not fully open.



### School to School

More accurately this should read provision to provision, but this will be even more essential to get started now than normal. School's need to know the children that are coming to them, really know them.

There are no exam results, and teacher assessment, while good, may not be as accurate given the amount of time children have been home learning. Don't rely on the traditional data dump, start having conversations.

The receiving school needs to start the ball rolling on this, you know how your

school works, you know what you need, give the previous provision time to get that information to you. Ask for it now.

The power of Zoom meetings for teachers and SENCOs to speak to each other should have been realised by now. The sooner these are scheduled, the easier transition will be.

This type of communication could, in future, replace face to face meetings at one school or the other, saving time and increasing efficiency, making transitions easier to manage.



## **School to Parent**

Parents worry a great deal about their children, particularly when they are all facing the unknown. It is not knowing anything that is the worst aspect of transition.

A simple letter from the new school explaining that they are doing something and that they will be in touch is very reassuring for many.

If this is then followed up by a more detailed information pack, the school buys itself time to implement the strategies that it has decided for managing transition.

There may also be actions that the parent can take, making them feel less useless in the process, and helping schools understand the new child better.

Parents can also help manage a child's worries about transition. If they know some of the

information, they can relay it to the child.

Useful information could include:

The standard timetable for the week, including when breaks and lunchtimes are, perhaps a typical menu or what the eating options are.

Parents and children worry about routines a great deal, and that is an easy worry to remove.

Primary schools, you can find out what worries parents by asking them.

One suggestion was to hold a parent forum on Zoom. Be upfront and let them know you don't have all the answers, but if they can give you the questions, you'll try and find out.

The experience of including some of the more vocal voices was reported as challenging initially, but ultimately very successful.



## **School to Child**

Children worry about belonging, they want to fit in. The school can help children fit in by communicating directly with them.

Their main concern is often that they don't know anyone.

A welcome pack with photographs and a brief introduction of key staff is a start. Perhaps more welcoming and personal is a video message. Not only can the children see the staff member, but they can also hear them too.

This could be part of the VLE – with login details sent to children early where appropriate.

A child-centred FAQ page on the school website – speak to parents and Year 7 children, what questions did they want answering before they went to school?

The sense of belonging doesn't just come from knowing people, it also comes from knowing places.

Without physically being in a place, it is hard to feel part of it.

Suggestions to foster this sense of belonging to a place revolved around visual experiences. From photobooks to video tours of key places in the school.

One of the more interesting ideas was to develop a visual social story of a typical day at school from arrival to the end of the day.

The video or picture book would include all the places that they would usually visit in a typical day. Very useful for SEN and vulnerable children.



## **Teacher to Child**

Some aspects of this have been covered in the School to Child section, however, teachers can have a huge impact on the success of transition with a few simple actions, provided they are given the time to do them.

A social meeting on Teams or Zoom was suggested for Year 6 children, where they get the opportunity to meet their new teacher/s

Alternatively, it could be with the Head of Year, being there to answer those key questions. Key to the children, that is.

Children could be given the opportunity to submit those questions in advance to

allow some anonymity and reduce anxiety.

The digital divide will also need to be overcome. For those children who cannot connect to the online material, potential solutions were offered.

One to one phone calls, while likely to be slightly awkward, start the connection between teacher and child.

Doorstep visits, where packs are dropped off and a socially distant conversation can be had. These may be particularly useful for vulnerable and SEN children, if not practical for large numbers of children.



## **Child to Child**

Hearing another child's voice, particularly one that they know can be very reassuring.

There is an opportunity here to engage current Y7 children in presenting the school to the Y6 children.

Or current Y5 children reassuring younger children.

Again, you could allow children and parents to ask questions beforehand if you wanted to do a Q&A style video.

The format of the contact could be varied: A video message, a letter or a postcard.

The message of the content is simple, just let them know that it will be OK.



## **SEND & Vulnerable Children**

SEND needs to be a priority, it is a big deal for them.

This is not a homogenous group, and different children will need different things, however, because they need different things planning needs to begin earlier and be more thorough.

The transfer of information from one setting to the next was discussed in the opening section, but the importance of getting this right is paramount.

SENCOs, I am sure, understand the need to connect and communicate everything that the child needs. Verbal communication adds



context and depth to the material in the school files.

This context will be essential for reaching out to parents during the lockdown.

For Early Years SENCOs contacting the nursery provision for all information may prove challenging as many of them are closed.



### **Build Relationships**

Reaching out to parents and building relationships with them early could help smooth the transition a great deal.

For some, a routine is important, for others, it is facing and recognising the people that support and help them.

For many, it is about the relationships they need to develop to feel secure and understood.

In normal times, these needs could be met by additional visits to the school and meetings with key workers etc.

While the visits to school may be problematic, key-worker meetings could still take place, via zoom or phone or socially distant doorstep conversations.

The connections that are made at this time could help to reduce the anxiety that could be felt once the time to attend approaches and reduce the chance of school refusing.

In September, children could be supported initially by the key worker currently working with them.

Attending the secondary and offering appropriate support as part of the transition from primary to secondary.



## **Year 6/7 Transition**

There were several potential issues and solutions discussed around transition from primary to secondary.

Ensuring that children are ready for the expectations of secondary school was a concern, with suggestions that different bridging units were started for a range of subjects.

This would allow Y6 to start to develop some of the skills required at secondary school, particularly some of the tech skills that may have been developed.

Adding the children to the Secondary VLE early may be a useful way to start bridging that gap.



### **Uniform**

Starting a new school can be overwhelming, one of the issues that may concern Y6 parents and children will be uniform.

With many parents being furloughed or even losing their income, the uniform may be an expense that is beyond them initially.

Secondary schools should consider whether they should relax the uniform expectations initially to reduce these stresses.

Alternatively, they could find a way to support families in its purchase, perhaps with cheaper alternatives or subsidising it, or extending the option of paying for it over a longer period.



### **Saying Goodbye**

Children won't have had the opportunity of saying goodbye to their previous school, scheduling a day where they can go back to their previous school and getting some closure could be a useful way of allowing that – liaising locally so all schools do this on the same

day would be a challenge, but worth doing for children's wellbeing.



### **Give Them Time**

If there isn't a staggered start, consider delaying whole school opening for a day or two to allow the Y7 to find their feet.

The geography of a new and bigger school can be difficult to grasp at the best of times, it is even harder when it is

full of the hustle and bustle of other children.



### **Buddy System**

Buddy systems may already exist in the school, if not, consider developing one.

Asking the buddies to attend the school on these Year 7 only days would also allow time for them to be recognised and develop relationships with the new pupils.



### **EYFS, Reception & Year 1**

Starting school for the first time is a big step. There were concerns expressed regarding new parents and children arriving from external provision.

Families that are already familiar with the school will understand expectations and have connections to the community, for new parents this is not true.

So, what happens?

Reaching out to the previous provision could be key to understanding the new family and the best way to approach them.

If there are key workers already supporting children, consider negotiating to have them support the child for transition at the start of the year.



## **Build a Community**

Zoom calls to families new to the school may be a possibility. Zoom is also available as an app and can be used to carry out individual walkthroughs of the provision with the child and parents giving them some form of familiarity with the site.

It was suggested that two videos be created, one for parents and one for children (shot from a child's eye view).

Another suggestion to build the community was to start with children now as though it was September already.

Add them to apps such as Tapestry and use this to communicate with parents and read stories to the children.

Digitally disconnected parents and children could be provided with a photobook of staff and the provision.



## **In-School Support**

Once in school, the use of older children, such as Year 5, as buddies to support new arrivals was proposed, similar to those discussed in the Y6/7 transition section.

There were different concerns for children in Reception, moving into Year 1.

The usual amount of preparation involved with getting them ready for the higher expectations would not have happened.

Indeed, there is a question of how many of the ELGs have actually been achieved and how much work would need to be done to support these.

One school has already combined Reception and Year 1 provision, with some success. If this is a possibility, given the space available it could be explored.

*It is worth reading "Moving on to Key Stage One" by Julie*

*Fisher for more on this type of provision.*



## **Staffing**

Discussion of staffing of this provision was also raised.

Much depends on the staff that are available, 12 weeks shielding is a long time, and the experience of those that are in school.

Some Year 1 teachers may not have experience of Early Years provision and may need support, it may be worth revisiting staffing arrangements for the new school year to do that.



## **Buddies**

Similar to Y6/7 transition, allowing the new Reception children a day without Year 1 was recommended to allow them a chance to get to know their teachers.

The opportunity for a Saturday visit was also mooted as a possible way to introduce parents and children to the school. The reasoning being, that social distancing could be maintained much more easily than if the school was even partially open.



## **New Staff**

September will also be a time when new staff arrive at school. Things will probably be very different, if you are employing new staff, start thinking about what their induction will look like. They may need more support than you would normally give, be kind.

## Summary

Another very difficult document to summarise, as again we are dealing with the unknown. There is so much speculation, which is a real distraction and very hard to ignore, but for your sanity, try. Have a plan A and a Plan B.

What I hope is that you find something useful here which you can take, adapt and use in the challenges you have ahead. Something that helps you make those difficult decisions as you find your way through this.

Once again, I offer huge thanks to the heads that have shared their thoughts and ideas so well.

Stay Safe

If you have had experiences of the issues discussed and have found potential solutions, then get in touch @edroundtables on Twitter.

If you have an educational topic you would like to discuss with your peers in a confidential space. Then contact @edroundtables or visit [www.edrt.co.uk](http://www.edrt.co.uk)



*Ben Brown*