



Supporting pupils on the Autistic Spectrum

What we know:

- Change/unpredictable situations can often lead to challenging responses.
- The impact of Covid-19 has led to some students attending school, whilst others remain at home. These environments have been designated as 'safe' places for students.
- Some students have not engaged in any learning related tasks made available from schools, whilst others have completed learning tasks (with some engaging more successfully with learning in the home environment compared to school).
- Families direct experiences of Covid-19 will have been variable, such as: the impact of self-isolating, shielding and social distancing. This change in contact with the wider community impacting on relationships, activities, access to food and household supplies, etc.
- Evolving information has brought reassurance to some, whereas others have experienced heightened levels of anxiety regarding the risk of infection to themselves or their family members.
- The process for lifting restrictions is unknown at this time, media speculation can present false information and further increase anxiety. The return to school will not be going back to what they left.

Preparing for the restrictions being lifted:

- Routines implemented and where possible linked to some of the activities provided by school, however, the priority is to support emotional well-being, and this may mean that these demands have been adapted so that the daily routine is based around functional/play activities in the home. Ideally lunchtimes could be aligned with those at school.
- Relationships between student and familiar staff members maintained- for some students who struggle with engaging in school information, this may be through video calls with parent/carers and/or child and could involve sharing of items of interest to the child through video/emails, for example sending a picture of a Lego model to a child who likes Lego – indicating that the child is being kept in mind.
- Schools in liaison with the families should consider what changes have taken place in the interim period, even the students in school will need support as to what is going to change. This could include: physical changes – most classrooms have had a deep clean and equipment may have been moved; staff appearance may be different e.g. hair, pregnancy, etc; staff may have left their



post; the outdoor environment may be different due to seasonal changes/maintenance; transport arrangements (changes in taxi); etc.

- Parents should also consider practical aspects, such as, uniform and shoes fitting.
- Changes within the home need to be shared, for some families there may have been Safeguarding/bereavement issues to consider.
- Some students may have increase fear of people as a result of the lockdown measures- with a perception that other people are dangerous. Support will need to be given to reduce anxiety about shared spaces and the physical proximity to others (e.g. how many to expect).
- Consideration for how the Covid-19 situation has impacted on staff at an individual and school level.
- Students at the school could be involved in developing a virtual tour of the school, there could be facilitated opportunities, with the appropriate safeguards implemented, to 'show' peers what is happening in school or link peers with friend/class members through virtual platforms with their teacher.
- Close liaison with the family to agree individualised social scripts/social stories to support the transition- reviews should be factored in to share additional information as it becomes known and to gauge how the student/family is feeling about the return to school.
- Recognition that the transition back to school is likely to be a gradual process. The use of visuals and calendars should support this so that the student will become more able to predict how the events will be organised.

Transitions into a new school, in addition to the above:

- Consideration as to how students say 'goodbye' to their previous setting to provide closure.
- Key staff from the new setting will need to establish virtual meetings with the families and student to gain an understanding of the current presentation as this may have changed in the interim. It may be useful to include key staff from current/former setting to share their knowledge to inform the transition.
- The use of pre-existing transition materials should be reviewed as to what additional support can be facilitated using remote working. The use of virtual tours of the school would serve to inform about the physical environment of the school and introduce staff, until restrictions allow for face-to-face contact. This could also include information about the structure of the day and an introduction to the interventions that are offered to students.
- Peer mentors may be an appropriate resource to support when visits to schools can commence.
- See guidance below '*Supporting pupils at transition stages*'.