

(To be read in conjunction with Supporting Children in their Return to School March 2021)

Some of our children with SEND have likely been coming into school during the 2021 national lockdown because of their status as 'vulnerable children'. These children may struggle with a sudden increase in their class size and changes in routine as your school returns to face to face teaching in March.

School needs to support children re-adapt to learning in a larger environment and reassure children who've been attending school in person. Reassure children and talk to them about what's happening so they feel more prepared for having more of their peers in school with them.

Equally, children who have been learning from home during lockdown will also need support to re-adapt to being around more people and changes to their routines making sure our resources and routines are accessible for all children.

School will discuss the following with children:

- Drop-off and collection routines
- Break and lunchtime
- How and where children should wash their hands
- How children should line up throughout the day

Using visual cues and social stories can help settle children, our SENDCO can help with these. It's a good idea to create posters for these routines, so children can get to grips with them. Visual aids are particularly helpful for some children with SEND because they can make communication physical and consistent, rather than fleeting and inconsistent like spoken words can be. They can also be used to:

- Provide structure and routine
- Encourage independence
- Build confidence
- Avoid frustration and anxiety
- Make the information permanently accessible
- Give children plenty of time to process the information
- Don't involve social interactions
- For children with autism you could create picture-heavy versions of timetables and expectations – see more about visual supports here.

Types of visual support:

- tactile symbols/objects of reference, e.g. swimming trunks, packaging, food labels
- photographs
- short videos
- miniatures of real objects
- coloured pictures
- plain squares of coloured card
- line drawings
- symbols
- written words.

These can be real objects, printed images, or on a smartphone, tablet or computer. Further information can be found at <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/communication/communication-tools/visual-supports>

Social Stories

Social stories show children what to expect and why in different social situations.

When creating social stories:

- Start by picturing the social interaction you want children to be able to understand
- Choose the most appropriate words and pictures that'll help them get there
- Use words such as "sometimes" and "usually" so that if things don't go as planned, you won't lose the children' trust
- Create stories for all of the possible outcomes (e.g. your school having to close and reopen again) so that children are prepared for different situations
- Tailor them to individual children' interests and abilities – for example, by using characters you know that a pupil likes
- Give them to children at a time when they'll be able to refer back to them, for example at the beginning of the day to explain what'll happen at lunchtime

Videos tours can also be used for example simple videos of classroom walk-throughs and send these to children who have been learning from home. These to include every step the child will need to take, so they can prepare for the full experience of arriving at school, walking to and entering their classroom. This will help children re-familiarise themselves with the school environment and understand that some parts may look different now. These can also be shown to the children who've been coming to school during lockdown - for example, if they've been learning in a different classroom or part of the school.

Teachers can also use the 'now and next' approach to make timetables manageable. Some children might feel overwhelmed by a strict timetable when they return, breaking the day into what they're doing now, and what they're doing directly after may help prepare them.

For example, "Now we're doing some creative writing, and next we'll be washing our hands before lunch".

This can also be made visual 'now and next' for example, by writing it on the whiteboard at the start of each lesson. We need to be mindful that children will have become used to having more time to do what they want to do while they've been at home, so it could also be helpful to be clear on when they can expect to have some time to do what they want to do.

Similarly, any timetable changes may make children who have been in school during lockdown feel unsettled, so using this approach will help reassure them along with speaking to children about what's going on and providing clear reminders.

To help children with SEND get to grips with routines, staff can talk to them and remind them about the following:

- Why children will have to wash their hands more often, and sit further apart
- Why adults will need to wear face masks where recommended
- Why there'll be more children in school again
- Why coronavirus testing can be carried out in the home
- Be flexible when reintroducing the rules

The use of class and personalised visual timetables is good practice throughout all key stages. However, it is imperative at this time as it provides children with a structure and awareness of what their day consists of. Inprint has ready-made timetable templates that are easily customised for different days and classes.

We should try and involve children in decisions made about them and be clear on what's negotiable and what isn't, making compromises (where it's safe to do so) that are appropriate for individual children about what they can and can't do now they're back in school, or in larger class sizes.

Staff also need to show children that their feelings are normal, asking children how they're feeling and why. ELSA can help here too. This will help us address specific concerns and make the transition now and when they change classes as easy as possible for them. Making questions open and generic, rather than asking about specific things you think they might be worried about. This will avoid accidentally creating any further anxieties.

Reassuring children that while everything's going to be fine, it is alright for them to not always feel OK, and they can talk to adults in school about this. Staff need to be an honest and open role model about their own feelings and how they are managing them.

For example:

"My tummy was feeling a little bit funny on my way in this morning – did anyone else's tummy feel like that? I felt better after I thought about seeing my friends."

"It's a bit noisier in this classroom than at home, isn't it? What noises can we hear that we couldn't hear at home?"

"Wow, I haven't had to stand in front of a full class for a long time! How are you guys feeling about sitting in a classroom after all that time at home?"

"School feels a lot busier now, doesn't it? Who else is excited about having their friends return to school?"

Children could be allocated a peer mentor or adult mentor to talk to. Teachers could consider asking children to be learning buddies with children with SEND.

These mentors can prompt and support their buddy with any activities, like reading or moving on from one task to another.

We also need to celebrate work completed in lockdown to build children's confidence. It is important to recognise the work that children have done during the lockdown - whether in school or at home and to provide some positive reinforcement.

If children with SEND have specific hobbies or interests, consider asking about these during conversations too, bearing in mind that some children won't have had as much stimulation at home as others so we need to try not to leave anyone out.

APS have invested in 5 Inprint and Symwriter licences to facilitate the making of visual resources such as visual timetables and social stories. The licences are installed on the SEND office computer, EY coordinator computer, 2 KS1 PPA laptops and about to be installed in KS2.