

Effective transition from home/pre-school to school

Helen Nelson discusses the importance of successful transition in the early years

Introduction

The transition from the home or pre-school environment into formal education is a crucial stage in the educational life of all young children. For all parents of children starting primary school this is an anxious time and more so for the parents of children who are deaf. As practitioners, we need to assess how best we support young deaf children, their parents/carers and the staff in their receiving schools to make this transition as successful as possible. This needs to involve consideration of elements that are important for all children starting school for the first time and those which are specific to the needs of the young deaf child.

Current legislation and guidance

The role of the Teacher of the Deaf (ToD) and Specialist Support Services are defined within current legislation and guidance. The SEND Code of Practice (2015) specifically states in section 5.47 that "SEN support should include planning and preparation for transition". The Quality Standards for Support Services in England (DfE/NatSIP, 2016a) emphasise the need for services to "ensure that children and young people with sensory impairment get a good start to their formal education" (QSD4). Furthermore, Support Services should make certain that the receiving school is adequately prepared to meet the child's needs". At the point of transfer to a new educational phase or establishment, the service can demonstrate that the establishment has a clear understanding of the learner's needs and how to ensure a successful transition." (QS B4iii). In addition, the Quality Standards for Early Years support (DfE/NatSIP 2016b) state that transition plans for nursery and school entry should form part of the child's individual care package.

What does the research and guidance tell us?

When we look at the research and guidance related to transition and children/young people who are deaf, the focus tends to be upon transition post 16 years of age. There is limited research related to transition of younger children, however; Curle et al's (2017) recent study provides useful information about facilitators of successful transition, which include:

1. inter-agency communication and document exchange
2. observations of the child prior to entering school
3. child and parent meeting the school community
4. provision of information to support parents
5. designated key person to facilitate the transition.

Effective models are also provided via post-16 transition materials, for example key aspects of the model of successful transition included in *Supporting Deaf Young People through Transition* (NatSIP/DfE, 2017) would



be equally applicable to much younger children including:

- starting the transition process early
- being open-minded to a range of options
- working in partnership
- ensuring the young person understands the transition process (*in this case the family would replace the young person themselves*).

What should good practice look like?

Advanced planning

Effective transition is dependent upon beginning the transition process early. The importance of pre-emptive planning and the anticipatory duties of schools and services are embedded within the Equality Act (2010) and SEND Code of Practice (2015:6.9). There is a clear need for a pro-active strategic approach with advanced planning to prepare the family, the receiving school, and the child for school entry.

Capacity building

The need to build capacity within the school through the provision of training for staff, who may lack knowledge, experience, and confidence in working with young children who are deaf, is a central part of the QToD role. Advice and training should ideally involve the whole school community including teaching and support staff eg lunch-time supervisors, parent helpers and older pupils undertaking a 'buddy' role with new entrants to the school. The best means to achieve this are likely to be via targeted input to the different groups involved and tailoring of the detail of information to the level of involvement with the child. It is important that everyone

feels competent in dealing with personal hearing equipment and assistive technology and has had the opportunity for some hands-on practice to develop competency and confidence.

Partnership working with families

The SEND Code of Practice (2015) emphasises the central role of the family in decision-making and the views of parents/carers must be central to the transition process.

The ToD can support family decision-making via:

- providing unbiased information about the full range of educational options available in accordance with the principles of informed choice and early support (DfES, 2006). This may include assistance to navigate the Local Offer and reference to relevant materials eg Starting Primary School NDCS (2015)
- accompanying families on visits to potential placements and being involved in discussions with the family in relation to their preferences. Families should be encouraged to visit and consider a range of options to support informed decision-making
- supporting families to make and have ownership of decisions about future educational placements
- making the family aware that they are making the best decision they can for their child at this time, whilst understanding that this is not 'set in stone' and that decisions can change in the future dependent upon the child's needs
- making time available to spend with the family to talk through their thoughts and feelings in order to be able to understand their perspective and proactively pre-empt concerns.

Acoustic evaluation

The ToD and/or Educational Audiologist should undertake:

- evaluation of the acoustic environment within the chosen school in order to facilitate improvements to listening conditions prior to a child's school entry in line with the requirement of the school to make reasonable adjustments (Equality Act, 2010)
- evaluation of the acoustic environments of different schools to support decision-making between settings.

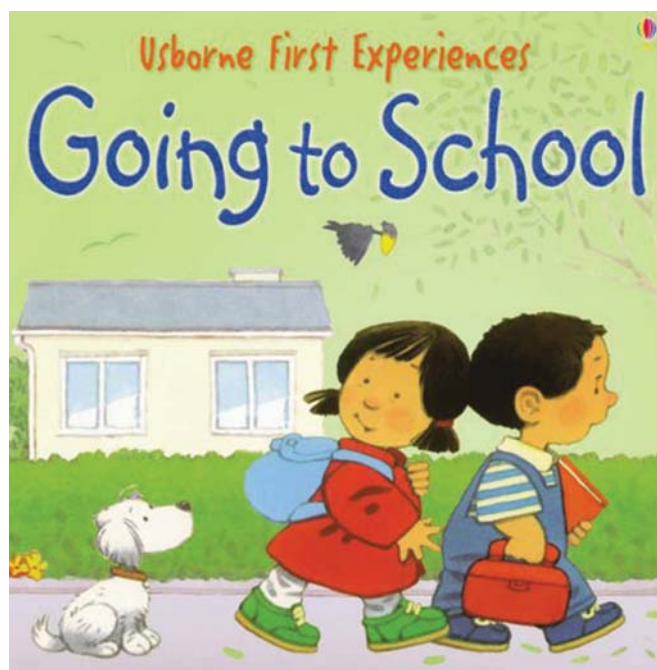
Staffing and recruitment

Typically, the majority of young deaf children will be entering a mainstream setting (CRIDE, 2017) and the school is likely to be recruiting/redeploying support staff as specified in the EHC plan. Ideally, there should be timely recruitment carried out in partnership with the ToD/Service with adequate time available for staff training prior to school entry.

Planning and pre-empting issues

The ToD should be involved in:

- assessment of any possible barriers to learning and the evaluation of ways in which to overcome these obstacles
- observation of typical sessions within the classroom and provision of suggestions/recommendations regarding adaptations and reasonable adjustments.



Key worker role

To facilitate communication and organisation between all parties involved in transition, assigning one individual to undertake the role of key worker/lead professional, is likely to be most effective. In most instances, the ToD working with the family will be best placed to undertake this role.

Developing familiarity with the setting and the process of transition

The ToD should support the family to provide:

- opportunities for the child to develop familiarity with the setting; this may involve a range of visits, trial sessions and the development of resources to use within the home eg photo books showing key activities and staff
- access to 'Starting School' Stories, possible stories which have a clear narrative structure include:
 - ▶ Topsy and Tim Start School, Jean Adamson
 - ▶ Starting School (Picture Puffins), Allen and Janet Ahlberg
 - ▶ Going to School (Usborne First Experiences), Anna Civardi (see above)
 - ▶ Starting School (First Steps with Biff, Chip and Kipper) Roderick Hunt and Ann-Marie Young (ORT series)
 - ▶ Usborne Starting School Sticker Book by Felicity Brooks – more interactive and engaging and a good means to introduce and reinforce new school-based vocabulary.

Responding to any issues promptly

This can be facilitated via:

- early review meetings
- increased regularity of visits to school and home to check that things are progressing well.

Flexibility around school entry arrangements

Some children may need longer or more flexible

arrangements to be put in place and again this would be considered as a reasonable adjustment to make.

On-going support for families

Parents often report that they feel that they have high levels of family support which then reduces significantly on school entry. Prior to transition it is important to enable parents to have realistic expectations of what support will look like once their child is in school and to ensure that home visits, albeit on a less frequent basis, are maintained for at least the first year of school entry.

Conclusion

It is important for further research to take place to evaluate how practitioners are currently working to facilitate transition into school and how families view the effectiveness of this process. A study is being

undertaken by one of our current MA students and hopefully these results will serve to further inform practice. The establishment of national guidance akin to that available for older age groups would be useful to define what good practice should look like and to support effective practice in this area.



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