

The Child Brain Injury Trust is a national charity supporting anyone affected by childhood acquired brain injury. The following information has been developed to help the reader understand more about brain injury and some of the associated issues. Every effort has been taken to ensure the information is accurate and up to date. If you require more immediate support or assistance please contact our **Advice, Information & Referral Service on 0303 3032248**.

## Moving from Primary to Secondary School

This Factsheet is about the move from your child's primary school to secondary school, and some information is also applicable to those times when your child may change schools for other reasons, and when they return to school following their brain injury.

The transition from primary to secondary school is a major change in any young person's life, and pupils with an acquired brain injury (ABI) in particular may need support at this time.

During early adolescence **organisation & planning skills and critical judgement** continue to develop rapidly. These skills include the ability for your child to be in the right place, at the right time, with all the right equipment etc. This also means being able to understand and assess if they have achieved what they needed to do, and make improvements and learn from the experience if required.

These important skills are functions of your child's **frontal lobe**, damage to the frontal lobes can often occur following an ABI. When this happens your child may struggle with many of the tasks required in the secondary school environment, such as:

### Planning

- Homework, when, what, how much time is needed
- Planning route around school
- What equipment they need for each class
- Extra curricular activities

### Organising

- Correct items to take to school
- Time to complete tasks within the lesson
- What books and equipment are needed for each class /day
- what is needed for each lesson

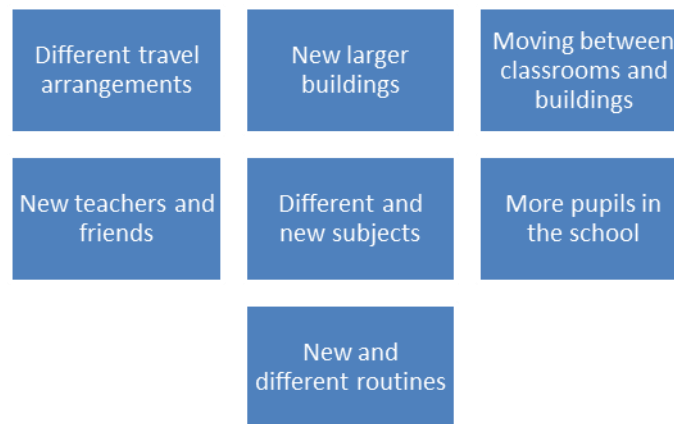
## What changes does transition bring?

Moving from primary to secondary school brings with it a number of changes. Most importantly, the general demands of secondary school are very different to those in primary school. In secondary school your child will be expected to take on far more personal responsibility for many tasks, which in primary school were supported by teachers. In addition, your child will not be taught by just a few teachers in one classroom, but by many more members of staff, and they will need to move from one classroom to another for different subjects, perhaps even from one school site to another.

It is possible that your child will have been supported well in the primary school environment so that their problems are not obvious, and it is only when they transfer to secondary school that the extent of their problems becomes apparent. Your child may find new and unfamiliar people, places and situations

more difficult to cope with than other young people. In addition they may find the ability to be in the right place, at the right time, with all the right equipment etc. more of a challenge.

Some of the more common changes they may face are:



### **Parents, primary and secondary staff working together**

It will help to prepare your child for these changes as thoroughly as you can. This Factsheet talks about some of the areas where pupils with an ABI may need help when they move to secondary school. However, every child with an ABI is different, so it is a good idea for secondary school staff to get as much information as possible about a child's specific needs from parents, carers and primary school staff.

See our online Webinars – presentations about *Understanding ABI* and *Strategies for school* [CLICK HERE](#) to see the full list of FREE OF CHARGE online resources available for you and your child's school).

Most secondary schools have a someone who is responsible for liaising with primary schools in their catchment area – often the head of Year 7 – who will be finding out about children with special educational needs who are due to move up to secondary school. If the child is known to have Special Educational Needs and therefore is known to the SENCo/Support for Learning staff, and / or has a statement, the school teams and Educational Psychologist should be involved in the transition as a matter of course.

However, not all young people with an ABI will have a statement or Education and Healthcare Plan (EHCP), although they may have considerable difficulties, and it is these children who can be most vulnerable to the change as they may have less support. With all children, but perhaps especially those with an ABI, it pays to identify their needs in advance so that the transition can be carefully planned and managed. This gives it a much better chance of being successful.

The best practice to transition from primary to secondary should include:

### **Before the transition**

- SEN team from Secondary school to visit Primary school and observe your child and assess overall academic and social needs; what is likely to make your child anxious, what do they struggle with?
- Additional “taster” days for your child with an ABI, over and above the standard days that all new pupils experience. Meeting new teachers and learning support assistants can help to reduce stress: your child will feel more comfortable if they are familiar with some of the people at their new school.
- Having a Year 8 “buddy” to accompany your child on the taster days
- Awareness training on ABI for Secondary school staff, so they are prepared for your child and are able to provide the correct support from day one
- If your child has difficulties with new situations and/or memory, produce a scrap book all about their new school, with photos of the new school, their new teacher, any new friends. They can then look through this during the summer holidays to remind them of the changes ahead

### **At transition**

- Ask school to allocate your child to the most appropriate classes, giving consideration to the best teacher and perhaps friendship groups to avoid/encourage
- Assign the Year 8 “buddy” to support and mentor your child, so they have a familiar point of contact who knows the school and how it works.
- Assign a key worker/support assistant from the SEN team so your child has one consistent adult from the SEN team whom they can speak to (NB at the same time ensure other members of the SEN team also support your child, so that they do not become too attached to one particular member of the support staff).
- Encourage your child to go to lunchtime and after school activities to meet other children with SEN, or for specific interest groups (e.g. a drama club)
- Initially ensure daily liaison between home/school so any issues are discussed and remedied quickly

Other ways in which a child who is moving to secondary school can be supported are with extra support through interventions that meet their specific needs such as:

- a visual timetable
- a desk in a quieter part of the classroom, that is positioned away from doors and windows to help them concentrate
- peer support in the playground

See additional Factsheets and Webinars on specific areas of difficulty

It is important to identify your child's specific needs, rather than creating a generic transition plan, so it is useful to consider the following:



Parents and carers will also be an excellent source of information as well as the staff from Primary School. Although it is possible that a child may have different issues at home, than they have at school.

### **Supporting pupils with an ABI at secondary school**

Providing day-to-day support is all part of managing pupils' transition from primary to secondary. Other key changes where your child may struggle with on transition are:

#### **Travelling to school**

For many young people, the first time they travel 'alone' may be when they go to secondary school. If a pupil with an ABI is going to be using a school bus, or a form of public transport, they will need to be prepared for this. The pupil needs to know:

- where to wait for the bus (or other form of transport, eg train)
- how and when to use their bus pass or pay for their ticket (if applicable)
- what time the bus leaves
- how much time they should allow to get to the bus stop
- roughly how long the journey takes
- how to cope with problems
- what to do if the bus doesn't arrive
- where to get off the bus.

Remember they will also need to know the same information for the journey home but in reverse order.

Children may need some help, too, to cope with social situations that occur on journeys to school, such as noise, banter or teasing. If possible doing a trial run before school term starts may also be helpful. If possible, pupils could travel with someone they know, for the first few days at least.

### Following a school timetable

At secondary school, timetables can be one of the main things children need to get used to, and they can at first appear complicated, especially if your school uses a two-week timetable. In primary school, children are often taught by one teacher, usually in the same classroom. This all changes at secondary school.

Many people with an ABI find visual information helpful. A timetable can be made more accessible to a pupil with an ABI:

- Replacing initials for subjects with symbols i.e. using a picture of a globe instead of Gg for Geography.
- Colour coding different subjects or different days of the week
- Using pictures of clock faces instead of times or 'Period 1', etc.
- Providing short written descriptions to help pupils understand where lessons take place, and who will be teaching them. This can help a pupil with ABI to feel better prepared and may reduce anxiety.
- Writing out teachers' names in full for each subject.
- Using classroom numbers, along with brief descriptions of each room.
  - The exact format a timetable takes will vary depending upon the needs of individual pupils. Parents and carers could also have a copy of the timetable prominently displayed at home so their child can refer to it there, if they need to.
- Consider leaving the classroom a few minutes after (or before) other pupils if there are physical problems which may make crowds / jostling difficult – balance, coordination, falling.

Finally, it is important to remember that the task of moving from primary to secondary school is considerable for all children. For those with an ABI, even with all this support, it can be a very great challenge, and they may take much longer to settle into the unfamiliar routines of their new school.

If you would like one of our Regional Child and family Support Coordinators to assist you in planning the transition to secondary school for your child, please contact our **Helpline 0303 3032248** or email **helpline@cbituk.org**

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