

For secondary teachers: Supporting autistic students' transition to secondary school

Many students find the move to secondary school stressful and exciting but there are some extra challenges for Autistic students. This is because the transition to secondary school involves three areas that Autistic students may find challenging - socialisation, communication and adapting to a new environment. The new environment at secondary school will have new people, a different daily structure and a new set of expectations.

Your role

As a secondary teacher you have an important role in preparing Autistic students for a successful transition from primary school to secondary school. You may be the Year Level Coordinator or Transition Coordinator or have a similar role with responsibility for transition planning for students with additional needs. To do this you will use your skills in planning and effective communication to develop a transition plan for the student.

A successful transition plan considers the individual needs of the student, includes defined objectives and is developed collaboratively with the student, parent and primary school to ensure a smooth path from primary to secondary school. A transition plan is a written document with information about how you, the student, the student's parent or carer and the primary school will work together to prepare the student for a successful start at secondary school.

The transition plan starts in primary school and continues as the student starts secondary school. Usually the primary school will contact you in Term 3 or 4 of the student's Grade 6 to invite you to a Student Support Group (SSG) meeting. You can contact the primary school to request an SSG meeting in Term 3 or 4 if they haven't contacted you.

Autistic students may need a longer timeline for transition, for example a few months, than other students, to give them more time to learn new skills. Read more about the timing, the actions and who's responsible in the [Timeline and checklist of steps to create a transition plan](#).

What the Disability Standards for Education mean for your school

Section 32 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, states that all schools must follow the Disability Standards for Education 2005. See: [Disability Standards](#). The Disability Standards list the legal obligations of all schools. They must:

(i) Consult, with the student and/or parent or carer;

- (ii) Make reasonable adjustments; and
- (iii) Prevent victimisation and harassment (bullying).

An adjustment is an action taken by the school to assist a student with a disability to participate in education on the same basis as other students. Student Support Group (SSG) meetings are one way teachers consult with parents. The SSG is a team that works together and provides the opportunity to share information and think about each other's perspectives. The purpose of the SSG meetings is to agree on reasonable adjustments and how they'll be put in place to best support the student's educational and support needs.

The next section lists the steps for a successful transition plan. The final section is a list of online resources to help you support autistic students at secondary school.

Steps for a successful transition plan

1. Gather information

To gather information:

- observe and get to know the student at their current primary school
- organise to meet with primary school staff, support officers, parents and student
- refer to reports and assessments
- refer to written documents provided by those who are unable to attend meetings.

A Transition Statement is a template style document completed by the primary school and provided to the secondary school to support a student's transition. Its purpose is to gather information about the student which can be used in developing a transition plan. Information is gathered from the primary teacher, allied health professionals, parent and the student to assist the secondary school to best support the student.

When communicating with parents or carers be aware of any challenges that may affect their communication with you. For example, a parent or carer may be autistic or English may not be their first language. Ask how they prefer to communicate and offer support for this preferred way of communicating.

It's important for teachers, parents and carers to support the student to be involved in developing the transition plan.

The table on the next page explains who is involved and what information is being gathered to complete the transition statement and develop a transition plan.

WHO will be involved	WHAT information could be gathered about the student
<p>Primary school transition team may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assistant Principal/Principal - Grade 6 Teacher - Transition Coordinator - Education Support Officer - Student Support Service Officers (psychologists, speech pathologists, social workers) - Visiting Teachers <p>Secondary school transition team may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Year 7 Teacher - Year Level Coordinator - Assistant Principal/Principal - Transition Coordinator - Education Support Officer - Student Support Service Officers (psychologists, speech pathologists, social workers, school psychologist) - Visiting Teachers - Wellbeing Coordinator <p>Parents or carers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengths/interests - Dislikes/challenges - Diagnosis information - Sensory challenges - Medical information - Communication skills - Cognitive Profile - Emotional and behavioural profile - Calming strategies - Current support strategies for learning and behaviour - Current goals, past goals - Transition strategies that have been successful in the past

	secondary staff					routines using visual aids		
Possible ways to support skill development	<p>Calendar of dates for meetings, extra transition days, SSG's etc. for parent, primary school and student.</p> <p>Establish ongoing communication method with the parent or carer.</p> <p>Create and distribute student profile and support strategies to all the student's</p>	<p>Organise additional visits (at different times of the day, with and without other students, prior to the school year starting).</p> <p>Plan what activities/areas/ staff will be focussed on each visit.</p> <p>Develop social stories/videos/virtual tours of the new environment.</p> <p>Develop student's individual passport – colour coded timetable, map</p>	<p>Develop opportunities to meet other students in their Year 7 class.</p> <p>Allocate buddy to support transitions to other class locations.</p> <p>Allocate a safe place and person to go to when needed.</p> <p>Practise going to</p>	<p>Learn to read timetables.</p> <p>Learn to use locker padlock.</p> <p>Colour coded organisation of books to match subject colours on timetable.</p> <p>Visual images of each subject's equipment/tools.</p> <p>Practise using timetable and visual</p>	<p>Teach self or personal care.</p> <p>Teach travel skills – bus, train as needed.</p>	<p>Teach how to prepare for a camp.</p> <p>Teach how to prepare for changes in routine such as fire-drills, vaccinations, excursions, or sport days.</p>	<p>Plan types of breaks and practise break strategies.</p> <p>Allocate quiet places for student to retreat to for self-regulation/stimming.</p>	<p>Plan locker and desk placement.</p> <p>Consider odours in food technology areas, science and art rooms.</p> <p>Consider noise of hand dryers in toilets, gyms, crowded corridors, assemblies, school bell volume.</p> <p>Plan how the student will use the Physical Education</p>

	secondary teachers. Develop Individual Education Plan (IEP) and distribute to all subject teachers.	of school highlighting classrooms, canteen, locker location, specialist rooms, safe place, school boundaries and pictures of teachers and visual rules. Allocate locker early – practise using padlock.	the safe place/person when student is calm.	images to get equipment for each class from locker.				change rooms.
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3. Implement the planned strategies and supports for the transition

This stage involves implementing the actions and the support strategies that were identified in the written transition plan. It's important to regularly check that each element of the plan is being actioned by the person responsible for its completion. It's critical for the parent and secondary school to establish an agreed method of communication which can include planned SSG meetings, email and telephone contact. You're responsible for implementing the student's transition plan in Terms 1 and 2 of secondary school, and you assist with the actions in Terms 3 and 4 of Grade 6.

4. Evaluate the transition plan

When you evaluate the transition plan you capture the learnings by asking;

- What worked well in supporting the student?
- What strategies could work for future transitions for the student?
- What could be done differently for future transitions for the student?

It's helpful for the student, parent and school to keep a record of this to ensure the student will be well supported in their future transitions. You're responsible for evaluating the transition plan in Term 2 of Year 7.

Resources

<p>Amaze Transition to Secondary School Information Sheets</p>	<p>Timeline and checklist of steps to create a transition plan</p> <p>For parents and carers: Introduction to preparing to start secondary school</p> <p>Preparing to start secondary school for autistic students</p> <p>For primary teachers: Supporting autistic students' transition to secondary school</p>
<p>Victorian Department of Education and Training – Transition Year 6 -7</p>	<p>Transitioning to secondary school – students with disability</p> <p>Transitioning from Primary to Secondary school. Supporting students with additional or complex needs that arise from disability Includes a Transition Statement p. 14-19 and a section to be filled in by the student p.20-22.</p>
<p>Positive Partnerships</p>	<p>Planning for change PDF</p> <p>Planning Matrix</p> <p>Student profile templates</p> <p>Transition plan, checklist and Transition and Change Webinar</p>
<p>inclusionEd</p>	<p>Free evidence-based and research-informed teaching practices and tools to support diverse learners in inclusive classrooms</p>
<p>Autism CRC</p>	<p>Structured Teaching</p>
<p>AllplayLearn</p>	<p>Secondary Teachers Transition Resources</p> <p>Secondary Teacher Resources</p>

Acknowledgement

This information sheet was developed in consultation with Autistic people. Amaze would like to thank the secondary teachers who shared their experiences of supporting students in the transition to secondary school.

This document was created by Amaze and is proudly funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Training.

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