

## Asperger syndrome – Transition

*This leaflet gives suggestions of things for both parents and teachers to consider in the lead up to transition from primary to secondary education (and elements can also apply to secondary to college transition). All these examples are based on actual situations and will vary from child to child. Please note: 'he' has been used but, of course, can also be read as 'she'.*

### General organisational ability

- Taking care of personal and school belongings – he is often not organised.
- Lack of appreciation of time – no sense of urgency. Having a watch is not necessarily the solution as it can be a distraction (something to fiddle with!).
- Not prepared and organised for activities and lessons – having the right things, at the right time, in the right place. Try using labelled plastic folders to organise each subject. Have a 'general' folder for letters, etc.
- Worried about having a locker – although a locker may well help him be more organised!
- Toilets – There may be concern about access to these at the necessary time. There may also be issues with location and finding them. Is it possible to issue a special card which gives permission to visit the toilet at any time? May have concerns about cleanliness of toilets – can the disabled toilets be used?
- Lunchtime – Do they have a packed lunch? Where is this eaten? How long do they have? Where do they go to buy lunch and what is available? May have restricted (and sometimes odd) tastes in food, can also be very sensitive to smells. May be a problem in crowded situations whilst eating lunch.

### School arrival/departure

- How will he be getting to school?
- Dropping off point?
- Is there somewhere 'safe' to go if he's early?
- What sort of time can he arrive?
- Pick up point?
- Can he work/stay after school for a short time (e.g. Library)?

### How he reacts when stressed/overloaded – possible reactions

- When he starts to get stressed he is likely to keep winding up if he stays in that situation. He may be very quiet and then suddenly erupt (this is also possible when he gets home). Some children 'flap' when they get stressed (this can also be an excited reaction too).
- He may not be able to deal with situations where he should really talk to a teacher (e.g. if another child was bothering him). He will rarely instigate a situation deliberately so if this appears to be the case it may well be the result of another's provocation.
- If other children wind him up and he retaliates, he is likely to be the one who gets caught (but he is no angel!!!). Generally, he will react to a situation regardless of who might be watching, unlike other children who will probably check first!
- Not often aggressive but has been known to slam doors and run at people.
- Could scream out loud if overloaded.
- Liable to run off (if this happens he needs to be clear on where he can go – safe refuge – but he would not run off site).
- Liable to 'blank' a teacher – not respond or appear to ignore – not come when called.

- Has very strong views on justice/injustice (his interpretation) and will make these clear!
- He is not very understanding of others feelings and the implications of his actions on others, or others need for privacy – in many respects he is about 3 to 4 years behind in social skills, etc.
- Can be over-sensitive to noise, touch and invasion of their 'personal space'.

## Reactions to change

- It's useful for the child to know about any changes to routine in advance. Misunderstandings due to lack of information can cause huge problems if not sorted out at the earliest opportunity.
- Changes in class (particularly changes of teachers/supply teachers, etc). Every teacher involved should have some sort of briefing about the child.
- Having a supply teacher may result in everyone changing seats in class, which may cause him to be unsettled and/or unable to cope with the lesson.
- Timetable and/or room changes need warning or clear guidance and explanation.
- Fire alarms. A social story may help. Advance warning of drills may be necessary (or an LSA on standby!)
- School trips. Additional support may be required. Occasionally trips may be not entirely suitable but it is important not to exclude the child without prior discussion with parents. Trips can be a cause of advance anxiety but can be very beneficial to the child in the end.

## Time-out in class

- How will this be handled – will all staff be aware?
- Where will he go if stressed?

## In class

- Will there be any in-class support to help him get on task? Many of these children will not have a Statement. Will this support be flexible enough to support changing anxieties?
- Finishing work – has difficulty stopping if he hasn't finished something.
- If not inspired/interested ('can't see the point') may only do a token amount of work.
- Word processor availability? Handwriting problems are very common amongst these children. Issues such as untidy writing, illegibility, reluctance (or inability) to join letters up. This links in with poor presentation skills and they may not see why they have to improve this!
- Seating position? (Preferably near the front).
- Will take things very literally – sometimes to a frustrating degree! This varies to a certain extent and some children may be more literal than others. Use of clear language is really helpful because they may not say if they do not understand. Sarcasm, metaphors, etc. can cause confusion but they can learn about these, as they will come across them in everyday life anyway.
- Same seat for classes? (other children will need to be aware of this). This is not always possible. Being sat with a child they are friends with is a real help. It can be a real nightmare for them if they are sat with someone they really don't get on with! Something which can work is sitting him with girls rather than boys as he (generally) gets on better with girls (girls are more likely to look out for him too). Apart from an occasional clash of personalities, he does tend to communicate more with girls. It is important if he does not get on with the person he's sat with and there is the potential for bullying, that this is dealt with, ideally by rearranging the seating.
- Distractibility –Can be very easily distracted by other children or by the classroom environment. It's best not to sit him near wall displays or windows! Sitting with the most talkative child in the class isn't always a good idea either!
- He finds it difficult to talk to teachers and will sometimes not respond. Some have the opposite problem and will have an answer for everything and not always when they should be responding!

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- May not fully understand what is said by the teacher – can take time to process instructions and these may need to be repeated clearly. He does miss bits of information sometimes and this can affect his work, leading to misunderstandings and anxiety.

## Homework

- Organisation of this may be a problem – will need very clear written direction on this. If he does write it down he may not understand what he's supposed to be doing. May write it down but not be able to read it later! Staff need to ensure that he has copied it down correctly and that he understands what he has to do. This is where email contact can be a lifesaver.
- Liable to forget to bring the correct things home!
- May not be able to meet deadlines.
- How strict do we need to be with this? – (we must start off on the right foot with this). If he gets the impression that he can get away with either not doing things or by handing work in late he will continue to do this! This happened in primary school but with maybe two or three pieces a night, he will have to be much more disciplined!
- He needs a consistent approach to homework from all teachers.
- He can get very stressed with homework. It is not unusual, with certain subjects, to spend half the weekend doing homework.
- Homework club could be a help here. Although they do not always want 'help' or to be seen to need help.

## Bullying

- This can be a major problem as many children with Asperger syndrome are susceptible to this. They are often seen as easy prey as there will often be a reaction.
- Psychological bullying is more common for children with Asperger syndrome and is also harder to spot. The child may not even realise that they are being 'bullied'.
- This is a major source of anxiety and can lead to school avoidance and anxiety related illness.
- This must be dealt with immediately and taken seriously.
- The child may be very reluctant to report this and often will react at home before the bullying is discovered.

## Parent liaison

- Routes of communication on a day-to-day basis need to be established.
- All information (good and bad) to be communicated both ways.
- Early warning of possible problems.
- Preparation for special events/changes.

## How parents can help schools prepare

Examples of specific subject information that parents can give to the SENCo to help planning for the child's arrival:

### PE/Sport

- Team games – will find understanding rules difficult.
- Hates football – may refuse to take part! Would there be an alternative?
- Dance, or anything that involves indoor group activities, may be a problem – the noise and movement gets him overloaded and he cannot cope with it.
- Changing/showers – he is very disorganised and may not cope in rushed/crowded situation (also a perfect opportunity for him to be picked on/bullied by other children).
- His lack of coordination can make physical sports difficult for him.

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### **Cookery**

- Enjoys this but very sensitive to smells!
- Has very limited diet so may be difficult to convince him to cook foods he doesn't like.

### **Religious Education**

- Has very set atheist views (due to his logical nature!).
- Is more likely to accept discussions about religions other than Christian.
- This subject could be interesting!!

### **Science**

- Very much enjoys this but has little appreciation of danger (would need close supervision).
- Likes to fiddle and lacks concentration– could be problems with Bunsen burners/chemicals, etc.

### **Computer activities/ art and design**

- Really enjoys this – has a natural aptitude.
- Only needs telling once and he will pick things up very quickly.
- Has clear ideas when drawing/designing and can be quite original.

### **Literacy**

- Loves reading and quite literary minded.
- May find some types of analysis of literature (e.g. Shakespeare) difficult.
- Does some very good imaginative writing himself.

### **Maths**

- Is very good at this but, for some reason, will not admit to liking very much of it (perhaps he has not yet been inspired by it!).
- Is good at mental arithmetic (often works out prices/discounts in shops in his head!).
- Certainly may need help applying himself on this.

### **Music and Drama**

- Loves many types of music from pop to classic.
- Has natural sense of rhythm.
- Does not like singing with others (even though he can sing quite well) or others singing around him – gets stressed when a lot of noise.
- Cannot cope with drama at all.

### **Languages**

- Not too keen on this, especially French – we wonder whether German may be more appropriate as he will see a logical use for this (having had holidays in Germanic speaking countries).