

The West Partnership presents:

Inverclyde Communication Outreach Service

Facilitating Online Transitions

The storyboard details how the Inverclyde Communication Outreach Service (ICOS) adapted to the pandemic in order to maintain enhanced transitions for pupils with additional support needs. We hear how service quickly adapted to changes on the ground before working towards policy/strategy changes at a local authority level.

What was the problem?

Prior to the pandemic, the ICOS team had established an enhanced transitions programme for pupils and families with a range of social communication differences. In the year before the pandemic, 60 children had gone through the programme which supports the transitions between early years, primary and secondary. The programme was delivered mainly in person, meaning the pandemic significantly disrupted those who were going through the programme in 2020.



Why is this important?

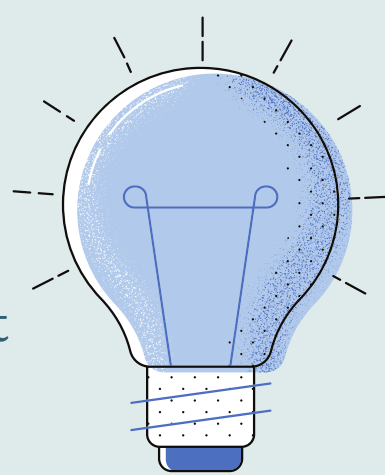
Positive transitions has been positively linked to wellbeing, attainment and also appears to be correlated with reduced pupil and parental anxiety. Research on pupils with additional support needs has found that for 'children with ASN, supported and enhanced transitions are beneficial' (Cantali, 2019). Enhanced transitions are therefore key to avoiding dips in attainment and wellbeing.



Aims of the change to practice

The project had a number of aims:

- 1) To maintain enhanced transitions in response to social distancing
- 2) To provide a 'near-as-normal' transitions experience that met the needs of pupils and parent
- 3) To ensure standardised practice across the authority



What did you do?

The ICOS team had begun meeting with families in Jan 2020. Four meetings had happened before the pandemic made social distancing methods necessary. The team made sure they kept in contact with families by phone as an initial response to social distancing requirements. The team then used door step visits as a way of meeting in person while operating within social distancing regulations. The team collectively identified the needs of their families and considered ways of meeting these needs using technology. The team set up a Teams space for pupils and encouraged the pupils to share the information with their parents. The team first created a PowerPoint presentations with information for each school that was involved in transitions. At a later date the team used photos and videos of each school in order to build up an idea of what the school environment might be like. The team also created weekly transitions activities that were to be completed at home. School 'passports' were also developed, giving pupils key information about the school environment.

What happened?

The remote activities that the team put in place were used during the initial phase of lockdown. When regulations allowed, the team facilitated access to the empty campuses of schools during the summer period. Feedback from families was positive and the team believes the blend of remote activities and in-person tours allowed them to provide enhanced transitions. After the initial transition in August, the team continued providing transitions activities with their pupils with additional support needs. The team believed this to be especially important during socially distanced education. The team were also keen to take what they had experienced on the ground to formulate strategic guidance. From their experiences they wrote new guidance for transitions at every level and also considered how the lessons from their enhanced transitions could inform transitions more universally.



What are the key points you have learnt?

The team have identified a number of key learning points from their change to practice. Firstly, the informal networks set up by parents despite the impact of social distancing has been invaluable. Secondly, the delivery of effective transitions required a collaborative approach where a number of organisations worked well together (school, ICOS, support services).



Thirdly, the team believe that their transitions approach led to the informal development of digital skills amongst participating pupils and parents. Fourthly, the team believe it is important to apply what they have learnt from this process to transitions more broadly. They have begun putting this into practice, working to ensure equity for all pupils, this is reflected in recently created authority-wide guidance.

What next for the project?

The team believe they will continue with some of their new practices post-covid. For example, the team believe they will continue to get value out of walk and talk meetings with parents in the future. As mentioned above, the team plan to develop to further enhance current transitions planning. The team are interested in adopting the work of Renfrewshire Council, who have used flipbooks for transitions, as a way of passing on information accessibly.

