

3rd October 2023

Transitions in Special Educational Needs – Report

Ward(s): ALL

Portfolios: Education and Skills Councillor Statham

1. Aim

This report will provide an overview of the work carried out by the SEND Service (Special Educational Needs Service) in relation to key transitions for children and young people with an EHC plan during the 2022/23 academic year

2. Recommendations

For the committee to note the impact of the development, progress and achievements made out by the SEND Service in relation to transitions.

3. Report detail – know

3.1 The SEND Code of Practice

The SEND Code of Practice explains the explains the duties of local authorities, health bodies, early years providers, schools and colleges to provide for children and young people (from 0 to 25 years) with special educational needs and disabilities.

It contains details of legal requirements that must be followed without exception, and statutory guidance that must be followed by law unless there's a good reason not to, as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014, the Equality Act 2010, and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014.

All schools must have regard to the Code when taking decisions relating to pupils with SEN or disabilities. This is explained on page 13 of the Code and Section 77 of the Children and Families Act 2014.

3.2 Transitions for Children and Young People with SEND

The term 'transition' can be used to describe the changes for a child or young person with SEND when they are moving into, within, between or out of educational settings. Key transitions can be particularly challenging for children with Education, Health, and Care (EHC) plans and those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and it is crucial that all transitions are well planned and coordinated.

The key education transitions are:

- Beginning the Early Years Foundation Stage (0 to 2 years)
- Moving from Early Years to Primary
- Moving Key Stages within Primary (Early Years Foundation to Key Stage 1, Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2)
- Moving from Primary to Secondary (even if the child is Electively Home Educated)
- Moving from Secondary to Further/ Higher Education, or employment, and Preparing for Adulthood.

Effective transition planning for children with EHC (Education, Health and Care) plans and SEND involves careful coordination between schools, parents or carers, and relevant support services. The transition should aim to ensure that the child's specific needs, accommodations, and aspirations are well-considered throughout the process. This includes identifying suitable educational settings, providing adequate support structures, and facilitating continuity of care and services to help the child to prepare for a successful transition into adulthood.

Phase transfer reviews, also known as transition reviews, are a crucial part of the process to ensure that children and young people with EHC plans experience smooth transitions between different phases of their education. Phase transfer reviews happen in the school year before the transition and ensures the EHC plan is amended to reflect any needs, outcomes or provision that must be in place before, during and after the transition. There are statutory deadlines by which Walsall must have amended and issued the EHC plan.

3.3 **Walsall Phase Transfer Operational Process for Children and Young People with an EHC Plan for 2022 to 2023**

In the previous 2022/2023 academic year, we had the following numbers of children and young people in phase transfer cohorts:

- Early Years: 136
- Year 6: 232
- Year 11: 191
- Year 13/14: 321

Transition from Nursey to Primary Education (Nursery 2 EHC Review)

The deadline date for securing a reception place was the 15th February 2023. This can be difficult for nursery aged children as any start the EHC assessment at some point during the year group and many assessments are finalised after the deadline day due to the twenty-week assessment. In addition, some children are under compulsory school age and may stay in a nursery setting until the term before their fifth birthday. For this reason, Walsall achieved placements for 79% of nursery aged children entering primary education.

Transition from Primary to Secondary School (Year 6 EHC Review)

The statutory deadline for the final EHC plan to be issued or amended for the child's move to secondary school is by 15th February in Year 6. Last year Walsall completed 91% of year 6 transfers on time. The remaining phase transfers included difficulties securing placements and children who started statutory assessment too late to meet the deadline. By July 100% of children had appropriate placements named for year 7.

Transition from Secondary School to Post-16 Education, Training, or Employment: (Year 11)

The statutory deadline for finalising EHC plans for post-16 destinations is the 31st March. In Walsall we were able to secure 74% of year 11's by the deadline and 96% of all placements by the end of June. By the end of July 2023, all year 11 children had appropriate placements and provision within their EHC plans.

Within Primary Phase transfers (Year 2 EHC Reviews)

Year 2 is considered a phase transfer year group when the child is leaving infant school to start a separate junior school. The statutory deadline date is the 15th February of year 2. Walsall were able to secure 97% of children entering year 3 by the date. The remainder were agreed by the end of July 2023.

Improvements in Phase Transfer and Transition Planning for 2023 to 2024

In 2023, the EHC team used a temporary process to improve on the phase transfers from 2022 and to ensure all children had appropriate provision for September 2023. We have been able to reflect on the successes of this and implement a revised Annual Review Project to ensure progress is sustainable and effective. The below areas summarise the action plan and activities.

Early Years (EY) 0 to 5 Years

From September 2023, we have started to plan EY transitions a year in advance of the child's move to primary school. The Early Years SENCOS have received transition planning training. We recognise that the EHC pathway is 0 to 25 and as a result, we are establishing a robust 0 to 2 EHC pathway including health visitors and paediatrics who are identifying children with complex needs from birth and bringing them to the attention of the EHC system through the health gateway. The aim is that all children who need an EHC plan have one in place before they start education. In addition, our inclusion agenda includes ways in which the SENCOS in primary schools can support with visits, meetings, and sharing of information between the settings to ensure a seamless transition between nursery and primary schools.

Our Portage home teaching service has been a lifeline for children aged 2-4 with cognition and learning needs who have not yet entered formal education settings. This service has not only been incredibly valuable to both our Local Authority and families but has also facilitated accelerated progress for children. It ensures that children have an EHC plan in place before transitioning to an educational setting and empowers parents to confidently support their child's learning and development. Building on the success of our Portage home teaching service, we have extended the opportunity to early years settings to receive training for their staff. This training equips them with the knowledge and skills needed to support the smooth transition of children from home to school settings. We are delighted to report that this training has been met with overwhelming enthusiasm, with 12 settings already signed up. Training sessions, organised in collaboration with the Portage Association, are scheduled for later this term. This initiative ensures that our commitment to supporting children's development extends beyond the home and into their early education environments

Primary Transfers

We have made some progress within transition planning to ensure EHC plans are ready at the point of transition without delay. The new annual review process was launched to schools last autumn and followed up with a Guide on how to complete an annual review on the Hub, although some schools still use the old processes. The new Inclusion Framework supports SENCOS (Special Educational Needs Coordinators) to move the transition planning for this phase to in Year 5, ensuring that we can confirm the contents by Year 6. Effective transition planning includes early communication between the primary and secondary schools, along with collaboration with specialists and parents. Our EHC Plan Drafting allows for transition planning and can include provision around new environments, larger class sizes, and different teaching styles.

Preparation for Adulthood reviews (Year 9 onwards)

For young people with SEND, the transition from compulsory education to post-16 education, training, or employment is important. Our transition planning is focused on preparing them for adulthood and the Annual review paperwork now included areas on training and independent living skills. We are aiming to begin our transition planning process for this phase in Year 9. The team are using the Preparation for Adulthood Website guide on writing outcomes to ensure these are robust in EHC plans. For older children and young people, from year 9, SENCOS must now consider their preparation for adulthood (PFA) in the annual review. This includes areas on post-16 education, training, employment opportunities, and independent living skills. These areas are reflected in a specific PFA EHC plan for children 14 years and older.

Improved Paperwork

Our annual review paperwork has been adapted to include Person-Centred Planning to ensure this is a key approach in all transitions for children with SEND. The EHC team have completed the CDC (Council For Disabled Children) online learning modules which include training on child's strengths, preferences, and aspirations, ensuring that their individual needs are at the centre of the transition process.

Effective Communication

In 2022, we started our phase transfer process for children and young people with an EHC plan a year before the transition. A letter was sent to families, with a parental preference form for them to complete and inform the EHC Team of which school they would like their child to attend in September 2023. The form was not routinely returned which delayed naming schools. This year we have moved to an online form which is easier to fill in and return. All SENCOS have a link to the form and are completing this with parents at the annual reviews (which are happening in the Autumn Term). The form is stored electronically, and the team are able to see immediately which places are required for September 2024.

Effective communication between all stakeholders is a focus of development within the EHC team. The EHC Team have established and maintained communication with Walsall's Admissions Team to keep them informed of places. This system worked well and will be strengthened in 2023/2024.

The EHC team handbook includes details of how to host meetings, ensuring that everyone involved is aware of the child's progress and any adjustments needed

during transitions. The EHC team is fully staffed with permanent Family Liaison Officers (FLOS). This ensure that every family has a named officer who is dedicated to annual reviews and will support the family through the process. Every child will have their EHC plan transferred to the new template at the point of review and updated where needed. Parents are central to decision making and the new annual review process allows parents to be part of decision making at the meeting. We have introduced a scheme of delegation which allows SENCOS and officers to make some decisions at meetings without the need to bring information into the decision making groups. This avoids delays and allows the EHC plan to be updated in the meeting. In addition, parents and SENCOS are given a word document of the plan which they can amend and write directly onto with any suggested amendments.

Annual Review Backlog

Despite being successful at transfer reviews, we are aware we have much work this year on ensuring all children have a timely review and a plan which is updated and reflects needs and provision. The Annual Review Clearance project started in September 2023. This includes a weekly meeting to identify children who require actions and tasks undertaken. EHC officer training is planned for October which focuses on annual reviews. This includes clarity about timelines, the legislation, what their role and what decisions can be made. The inclusion framework in Walsall which was launched in the summer term on 2022-23 includes a focus on annual reviews. The relaunch of the expectations of paperwork and statutory timelines is the early stages of implementation. This will support schools with access to a dedicated team's area and inclusion email address regarding annual reviews. Schools are being alerted to which annual reviews are due and when they will be required to submit their paperwork. The EHC team are completing online learning modules on Annual Reviews. This is the first term when the EHC Annual Review team has been fully staffed with permanent officers. This will support parents and schools with a named officer.

4. *Financial information*

There are no key financial factors within this report.

5. *Reducing Inequalities*

Reducing inequalities for children and young people with an Education, Health, and Care (EHC) plan during key transitions is paramount to ensuring their successful journey through the education system and into adulthood. These critical transitions, such as moving from primary to secondary school or preparing for post-16 education and employment, can be particularly challenging for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). By providing targeted support, personalised transition planning, and effective communication between schools, parents, and relevant support services, we can help minimize disparities and ensure that each child with an EHC plan has an equal opportunity to thrive during these pivotal moments. This proactive approach not only supports their academic progress but also fosters their overall development and prospects for a fulfilling future.

6. Decide


The committee may decide to request further information on the education outcomes of children with a social worker.

7. Respond

Any recommendations made by the committee will be responded to by the appropriate service area

8. Review

The actions and outcomes within this report are monitored by Access & Inclusion SMT and Children's Services DMT and through a monthly performance board.



Author

Judith Nash

Head of SEND and Inclusion

☎ 653682

✉ Judith.nash@walsall.gov.uk

19.09.2023