Welcoming more pupils into schools

Schools have extensive plans in place for managing the return to school in the next few weeks. It's going to be important to create a strong bridge back to school life. Lockdown has presented a variety of challenges and for children in care and previously in care, these challenges may have been greater given their experiences of loss in their lives. There have also been gains; children and young people enjoying the time at home, developing deeper bonds with their carers and not having to manage the social anxiety related to being with large groups of peers. Many children have managed well and have been able to focus well on their learning away from the pressures of school. Even though it will be positive for us to see our colleagues and our classes and for pupils to see their friends, we can acknowledge that returning to school also comes with a degree of loss for staff and pupils alike.

Greetings - parting at the school door will be harder as adults can’t comfort as normal. How can we make greetings fun? Music, rhythms or song to start the day? Hi fives with distance?

Emotional registration - choose an emoji, card that shows how you feel, sentence starters for children to complete, feelings board to stick up your emoji. Warm and welcoming language - ‘I missed seeing your smile’ ‘I thought of you when I…’. How can DT or keyworker check in to see the pupil?

Space - making their space their own - desk names, own equipment pack. Wall display of photos from lockdown or work completed? Area for calm down? Place to leave bag safely?

Self care and personal hygiene - everyone will need explicit teaching about how to keep safe. How can we support our pupils sensitively? Children with complex SEN may need support.

Routines - Be supportive and empathetic as it will take time for children to learn new rules. Routines may take much longer to stick than usual. Plan for pupils who may push boundaries. Listening, empathy and restorative approaches are best.

Attachment needs of children - it might be good to have your own script- ‘I know it’s strange that we can’t get close. It feels weird to me and I feel sad for now. I am looking forward to the time when it doesn’t have to be like this’. Alternatives to tactile connection - make them visual - e.g. draw a heart sticker on the board you can touch, child could have a sticker or a felt pen heart on the wrist. What kind of substitutes could there be for transition objects? How can you let pupils know you are holding them in mind?

Anxieties - avoid reassurance but acknowledge anxieties. Model calmness. Avoid talk of assessment/ gaps until everyone is well settled again. Use PACE approach to support pupils. PACE explanation here

Endings - make time to check in and review the day and talk through what tomorrow looks like. Make time for reflection and relaxation.
Personal Education Plan update

Thank you for organising reviews during lockdown and managing the meetings online. It is so important to schedule these meetings and to have the time to discuss how things are going and to think creatively about how to plan the next steps.

In particular these reviews are crucial for any children or young people who are transitioning to a new school or college place.

The more conversation and planning we can do, the better prepared both schools and pupils will be in moving on to new schools and colleges. Schools are already doing a lot to maintain home/school contact;

- Phone calls, video calls, emails
- Postcards
- Celebration of work sent
- Using different ways to gather the voice of the pupil ideas for ways to do this [here](#)
- Virtual tour of school or new classroom arrangements
- Making contacts with DTs or support staff in new school – staff attending online meetings
- Thinking about rights of passage - leavers rituals, cards, goodbyes.
- Our year 6/7 caseworkers and our year 11 transition lead Izzy have lots of ideas to support transition so please get in touch if you would like to talk through plans.

Supporting foster carers with home learning

With schools widening their opening, primary schools will have less capacity to set bespoke online tasks. The Virtual School is supporting the distribution of a new app for foster carers - the Mobile Curriculum Learning app. The feedback is very positive, and the app has some really good content on it. It is available on smart phones, tablets/iPads and via the web. The app covers a range of topics and curriculum areas. Foster carers have access to a license for the next year and we are encouraging them to use it. It would be worth asking your families how they are getting on with this and encouraging them to make use of it to vary the activities they can do at home or to enhance what they are doing at school.

Foster carers have also had access to some excellent training through the Foster Carers App which is also supported by The Virtual School.

Many foster carers have been really proactive supporting learning and have enjoyed the quality time with their children. In many cases relationships have developed well and carers now know much more about how their child learns. This is worth bearing in mind on the return to schools – foster carers may be better able to contribute to discussions about progress, barriers to learning and potential strategies for raising attainment.

EHCP – legal update

If you have pupils with EHCPs or are waiting for an application to be processed, there have been some updates from the government related to Covid 19. From 1st May adjustments to the Special Needs and Disability Regulations relate to timescales and provision. Local Authorities normally have set deadlines in which to process EHCP requests, produce draft and final EHCPs and comply with tribunals. The timescales for all these processes have been temporarily relaxed. The Local Authority must still carry out the usual duties, but for now they need to do so in a time that is ‘reasonably practicable’.

There are also changes to the duties to provision on an EHCP. With the restrictions in place due to Coronavirus, it has been difficult for schools and other agencies to deliver what is set out in section F on an EHCP. There is a temporary reduction in these duties and Local Authorities must now use ‘reasonable endeavours’ to deliver provision. For schools this means that SENCOs need to communicate with their SEN case officer and discuss what is possible. Examples of temporary adjustments may be part time attendance, online support from EP, SALT or bespoke input from the SENCO. DTs who are SENCOs as well will be up with this guidance and busy doing risk assessments. DTs who are not SENCOs can read the guidance [here](#).

Children in Care Council have been running video link mini meetings and the online forum has been fantastic for getting new members talking confidently. Older members in the council have been on hand alongside the adults to facilitate and run activities and there are more meetings planned. If you think this would be great for any of your pupils contact James Collins james.collins@oxfordshire.gov.uk