

GUIDE 12. MOVING ON TO JUNIOR SCHOOL

This guide will only be relevant to schools that have a separate junior school. Many primary schools do not have separate infant and junior schools.

When it is time to progress to junior school, a child who has a visible difference will usually have attended infant school long enough for everyone to have become quite used to their appearance. This is in general very positive for the child, enabling them to enjoy good social interactions with the staff and children they meet every day.

At the new school there will be many children and staff who have not met this child before and will be quite unfamiliar with the way they look.

In addition to all the usual concerns about starting at a new school, the child's parents/carers are likely to have specific anxieties about how their child will be accepted among so many new people. From being out and about with their child in various situations where there are other people, the family will know that entering any new situation involves exposing their child to scrutiny, curiosity, questions, and comments.

Alongside all the usual meetings and visits which precede a child's move to their new school, two specific kinds of additional preparations will be needed:

- The staff at the new school will need to prepare for pupils' reactions of staring, curiosity and concern to the new pupil's appearance.
- The child themselves will need some preparation to for the challenge of meeting lots of children, most of them older, who have not seen them before.

Allow plenty of time for these preparations – begin them well before the first visit the children make to their new school.

If there is a delay in establishing which pupils will be attending which schools (if a school is oversubscribed for instance) staff preparations will be delayed. But it will still be possible to work with the child so that they can learn and practise skills and strategies for managing other people's reactions to their appearance.

1 WORKING WITH THE CHILD WHO IS MOVING ON

A child who has a visible difference will get on much better if they have:

- a basic understanding of why people react as they do to their visible difference
- at least one strategy for dealing with curiosity in a positive way
- some social skills for talking about themselves and asking other children about themselves.

This is quite a lot to ask of such a young child, so begin to plan early in their final year at infant school and do be aware that they may need a lot of support and monitoring during the first few months after they move on. If you can, observe how the child manages when they encounter children and adults they have not met before. Usually this can be done when you take a group of the children on a trip or visit, such as a pantomime or music show at a nearby school or a special fun day for children at a local park or leisure centre. Ideally, there will be other groups of children there, so you will hopefully get a chance to see the child's coping strategies. Here are a few things to focus on:

- How does the child seem in unfamiliar surroundings? Are they nervous or confident?

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- How do other people react when they notice the child? For example, do you see any children notice and then draw their friends' attention to the child with the visible difference? (This is quite a common response when groups of children see someone they haven't met before who has a visible difference.)
- Does the child stay close to the children he/she already knows well, or do they engage with or speak to anyone new?
- Is the child over-friendly to strangers?

2. WORKING WITH PARENTS/CARERS

It will also be important to ask the parents/carers how they and their child get on when they encounter new people. For example:

- Do they have established strategies for coping with reactions?
- What do they say if anyone makes a comment or asks a question?
- What would they like to say in such situations?
- What sort of words do they prefer when they discuss their child's visible difference? Would they like help in dealing with the reactions from parents of other children at the new school?

Explain to the parents/carers that you are planning to teach their child to respond with confidence when other children at the new school, many of them older, are curious about the way their child looks. Parents may feel less worried if they are involved with these preparations.

3. PREPARING THE CHILD

Below are some points to help ensure the child is well prepared for meeting new people at junior school. You will see that there are a lot of topics covered, so between you, you will have to decide which areas you want to cover. This is quite a lot to take on-board for a 7 year-old child, so use your knowledge of the child to decide how to proceed.

- How aware is the child of other people's reactions? Do they know that most people will not have seen anyone before who has a visible difference? How does the child feel about this?
- Does the child have ideas of their own about what they might like to say or do when children at the new school stare or ask questions about their appearance?
- Is the child happy to answer questions?
- When people ask, what does the child normally say? (For more about learning this essential social skill, see the [Guide on Having something to say.](#))
- How comfortable / uncomfortable is the child with this?
- Would the child like help to work out some answers, and opportunities to practise?
- Can the child talk in more detail about their visible difference? (for example, when getting to know another child better and becoming friends.)
- How comfortable / uncomfortable is he/she with this?
- Would the child like some help with saying a bit more about their visible difference and some of the experiences they have had?
- Can the child talk about other aspects of themselves too – family and pets, likes and dislikes, what they enjoy doing at the weekends, etc.
- Can the child ask other people about themselves and get to know them?
- Would the child like help with this and opportunities to practise these important social skills?

Some of the points on this checklist will be useful for all the children moving on to their new school. For more information about getting on well with other children, see the [Guide on Practical support with social skills](#).

4. WORKING WITH STAFF AT THE NEW SCHOOL

You can let the new school know about *A World of Difference* resources which explore visible difference. The resources include [CPD](#) for teachers and [classroom and assembly](#) resources for pupils.

Because visible difference is relatively rare, most teachers, particularly in smaller schools, have little experience of supporting a child who looks different. They will need to know:

- Reactions such as curiosity, concern and looking or staring are quite usual.
- The best way to manage other children's (and adults') looks and stares is to say something very brief about the visible difference and then move the subject on to something else. (See the [Guide on Having something to say](#).)
- The quality of the child's social interactions will have an impact on their self-esteem and consequently on school experiences and outcomes longer-term.
- The Equality Act, establishes visible difference (severe disfigurement) as a disability and requires schools to anticipate and make adjustments so that a pupil or prospective pupil with a visible difference will not experience less favourable treatment (see the Introduction to these *Guides*).
- The special social and psychological issues associated with visible difference should be understood and addressed whether or not the child has been identified as having special educational needs and disabilities or sees themselves as having a disability.

Education professionals sometimes express their inclusive intentions by saying "He will be treated the same as everyone else" or "All our children are special" or other similar statements that endorse inclusion. But good intentions and inclusion policies require preparation and action. In addition, 'equality' in a school setting, is not about treating everyone the same, but removing barriers.

It is essential to avoid a situation where the child visits or starts their new school, all the other pupils turn to look at whatever it is about their appearance that is different, and staff have not been prepared and do not know how to respond to this. It will be very helpful if staff at the new school look at the [Guide on Starting junior school](#), in the section on *7-11 years* and the Changing Faces [web pages for teachers](#)