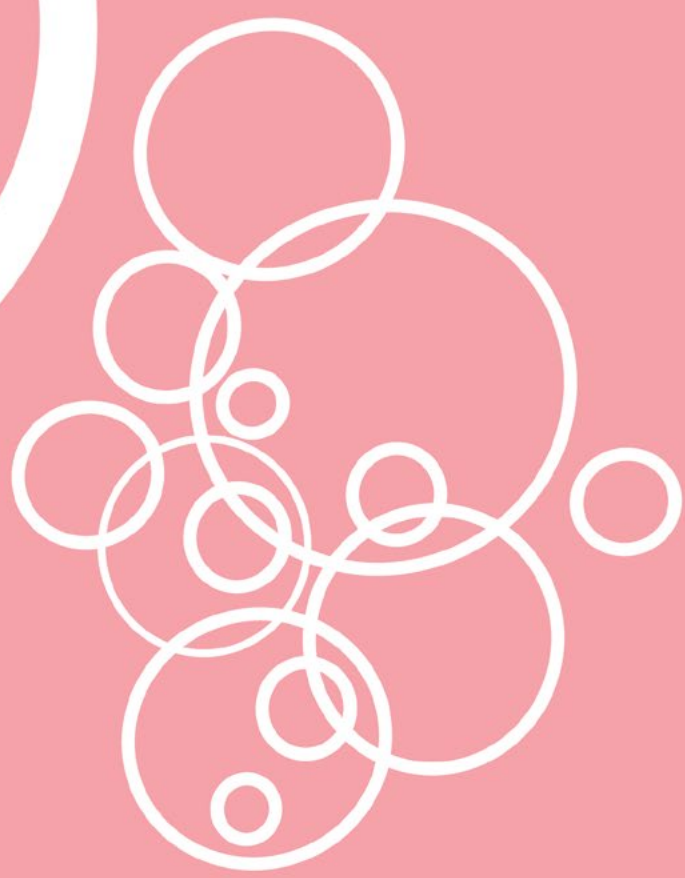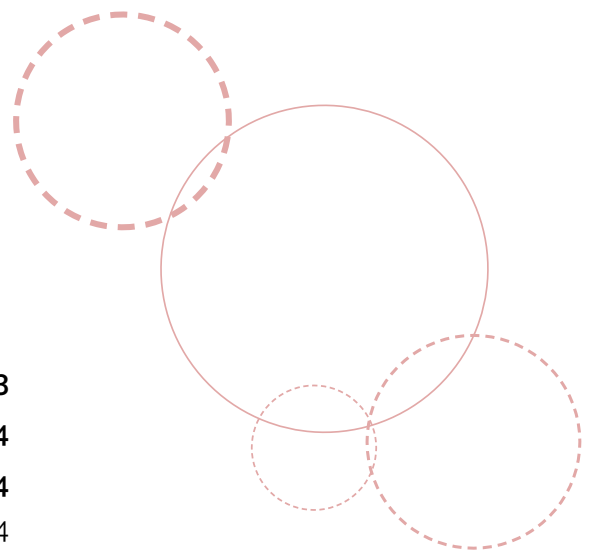# TRANSITION TOOLKIT: SUPPORTING SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION EXPERIENCES FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION NEEDS IN THE EARLY YEARS

Created by Lancashire County Council's Educational Psychology Service 2023

lancashire.gov.uk

Lancashire County Council

Contents

Introduction

This document is created by colleagues within Lancashire County Council's Educational Psychology Service. It aims to support settings to feel confident and equipped when planning the transition to Reception Year for pre-school children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or social communication needs.

When beginning this project, the hopes and aspirations for the toolkit were outlined.

They were:
- To provide a model of good practice for transition.
- To support settings to aid the successful transition to Reception Year.
- To promote and aid inclusion.
- To support settings to recognise their strengths in supporting children.
- To aid children's needs being better understood.
- To highlight the need for well-executed transition for children with ASD or social communication needs.

Why is Transition Important?

To transition is to 'change' or 'move'. In the lives of children, this often means moving from one phase of education to another, however, transitions also occur regularly throughout a child's day. In this document, transition will refer to the move from the pre-school or nursery setting to the formalised school setting. All children experience transitions and children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are expected to be supported with transitions via a carefully planned and prepared processes (SEND Code of Practice, 2015), in line with The Equality Act (2010). An effective transition positively impacts children, and when managed sensitively, can provide them with the support and skills to flourish in a new setting.

Whilst many children, particularly those with SEND, can find transitions difficult, for children with a diagnosis of ASD or other social communication needs, it can be particularly challenging. For children with this profile of strengths and needs, the difficulty can stem from inflexibility of thought and increased anxiety linked to uncertainty. This, alongside differences in understanding their social environment, makes it tricker for these children to grasp the expectations and routines of a new setting.

Preparing for Transition
School Readiness

> *"Children should start school healthy, happy, communicative, sociable, curious, active and ready equipped for the next phase of life and learning"*
>
> (Supporting Families in the Foundation Years, 2011).

This section aims to focus on the term school readiness and what this means for the children entering your setting. This term does not solely focus on the child but also the responsibilities and key roles that practitioners, teachers and families have in ensuring a child is ready and able to access learning.

What is School Readiness?

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework provides a general definition of school readiness as "the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life." (Statutory Framework for the EYFS, 2014). This definition describes the interaction between the child and their environment in addition to their cultural experiences that maximises their developmental outcomes.

A preferred description is that of UNICEF (UNICEF: School Readiness: A Conceptual Framework, 2012), who refers to three elements that can increase a child's likelihood of success (see Appendix 5).

These elements are:
- Children's readiness for school affects their learning and development.
- Early years setting and schools' readiness for children ensures learning environments are child-friendly and adapt to the diverse needs of young learners and their families. This refers to how practitioners create a learning environment that supports children's further development when they enter school.
- Families' readiness for school promotes a positive and supportive approach to education, their children's learning and the transition from home to school.

We believe that it is these three aspects that will maximise each child's likelihood of success as they progress through school.

What School Readiness is not

When reflecting on what this term means it is important that we are clear in what it does not mean. Being school ready is not about compliant behaviour where children are expected to sit at a table and work or sit still on a carpet or even lining up. It is important that this term is not about embarking too early on a formal approach to learning.

A Holistic Approach

One of the key elements of early years is the wholesome approach where we observe and support children to develop holistically.

This approach acknowledges that, in order to be an effective learner, all areas of development need nurture and support. This development is underpinned by play and it is through play that children develop physically, creatively, intellectually, socially and emotionally. Through play children will gain life skills.

All the elements in UNICEF's description are important and need to work together to be successful.

Children's Readiness

The characteristics of effective teaching and learning set out how children learn. The term school readiness is referred to in the EYFS Profile at the end of the EYFS as "providing parents, practitioners and teachers with a well-rounded picture of the child's knowledge, understanding and abilities, their progress against expected levels and their readiness for school." Settings are encouraged to strengthen children's knowledge and understanding in all areas of learning. It is important that we consider this when we are planning and thinking about what it actually means to be 'school ready'.

The Are you Ready? report (Ofsted, 2014) reported that settings that were most effective at addressing this issue maintained regular tracking of a child's progress, which was then used to assess any barriers to learning by working with children to develop their skills. Settings that were most successful encouraged school readiness through involving parents in the process.

Children need practitioners and families to support them with opportunities to:
- Feel secure socially, emotionally and physically in order to enable them to behave appropriately as well as become confident active learners using all their skills and senses.
- Develop their knowledge, understanding and skills across all areas of learning.
- Enable them to initiate activities, follow their lead and make decisions.
- Have time to follow their own ideas, explore their interests in depth and make links.
- Be able to become deeply involved in activities and develop their concentration.
- Be able to learn in different ways at a rate that is right for them.
- Play and work independently and cooperatively, at times without close supervision.
- Follow instructions and respond to questions.
- Know how to keep themselves safe and healthy.

Early Years' and Settings' Readiness

There are a number of ways that settings can support children in becoming school ready.
These include:

- Have an understanding of the child's background and being sensitive to their home learning environment.
- Develop respectful and meaningful relationships with parents and carers to help encourage engagement and involvement in their child's learning.
- Have a robust 'key person' approach which is sensitive to and fully inclusive of all children's needs and ensuring these needs are met.
- Provide a stimulating environment and plan activities that are purposeful and engaging. Have a good balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities.
- Plan for and provide opportunities to extend children's speaking skills, ensuring the needs of children who require alternative communication systems are met.
- Plan for and provide active opportunities that teach 'appropriate' behaviours through playful activities and routines.
- Ensure there are opportunities for children to develop independence skills and resilience, avoiding doing everything for them, e.g., wiping themselves after using the toilet. Use visual 'jigs' and backward chaining to support them in the steps needed.
- Share with parents and carers the characteristics of school readiness and their child's progress. Checklists (see Appendix 1) and activity packs can be provided to help them understand what they can do to help.
- Ensure all staff are trained in school readiness and aware of their responsibilities in supporting the children in the setting. It is important to emphasise to staff, parents, and carers that all children develop at a different rate and their journey towards school readiness may look different to another child in the setting.

Families' Readiness

It is key that parents and carers are involved and are ready to support their child before and as they enter school. The creation and maintaining of effective relationships with parents during transition can help them to understand the process, their child's development and what their role is in preparing their child for school. Working with parents and carers ensures consistency and can build a child's confidence.

Providing a guide to school readiness can be useful so that parents and carers have something to refer to, understand what it means to be school ready and support their child during the process.

It is important to understand that a family's ability to be ready to support their child to be school ready can be affected by many factors, such as socioeconomic factors such as poverty. It is important that practitioners recognise this when supporting families. Sharing what will happen during the transition to school and what the key steps look like will help parents and carers understand what is involved.

In Summary

When reflecting on school readiness and what effective preparation looks like, early years settings and professionals need to work with parents and carers to ensure progress is made toward several key skills. In order to do this with ease, assess where each child is in relation to these skills and identify their individual needs and where they might need a little extra support.
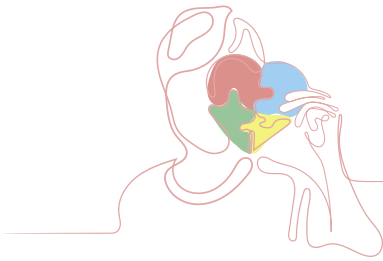
Gathering the Child's Voice

Gathering the views of the individual child is crucial to any transition planning and is in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which outlines that all children, including those with SEND, have the right to have their views sought and expressed. By taking the time to gather the child's views it ensures that their voice, wishes and hopes are at the very centre of any plan that is created. Gathering the views of early years children requires creativity and patience. Examples of possible resources that could be used include observing the child and recording what they enjoy, giving the child a camera and supporting them to capture their favoured experiences, and the use of sorting activities. Additionally, please see Appendix 7 for further examples on ways to gather a child's views or Appendix 2 and 3 for ways to create a One Page Profile.

The Transition Team

Once the receiving setting's details are known, a transition team should be created. The transition team's aim is to provide a coordinated, organised and smooth transition period (see Appendix 4).

The transition team should:
- Convene as soon as possible to enable an enhanced transition process.
- Adhere to person centred planning approaches.
- Have a lead professional who is the main contact for all members of the team, including the child's parents or carers.
- Include all key partners within the child's life (e.g., the child, the child's parents or carers, current and receiving Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENDCo), current and receiving Key Workers and specialist professionals if appropriate).
- Ensure all necessary documentation, that is relevant, is shared across settings.
- Facilitate the exchange of information, strategies and successful provisions (i.e., a 'what works' guide).
- Ensure each member understands their role and actions agreed for them to complete.
- Record agreed actions on an accessible template.

Working with Families

Working closely with families, across all aspects of a child's educational experience is beneficial; however, during the transition period, collaborative and supporting engagement with parents and carers is key to successful outcomes for children with ASD and/or social communication needs.

The transition from pre-school or nursery to a formalised learning setting is often a stressful and anxious time for parents and carers. Existing and receiving settings can support parents in the following ways:

- Ensure good communication, not just in a verbal format as it can be overwhelming to remember all important information. Provide a record of discussions (i.e., those held within the transition team meetings) so that families have something to refer to.
- Provide a key point of contact. Usually this is the professional leading the transition team.
- Provide opportunities for families to share concerns or worries.
- Provide a medium for the sharing of information, to ensure that nothing important is missed.
- Explore expectations and be transparent in how a child's needs can be met within the setting.
- Be compassionate- this is a worrying time for many families.
- Be proactive with the enhanced transition process.

Families know their children the best and they can be a valuable asset in preparing children with ASD and/or social communication needs for the transition to formalised learning. Alongside the current and receiving setting, the following are suggestions for ways to prepare the child for an upcoming transition:

- Use picture books and videos of the receiving settings (please see Appendix 6).
- Ensure the child and their family can visit the setting at different times of the day. This allows the child to experience the environment in a way that reduces the unknown.
- Ensure that the child can meet their new teacher and key support staff.
- Increase structured activities, where possible, within the pre-school or nursery setting to widen the child's tolerance to adult-led and directed activities.
- Practice some aspects of the formalised learning environment (e.g., sitting on the carpet, getting the coat off the peg or lining up for lunch).
- Aim to ensure that children, where possible, have the required school readiness skills (please see Appendix 1 and 5).
- Consider if there are opportunities for the child to take part in additional transition or extra-curricular activities at the receiving setting.
- Consider the use of social stories and comic strip stories to support children with the upcoming change.
- Complete activities with the child around asking for help and expressing when they need support.
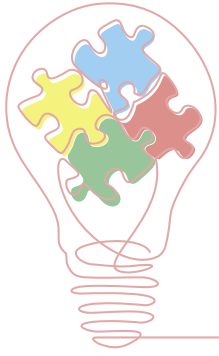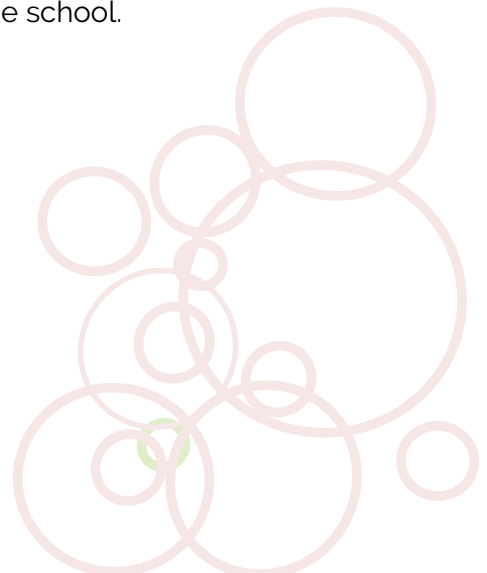
Supporting Success Post-Transition
What Success May Look Like:
Moving to a new setting can be a challenging process for some children, particularly those with ASD or social communication needs.

As the adults supporting transition, it can, at times, feel difficult to recognise what 'success' looks like. Particularly if there are still tricky days or instances. It is important to recognise progress, however small and celebrate the successes as they arise.

- Consistent communication between parents and carers and professionals (e.g., regular meetings, calls or a communication book).
- The child feels safe and secure in the setting (e.g., demonstrated by accepting comfort when distressed or being able to seek familiar adults).
- The child has a positive sense of school belonging.
- Positive relationships with staff are developing (e.g., children feel they have key staff whom they can seek out when needed).
- Including the voice of the child (e.g., regularly and consistently checked and views impacting support plans).
- Including parents' and carers' views (providing formats for parents and carers to share their views easily).
- Support for parents and carers is available (staff are knowledgeable of signposting resources that may support parents and carers).
- The child is demonstrating increased independence skills.
- Staff who understand the needs of children with autism and are confident in supporting pupils with ASD through transitional periods.
- Identifying areas for professional development for staff.
- Strategies personalised around the individual child.
- Continuous review of strategies used to identify whether these are effective or not.
- Using the experience and expertise of others from outside the school.
- Time for the pupil with ASD to be autistic.

Potential Difficulties Post-Transition:

Whilst a positive transition period can be achieved for any child, it is key to recognise that successful movement between settings will often still be accompanied by challenging days and experiences. Some of the frequently experienced difficulties are listed below. They may persist for significant periods of time or be fleeting.

- The child finds the new environment, routine, peers and staff challenging (may be displayed by instances of dysregulation or distress, shut down or overwhelm, difficulties settling without caregivers).
- Difficulty understanding new situations (e.g., appearing to not understand the setting routine or resisting adult-directed activities).
- A larger setting may be overwhelming in terms of sensory processing of all the information.
- The child may not understand the social rules of their new setting (e.g., raising their hand to speak or getting up when it is carpet time).
- The child may struggle with long periods of structured, adult-led activities (particularly desk-based tasks).

References

1. AET (Autism Education Trust) transition toolkit document:
   Supporting learners with autism during transition (autismeducationtrust.org.uk)
2. Are you Ready? Report by Ofsted (2014):
   Are_you_ready_Good_practice_in_school_readiness.pdf (publishing.service.gov.uk)
3. UNICEF, School Readiness: a conceptual framework (2012):
   School Readiness. A conceptual Framework. UNICEF (leicestershire.gov.uk)
4. SEND code of practice (2015):
   SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
5. Supporting Families in the Foundation Years (2011):
   Supporting families in the foundation years - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
6. Statutory Framework for the EYFS (2014): **Early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)**
7. The Equality Act (2010):
   Equality Act 2010 (legislation.gov.uk)
8. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:
   UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - UNICEF UK)

TRANSITION TOOLKIT

Appendix 1

School Readiness Checklist

	Done?
Staff understand the child's background and are able to be sensitive to their home learning environment.	
There is a robust 'key person' approach in the setting.	
There is a pre-determined plan to provide opportunities to extend children's speaking skills, with all adults knowing how to do this and when.	
Adults are confident in supporting a child if they require an alternative communication system.	
There are planned opportunities identified for children to develop independence skills and resilience. Staff know how to do this and when.	
All staff are trained in school readiness and aware of their responsibilities in supporting the children in the setting.	
Respectful and meaningful relationships with parents and carers are being developed.	
The characteristics of school readiness have been shared with parents so they can support at home. For example: • Developing the ability to be separate from main caregivers. • Trying on and tolerating wearing school uniform. • Developing skills in independence (i.e., putting on their coat, feeding themselves independently). • Developing positive sleep hygiene and routines at home to support positive school experiences.	
Plan for and provide active opportunities that teach 'appropriate' behaviours through playful activities and routines.	
Provide a stimulating environment and plan activities that are purposeful and engaging.	

One Page Profile Template

All About Me

My name is: _____

My birthday is: _____

My family includes: _____

My interests include:

I communicate by:
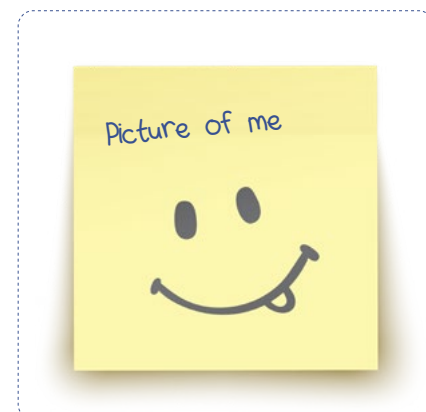
I am good at:

I struggle with:

You could help me by:

Example: One Page Profile

All About Me 🙂

Picture of me

My name is: _____

My birthday is: _____

My family includes: _____

My interests include:
Dinosaurs, playing outside, playing in the water and sand trays.

I communicate by:
Using single words and short familiar phrases.

I am good at:
Counting and singing my favourite nursery rhymes.

I struggle with:
Sharing, playing alongside my friends, managing my frustrations when I am upset.

You could help me by:
Distracting me with my favourite activities when I am upset,
Helping me feel comfortable playing next to my friends.

Appendix 4

Checklist for the Transition Team

Actions	Completed	Comments
Contact has been made with the receiving Primary school.		
A transition meeting has been organised and relevant people are invited.		
A transition book or Social StoryTM is written to introduce the new school, including photographs.		
School visits have been organised.		
Staff from the Primary school have visited and observed the child in their Early Years setting.		
A sensory assessment checklist has been completed for the child.		
A sensory environment audit of the Primary school has been conducted by staff and strategies have been discussed.		
Relevant documents have been created or updated (e.g., a child profile, SEND plan, EHCP (Education and Health Care Plan)).		
Staff at the Primary school have received autism training.		
The child is being familiarised with the new school route.		
Visual resources to support the child's understanding are in place.		
Rules, boundaries and expectations are clear from the start.		

Adapted from AET's 'Examples and templates for Early Years to Primary school transition' document, 03/21 :
Supporting learners with autism during transition (autismeducationtrust.org.uk)

Sensory assessment checklist:
AET_Individual_Sensory_Checklist.pdf (locala.org.uk)

Sensory environment audit:
Sensory Audit for Schools and Classrooms (education.gov.scot)

Appendix 5

Audit for Receiving Settings

Do You?	Our Current Practice	Ideas for Development
Does the school have whole school awareness training in autism?		
Are all staff aware of the associated difficulties of being on the autism spectrum? E.g., sensory sensitivities, sleep disturbance and dietary needs.		
Does the school have a named person to co-ordinate information about the children on the autism spectrum?		
Does the individual education plan (IEP) focus on targets relevant to the child-specific areas of recently assessed need?		
Are all staff who teach a child on the autism spectrum aware of their individual needs and do they have access to IEPs?		
Does the school offer, in consultation with the child, parents and professionals, a curriculum adapted to the child's needs and is this reflected in the child's SEND Plan/EHCP where applicable?		
Is account taken of individual children's special interests?		
Is the behaviour management system designed to take account of the child's understanding of behaviour and their personal motivation?		
Is there a quiet room/area available to use as a means of calming when necessary?		
Has a risk assessment been carried out which takes account of the lack of awareness of hazards a child on the autism spectrum might have?		
Does the school facilitate positive relationships between the child and their peers? E.g., 'circle of friends' or 'buddy scheme'.		
Have attempts been made to reduce distraction in the learning environment or to provide the pupil with a 'workstation'?		
Has the school attempted to reduce overwhelming sensory stimulation? E.g., strip lighting, acoustics, etc.		

Appendix 5

Audit for Receiving Settings (continued)

Do You?	Our Current Practice	Ideas for Development
Is there a variety of cues (e.g., tactile, visual, auditory) in use to help pupils with autism understand and navigate the environment?		
Are strategies in place to lessen the child's anxiety levels especially when moving between areas in school, in group time or at other busy times?		
Are there any break time / lunch clubs set up or strategies in place to support pupils on the autism spectrum during break / lunch periods?		
Do members of staff adopt autism-friendly communication strategies? (Visual cues, lists, key subject words and use of language should be considered.)		
Are expectations of the child made clear in every lesson?		
Are there opportunities to ensure that skills taught in one part of the day are generalised and transferred into other situations and settings?		
Is there a home-school communication system in place?		

See the Autism Education Trust's School Standards Framework document:
School-Standards-Framework_T-HUB-Sc-Mt_0.pdf (autismeducationtrust.org.uk)
for further information.

New School Booklet
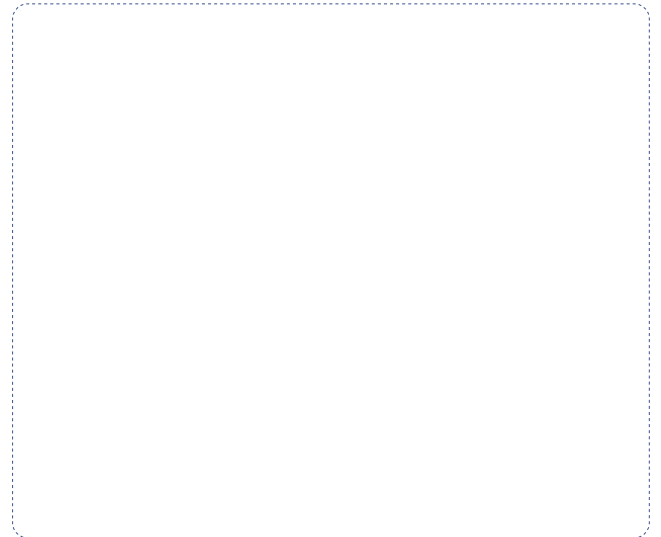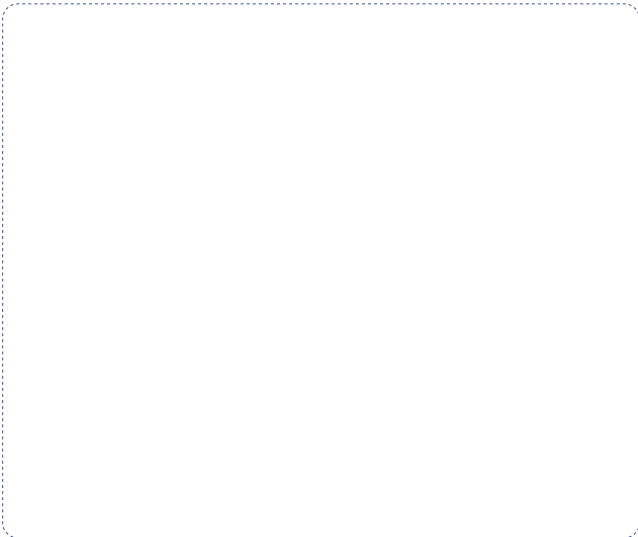
Picture of School Here

This is my school
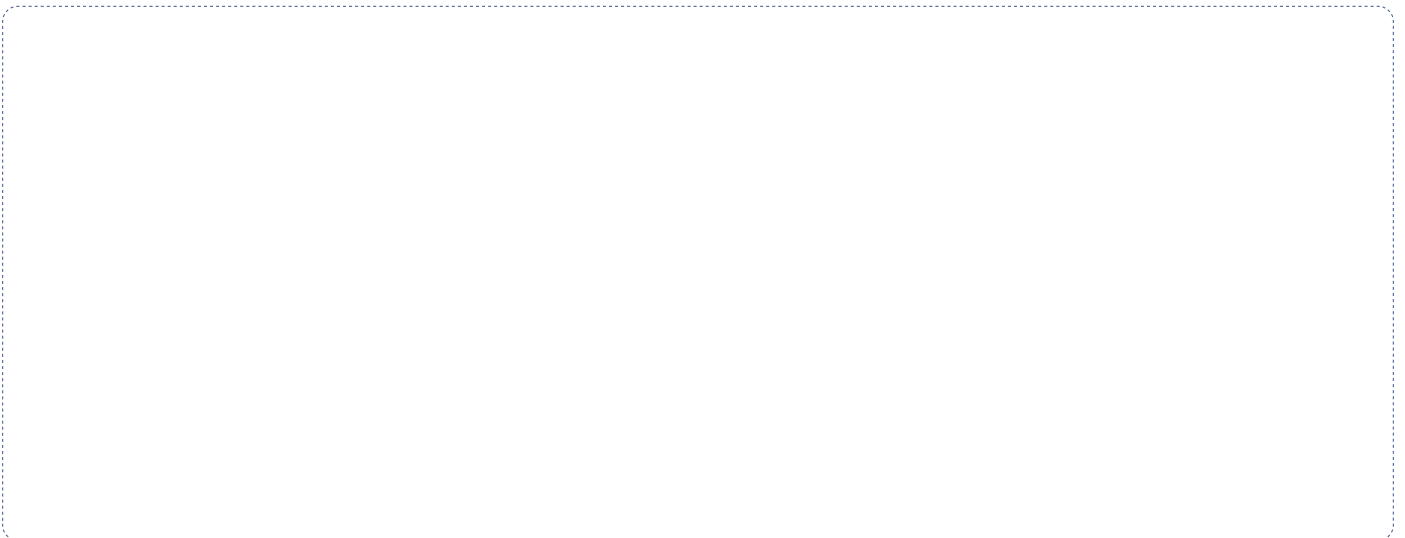
My classroom

My playground

My uniform
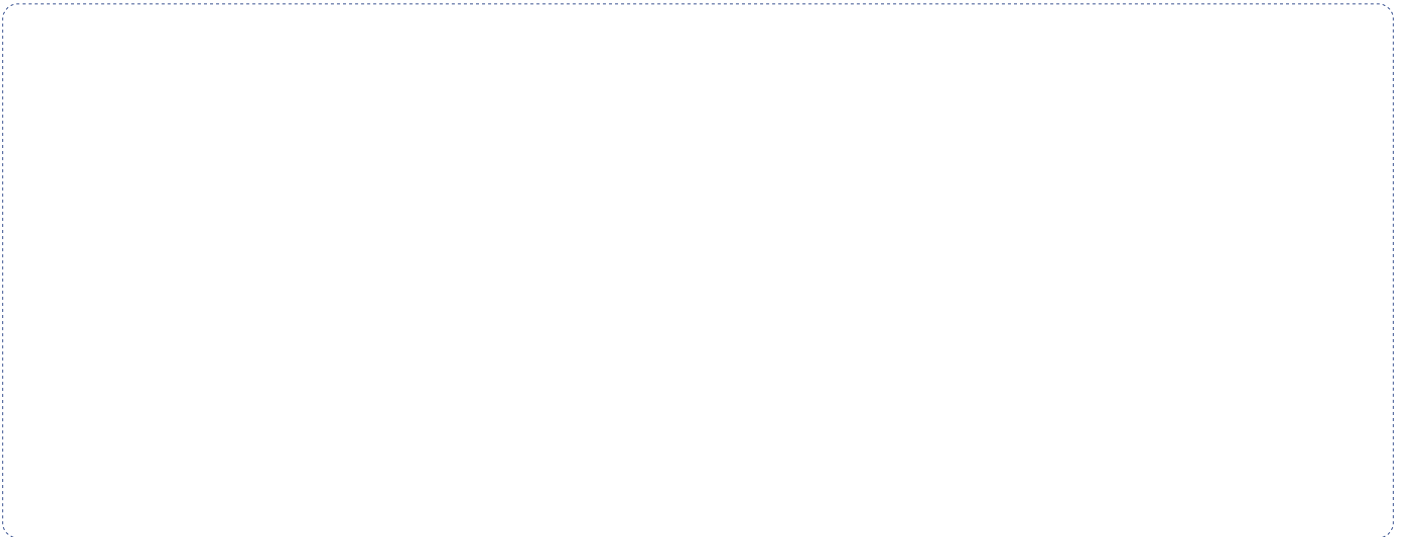
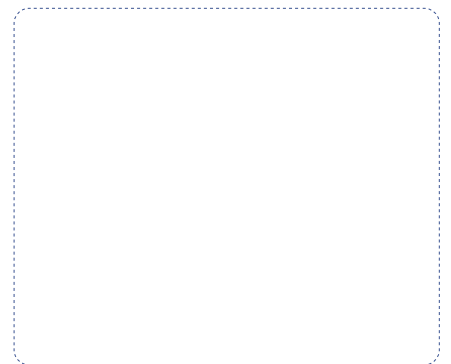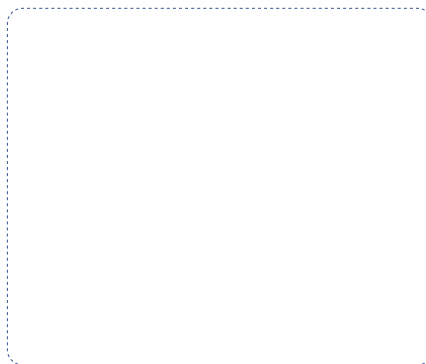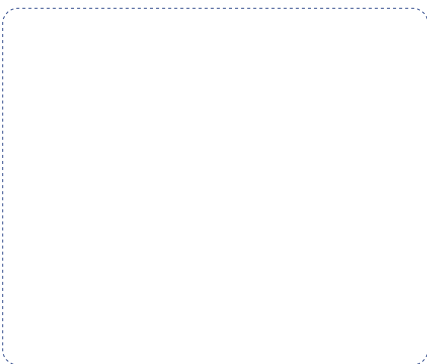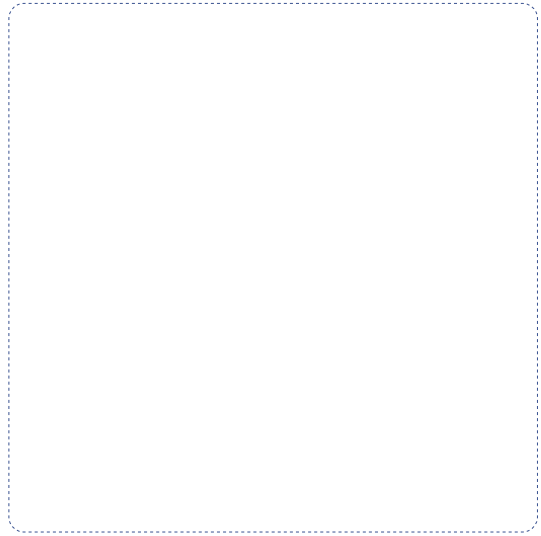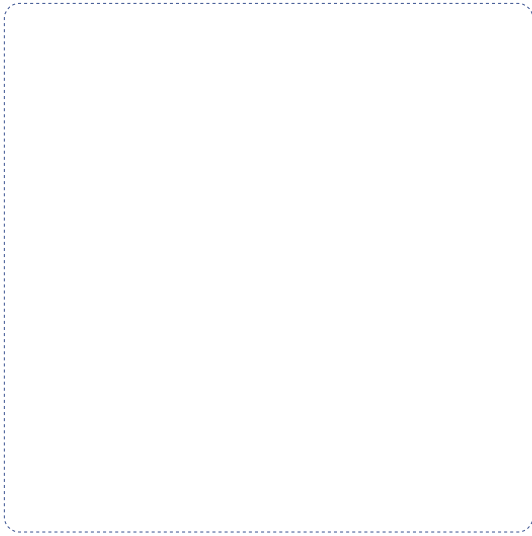## This is where I put my bag and coat

This is where I eat my lunch

Lunch time adults

Who can help me:

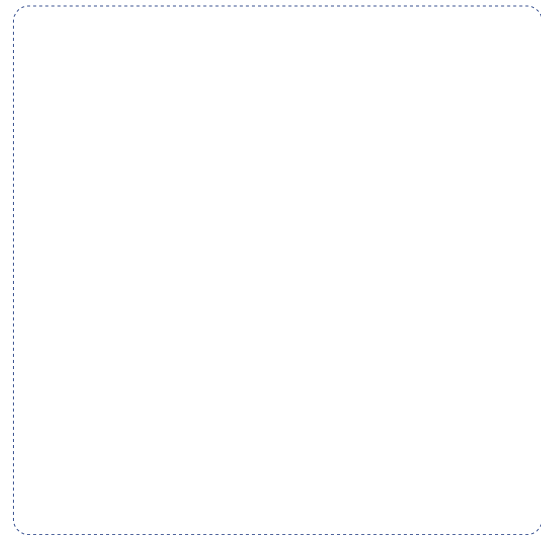For example: SENDCo, Head Teacher, Class Teacher, Teaching Assistant, etc.
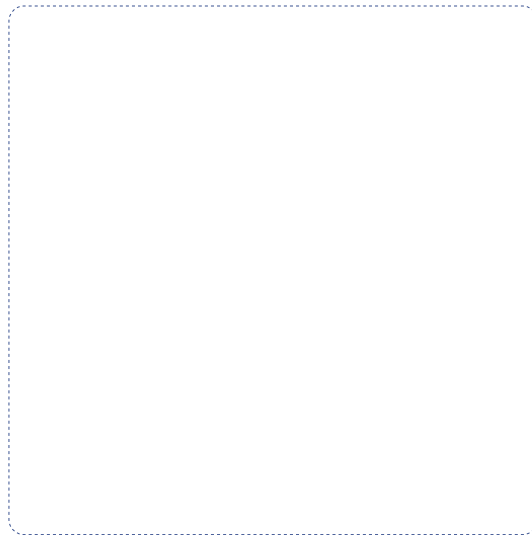
My first day will look like this:

For example: Uniform – school – classroom – break – classroom – lunch – classroom – home time – home

Morning at home

Morning at school

Lunch

Afternoon at school

Afternoon at home

Appendix 7

Gathering the Child's Voice

Involving children in the decisions that impact them is crucial, however, it can be challenging to know how to successfully gather the views of young children, particularly those with social communication and/or speech and language difficulties. Below are some suggestions on ways to gather a child's view.

Using a Mosaic approach

Gathering the views of children will require a holistic and varied approach. The Mosaic approach advocates bringing together methods of gathering views by using both hands-on and verbal methods, alongside taking photographs or utilising drawings.

Observation

Use of observation is a regular occurrence within the Early Years setting. At times it can be used positively, with the consent of parents and carers, to identify a child's views around a situation. Observations are best conducted over multiple instances at differing times of the day. At times, particularly for those children who experience difficulties expressing themselves verbally, adults may need to infer from a child's action. Caution should be exercised during these instances.

Sorting Activities

The use of visual and interactive cards that use both symbols and pictures, alongside words to identify what a child likes or dislikes, what helps or does not help.

Intensive Interaction Approaches

By being attentive, showing interest, anticipating, turn taking, sharing and developing trust, it is possible to promote positive relationships to facilitate adults viewing the environment from a child's view. Sometimes, this approach can be used as a precursor to gathering the child's views in a more structured manner.

Using Toys and Puppets

Children can share a lot about their inner views and perceptions of the world via toys, dolls and puppets. Using such resources can also support children who feel uncomfortable having a direct conversation.

Please see the following for further ideas:

Information from The Highland Council on gathering children's and young people's views:
The Highland Council- gathering the views of children and young people

Suggestions and strategies for gathering the views of children and young people from Leeds for Learning:
Leeds for Learning- ways to gather a child's views