

Transitions

August 2023



The Inclusion Ambassadors are a group of secondary school-aged pupils who have a range of additional support needs and attend a variety of educational provision across Scotland. Children in Scotland has supported the Inclusion Ambassadors since 2016, and formally took over running the group, supported by Enquire, in 2019.

Currently, there are 20 members of the group representing 17 local authority areas. The group share their experiences of being a young person with additional support needs in Scotland through online and in person meetings. Each meeting focuses on a particular issue that the group have identified they wish to discuss, or Children in Scotland have selected as being helpful to gather their views and experiences.

The group discussed transitions from school across a number of meetings from early 2022 through February 2023. The group have met with a representative from the Scottish Government who is working on the Transitions Strategy to share their views directly and help create a vision statement for the Strategy.

Below summarises the discussions the group have had in this area and a series of simple recommendations for improving young people's experiences of leaving school.



The Inclusion Ambassadors' views on transitions

How transitions can make young people feel

The group told staff how moving from one school to another or leaving school altogether can make them feel nervous and scared as it was a significant change. They spoke about how this can be ever scarier for young people who have additional support needs particularly if there is uncertainty about what the support will be like after they leave school. Young people can also feel anxious about meeting so many new people (staff, other pupils) and making friends.

Several members of the group also discussed how adults only tell them the positive things about their next steps and that this can be unhelpful.

"I got told it was going to be great and lots of fun which was the main bit of information. I felt unprepared."

Inclusion Ambassador



To better support young people going through transitions, adults should ensure they are sharing all relevant information about what to expect and ensure that young people are supported with aspects they might find difficult.

Skills for independent living

Many of the group felt that time in school was largely focused on supporting students into college or university rather than preparing them for life after school. They mentioned that it would be helpful to learn skills such as money management, understanding bills and how to travel independently. All members, whether they were still in school or had moved on, were passionate about this idea.

As one member stated,

“In S6 I thought we were going to learn more about being independent and looking after yourself after school. But most of what we focussed on was your personal statement. It would have helped more to learn about money management and travelling to places.”

“You feel more of an adult if you learn these skills. After you leave school, you are an adult, so it is good to have those skills to do stuff yourself.”

Inclusion Ambassador

Supporting young people’s decisions

The group said that adults allowing young people to make decisions on what they want and giving them the support needed to pursue these would ensure transitions from school worked well.

The Ambassadors believe young people should be able to decide their next steps and should get support with this. They want adults to support the decisions they make about life after school.

Some of the group shared experiences of feeling like there are only three options after school; college, university or apprenticeships. Members of the group want to hear about all options open to them and be supported to choose. One member shared that they are currently pursuing their second choice of subjects as staff at their school believe that they are not capable of doing the course they would like to do. This had made them feel they are being sent in a different direction to the one they want.

Asking young people what they need support with

The group discussed the importance of ensuring there is proper time and space to discuss the additional support a young person needs. Young people must be able to input into their support and be given the opportunity to talk about their support needs and what they would like to be put in place. One young person said that it could be as simple as asking the right questions:

“Ask the question – what is it you actually need? Talk through all the support and check that it works for me. Making the time to do that is really important, the acknowledgment that they understand is key.”

Inclusion Ambassador

The group shared they sometimes feel as though adults do not understand what they need, or they do not have the time or energy to listen properly. The group stressed that decisions about support are about the young person so the young person should be involved.

Throughout our discussions, the group have highlighted that they did not get enough meetings with their career's advisors. Any additional meetings, outside those arranged by teachers had to be organised by the pupils themselves. There needs to be more proactive approaches to engaging with children through this process.



Summary and recommendations

Transitions can be a challenging period for all young people and this can be particularly pronounced for young people who have additional support needs.

Children and young people want more information about what to expect from transitions and what will come next. They also want more opportunities to learn about independent living skills while they are in school. They are clear that they want staff to ask young people directly about what they need as they leave school and to have more say in this process.

Schools and other adults in their lives can take simple steps to support transitions for young people.

Based on our work with the group we have a number of suggestions for how we can respond to their concerns:

- **Skills for independent living should be taught more widely in schools.** This could be in PSE classes or incorporated into the curriculum for relevant subjects (such as covering money management or taxes in a maths lesson)
- **Staff must endeavour to share as wide a range of available options for pupils** to pursue when they leave school and support pupils with their preferred option.
- **Young people must have more opportunities to engage with careers advisors** and have input into the support they are given for leaving school.



Based on our work with the group we have also developed a reflective questions document for practitioners to support young person led transitions which can be accessed [here](#).



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