



2. Preparing for Inclusive Education

2.3 Providing continuity while in hospital

Introduction

Providing continuity for children and young people while they are in hospital is a key factor in successful re-inclusion in school following a spinal cord injury. Early contact between hospital and school is very important, this should include when the hospital hopes the child or young person can return.

Further info

Ideas and strategies for providing continuity of support:

Visits and contact in hospital

- 1** Children and young people with spinal cord injuries have described how important it is to have contact from schools and classmates when they are in hospital. Visits from teachers or school friends when in hospital can create a link between a sudden injury and a new identity with their previous school life as a non-disabled person. Small groups are best and check with the hospital, child and family first.
- 2** School staff and teachers can liaise with hospital teaching staff in order to help the child or young person keep up to date with the curriculum and aligned with what other children are doing. Involving parents in this communication as well has also been shown to be helpful for families and children.
- 3** Cards, letters, or multimedia communication like a video message or photo journal from other students, the whole class or school are appreciated – and ideally at regular intervals.
- 4** Use Skype or email to link the children and young people with their peers and to keep them involved in school activities.
- 5** Keep in contact with the family, sending school newsletters or information on school activities
- 6** Recognise that siblings may be anxious about their brother or sister and are also going through big adjustments. Check in with them to see if they need any further support.

In an Institute of Education report on school lives of children and young people with spinal cord injury, one young girl described how her class had continued calling out her name in the register and how some of her classmates pretended to answer questions for her in class. Gestures such as these served to show the children and young people that they were still being cared for by their school and not forgotten*.

Before your student returns to school

- 1** Ensure that the student is involved and consents to how their situation is described and discussed with staff and other students. Any preparatory work with staff and students should be communicated to the child or young person so they are aware of what the school community has been told before they go back to school.



My advice is to talk to the student, don't feel bad or embarrassed or shy about talking to them about their spinal cord injury. This might seem like a little thing but it can make a huge difference to the student. Asking them what they want is so important.

Ben, aged 17

2 Communicate with the whole staff about the situation and return of the student. This preparatory work may not need to go into great detail about the spinal cord injury but could discuss how the student will get around, what requirements they may have or equipment they might use. It is important to emphasise that they remain the same person and should be accepted as such.

3 Resourcing adjustments, such as physical adaptations to the school, before the student returns can enable a smooth transition. See section 2.6 Preparing the School for more information on this.

4. Begin raising awareness through talking to students and peers about disability. This can link with the PSHE programme. Assemblies are a good tool to raise awareness. However it is good to not draw too much attention to the child or young person. Other people who are wheelchair users discussing their own lives, can answer from first-hand experiences.

One primary school Head Teacher spoke to all the children personally about wheelchair use and had read a 'Topsy and Tim' book about a girl in a wheelchair to each class before Elizabeth started at the school. Although Elizabeth was starting at primary school rather than returning after being in hospital, the Head Teacher prepared the school for Elizabeth's arrival, and this was highly valued by her family, who saw this as very helpful for the transition to primary school.*

Reference

* Knight, A, Petrie, P, Potts, P and Zuurmond, M. (2008) [The school lives of children and young people with a spinal cord injury](#). Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London. Report to the Back-Up Trust.



The wheelchair and the fact that they can't move their legs is not their biggest problem... it's social acceptance and being seen as a person and not as a person in a wheelchair.

Head Teacher, Primary School