

PREPARING FOR THE

NEXT STEP

For young people nearing the end of their school career, the big question for many is: what next? We take a look at the importance of the transition process, with some tips from the experts on how staff can best support pupils throughout

Transition can be a complex process for any young person moving from one stage of their life to the next, but it's even more complicated when they have additional support needs to take into consideration.

For most pupils in SEN schools, there's a handful of options for after school – further education college, supported employment, supported living, residential care or a combination of these things. And it's all about careful planning, and support from the local authority, to get them to their chosen destination.

"It's the teaching staff and transition staff within the school who have the biggest access to these young people in the key period of time running up to when they're due to leave school," points out Bernie Middlehurst, referrals manager for Consensus, the UK-wide provider of specialist residential care and supported living services for people with learning disabilities and a range of other additional needs. "They need to be working closely with parents – to be able to help the students and the student's parents navigate what is a very confusing system."

EARLY START

He says that it's important for schools to start thinking about transition as early as possible. Current legislation suggests that the planning process should commence at 14-plus, but this often doesn't occur until the age of 17 in some schools, which can be too late.

"In terms of planning, young people's needs do change between 14 and 18, or whenever they're leaving school. Services can change in that space of time too, or new services will have been developed," points out Bernie. "But it's good to start thinking about transition as early as possible – start forward planning at 14-plus – albeit the detailed work can't really start until the age of 16 or 17."

Consensus believe that, whatever the child's current situation, abilities and potential, it's important that schools establish a relationship early on with their parents or carers – and class teachers, whether responsible for transition or not, have a key part to play.

ASPIRATION

"We often find when talking to parents of students approaching this critical stage in their life that, although the young person themselves and their families may have aspirations regarding their future, these are not reflected in the support options being discussed. No matter how complex a person's disabilities, it is rarely the case that further development of skills is impossible or that ways cannot be found to support the individual to undertake some tasks and contribute in some way that will be valued by others."

He advises too that school staff should research what's available in the local area for students, whether that's specialist college courses, support schemes, day centres, care services or employment opportunities.

"Practitioners and transition workers within schools and colleges need to know the differences between the different models in care – residential and supported living," Bernie points out. "And understand the expectations of the local authority too."

MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the support and services offered by Consensus, head to www.consensusupport.com