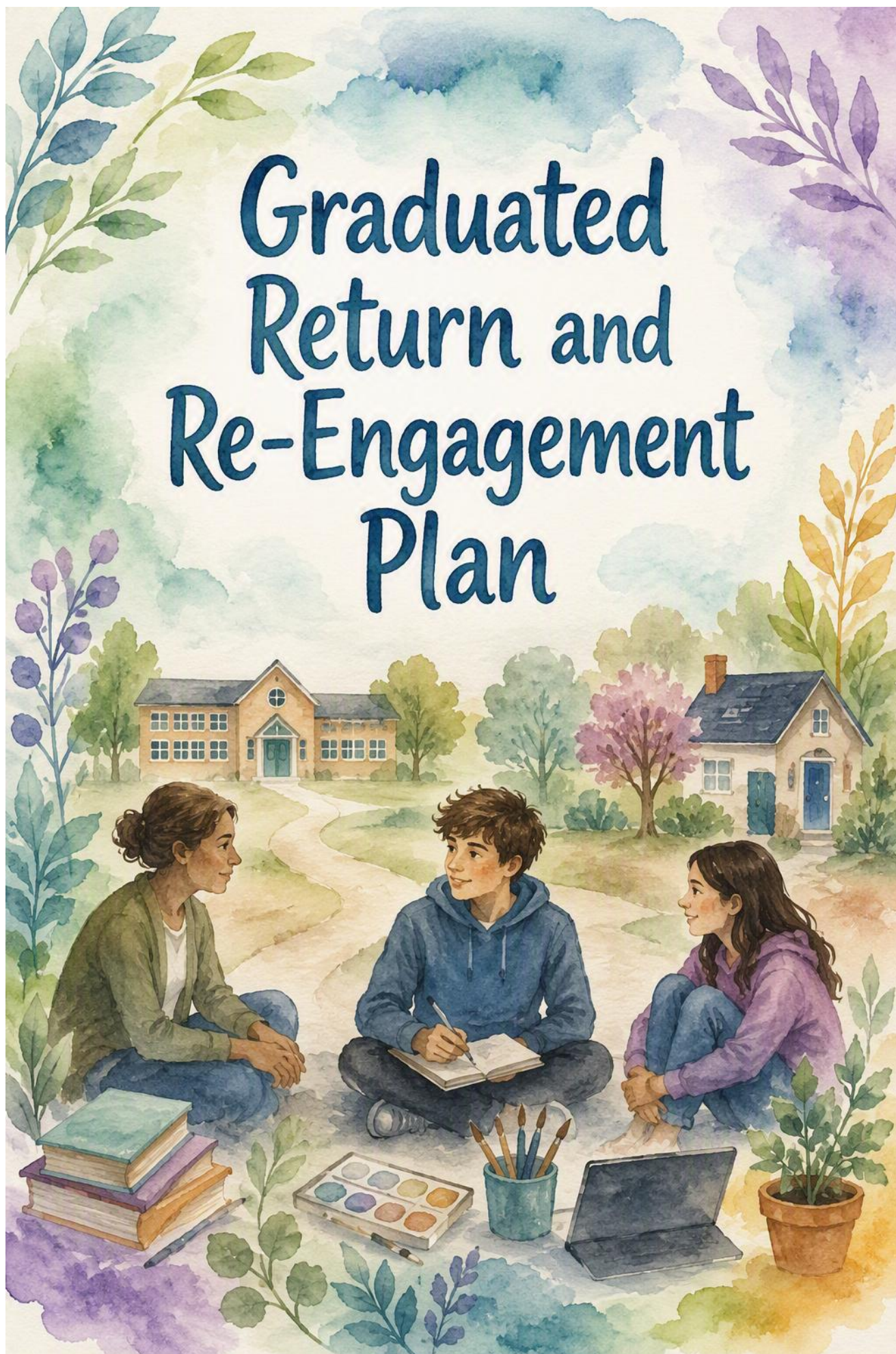




Graduated Return and Re-Engagement Plan



Contents

Purpose	3
Principles	4
Developing a Shared Understanding	5
Children and Young People's Views.....	5
Family Engagement and Partnership	6
Understanding Barriers and Difficult Experiences	8
Reasonable Adjustments and Support Planning	9
Putting it all together: A Responsive Return and Re-Engagement Plan	11
Phase 1: Maintaining Connection	12
Phase 2: Rebuilding Familiarity	14
Phase 3: Increasing Participation	17
Phase 4: Broadening Engagement	20
Phase 5: Sustaining Participation	23
Appendices	26
APPENDIX 1A: MY VOICE, MY EXPERIENCE.....	27
APPENDIX 1B: UNDERSTANDING MY EXPERIENCE	30
APPENDIX 2: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP	33
APPENDIX 3: BARRIERS AND SUPPORT MAPPING	35
APPENDIX 4: GRADUATED RETURN AND RE-ENGAGEMENT PLAN.....	37
APPENDIX 5: A WORKED EXAMPLE	44

Purpose

This graduated return and re-engagement plan is designed to support schools, families and professionals to work together when a child or young person is experiencing difficulties attending or engaging with education.

The purpose of the plan is not just to increase attendance. It also aims to provide a practical framework to help understand the barriers that may be affecting attendance and engagement, identify strengths and protective factors, and agree supportive, meaningful and achievable next steps. The focus is on helping children and young people feel safe, understood, connected and able to participate in education in ways that feel manageable and sustainable.

The plan should be developed in partnership with the child or young person, their family and other relevant professionals. It is intended to support shared understanding, collaborative planning and regular review. By identifying what is helping, what remains difficult and what adjustments may be needed, the plan can be adapted over time as confidence, participation and engagement grow.

This is not intended to be a fixed programme or a checklist to complete. Every child or young person's experience is unique, and progress is rarely linear. Some children may move through the plan quickly, whilst others may require much longer periods of support, adjustment and review. The pace of re-engagement should be informed by the child's readiness, feelings of safety and current capacity rather than predetermined attendance targets. The aim is to create opportunities for success, belonging and positive experiences of education, recognising that improvements in attendance often follow when these foundations are in place.





Principles of a Graduated Return and Re-engagement Plan



A supportive, child-centred approach that builds safety, belonging and meaningful participation.

1 Prioritise wellbeing, belonging and engagement alongside attendance.



Attendance is important, but wellbeing, relationships and participation matter too.

2 Develop a shared understanding.



Explore experiences, strengths, needs and barriers together.

3 Place the child or young person and their family at the centre.



Their views, goals and priorities guide the plan.

4 Build on strengths, interests and protective factors.



Focus on what's working well and what supports success.

5 Focus on reducing barriers and increasing accessibility.



Remove obstacles and create conditions for participation and success.

6 Use reasonable adjustments.



Adapt the environment, teaching and expectations to meet individual needs.

7 Recognise the importance of relationships.



Trusted adults, peers and family support are key to re-engagement.

8 Be individualised, flexible and responsive.



Adapt the plan as needs, understanding and circumstances change.

9 Progress at a pace informed by readiness, safety and confidence.



Not by predetermined expectations.

10 Acknowledge that progress is rarely linear.



Setbacks are opportunities to learn and adapt.

11 Consider the role of the environment.



Attendance and engagement are influenced by systems, relationships and experiences as well as individual factors.

12 Maintain connection.



Stay connected to learning, school, peers and trusted adults, even when attendance is reduced.

13 Review regularly and adapt.



Use ongoing feedback from the child or young person, family and professionals.

14 Measure progress broadly.



Look at wellbeing, participation, confidence, relationships, belonging and attendance.



Keep returning to this question: What is making attendance or engagement difficult, what might be maintaining these difficulties, and what might help?



Developing a Shared Understanding

Before developing a return and re-engagement plan, it is important to develop a shared understanding of the child or young person's experiences, strengths, needs and circumstances. Attendance and engagement difficulties are rarely explained by a single factor, and effective planning is more likely when schools, families and professionals work together to understand the full picture.

The aim is not to identify a single cause or label, but to explore the factors that may be making attendance or engagement difficult, what may be maintaining these difficulties, and what might help. This understanding should be reviewed and refined over time as new information emerges and experiences change.

Developing a shared understanding may include exploring:

- The child or young person's views and experiences.
- Parent and carer views and narrative.
- Strengths, interests and aspirations.
- Push and pull factors.
- Emotional wellbeing and relationships.
- Learning, communication and sensory needs.
- Health, developmental and contextual factors.
- Experiences of belonging, safety and inclusion.
- What is currently helping and what remains difficult.
- Previous support and its impact.



Children and Young People's Views

The child or young person's perspective should be central to all planning. Children and young people are more likely to engage with support when they feel listened to, understood and involved in decisions that affect them. Their views can provide valuable insight into what is helping, what feels difficult and what changes might make education feel more accessible, predictable and manageable. This section should focus on understanding the child or young person's experience rather than seeking agreement with a particular plan.

There is no single "right" way to gather a child or young person's views. Approaches should reflect their developmental age, communication preferences, strengths and needs. Some children and young people may prefer conversation, whilst others may communicate more effectively through drawing, photographs, card sorts, scaling activities, written reflections or other visual approaches.

When gathering views, schools may find it helpful to explore:

What Matters to Me?

- Who are the important people in my life?
- What interests, activities or hobbies do I enjoy?
- What am I good at?
- What helps me feel happy, calm or successful?
- What am I looking forward to?

My Experience of Education

- What do I enjoy about school, college or learning?

- What feels difficult, stressful or uncomfortable?
- Are there particular people, places, lessons or times of day that I find harder?
- When do I feel most comfortable and able to take part?
- What would I like adults to understand about my experience?

My Strengths and Supports

- Who helps me when things are difficult?
- What helps me feel safe and included?
- What strategies or adjustments have helped in the past?
- What makes it easier for me to learn and participate?

Hopes and Goals

- What would I like education to look like for me?
- What is one thing I would like to achieve?
- What would make the next step feel manageable?
- What support would help me move towards my goal?

Key Considerations

When gathering a child or young person's views:

- Use the child's preferred communication methods.
- Think about developmental age rather than chronological age.
- Behaviour may communicate important information about comfort, safety and engagement.
- Focus on understanding rather than solving.
- Be curious and non-judgemental.
- Make space for strengths, interests and aspirations as well as difficulties.
- Recognise that views may change over time.
- Revisit conversations regularly rather than treating them as a one-off activity.
- Ensure that the child or young person can see how their views have influenced planning and decision-making.
- The aim is to understand the child's experience, not to test, challenge or persuade them.

A helpful question to keep returning to is:

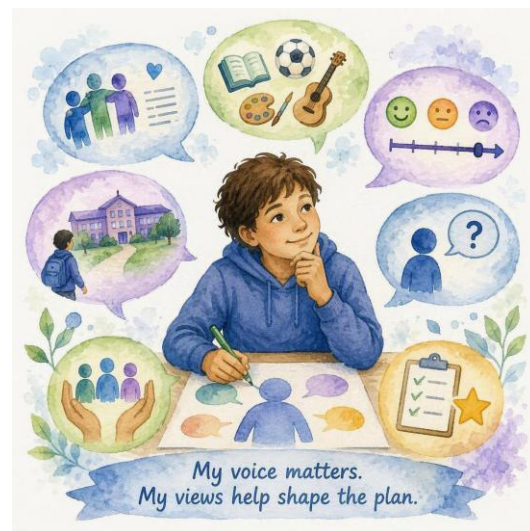
"What is this child or young person telling us about their experience, and what can we learn from it?"

[See Appendix 1A and 1B: Example guides for capturing children and young people's views](#)

Family Engagement and Partnership

Families play a vital role in supporting attendance, engagement and wellbeing. Parents and carers often hold valuable knowledge about their child's strengths, interests, experiences, needs and the factors that may be affecting their relationship with education. Developing a shared understanding with families can help schools better understand what is helping, what remains difficult and how support can be tailored to the individual child or young person.

Attendance and engagement difficulties can have a significant impact on family life that needs to be recognised and acknowledged. Parents and carers may be managing their own worries, uncertainty, frustration, exhaustion or feelings of blame. It is therefore important that schools create opportunities for open, respectful and non-judgemental conversations, recognising families as partners in understanding and supporting their child.



Effective Partnership Involves

- Listening with curiosity rather than making assumptions.
- Recognising parents and carers as experts on their child.
- Creating a safe space for families to share their experiences.
- Valuing strengths, successes and protective factors as well as concerns.
- Maintaining honest, consistent and transparent communication.
- Working towards shared goals and agreed actions.
- Being flexible and responsive as circumstances change.
- Celebrating progress, however small.
- Preserving dignity and avoiding blame.

Helpful Areas to Explore

Understanding the Child or Young Person

- What are their strengths and interests?
- What do they enjoy doing?
- What helps them feel safe, calm or successful?
- What do they find difficult or stressful?

Understanding Attendance and Engagement

- When did concerns first emerge?
- Have there been any significant changes or events recently?
- What does a typical morning look like?
- Are there particular times, places, people or activities that seem easier or harder?
- What does the child or young person say about school, college or learning?

Understanding What Helps

- When attendance or engagement goes well, what seems to help?
- What support has been helpful in the past?
- Are there particular people, routines or activities that support participation?
- What support would the family find most helpful at this stage?

Supporting Re-engagement Through Partnership

Families and schools may wish to work together to:

- Maintain predictable routines where possible.
- Agree consistent communication approaches.
- Share information about what is helping and what remains difficult.
- Support the use of coping and regulation strategies across home and school.
- Practise agreed re-engagement steps where appropriate.
- Maintain connection with school during periods of reduced attendance.
- Review progress regularly and adapt plans when needed.

[See Appendix 2: Family Engagement and Partnership Template](#)



Understanding Barriers and Difficult Experiences

Attendance and engagement difficulties are often associated with feelings of stress, worry, overwhelm, uncertainty, low belonging or unmet need. These experiences can affect a child or young person's capacity to participate in learning, social situations and wider school life.

Understanding what may be contributing to these feelings, how these feelings present, and what helps the child or young person regulate can support more effective planning and intervention. Every child or young person will have their own unique profile of barriers, strengths, and supports.



Reasonable Adjustments and Support Planning

Once barriers and strengths have been identified, the next step is to consider what changes, supports and adjustments may help the child or young person feel safer, more connected and better able to participate in education. Effective support is most likely when adjustments are tailored to the child or young person's individual needs and experiences. The aim is not to remove all challenge or discomfort, but to reduce unnecessary barriers and create opportunities for success, participation and belonging. Adjustments should be reviewed regularly to understand what is helping, what remains difficult and whether further changes are needed.

Areas to Consider

Examples may include, but are not limited to:

Relationships and Belonging

- A named (small team of) trusted adult(s)
- Daily check-ins/check-outs
- Peer support or buddy systems
- Opportunities for positive social connection
- Lunch clubs and small-group activities
- Relationship repair work where appropriate
- Increased opportunities to experience belonging and inclusion



Learning and Curriculum Access

- Adapted workload or expectations (including homework)
- Chunking tasks into manageable steps
- Flexible and alternative methods of recording work
- Literacy supports
- Additional processing time
- Opportunities to experience success and competence
- Flexible timetables

Sensory and Environmental Factors

- Access to quieter spaces
- Sensory supports
- Alternative routes around school
- Arriving/leaving lessons 5 minutes earlier than others
- Adjustments to seating arrangements
- Advance warning of changes
- Planned movement breaks
- Increased predictability and structure



Emotional Wellbeing and Regulation

- Regulation support plans
- Emotion coaching approaches
- Planned movement breaks
- Access to calming activities
- Visual supports
- Time and space to process emotions



Routines and Attendance

- Adjusted start and finish times
- A personalised arrival routine
- Supported transitions
- Gradual increases in participation
- Flexible timetabling where appropriate
- Opportunities to maintain connection during periods of reduced attendance

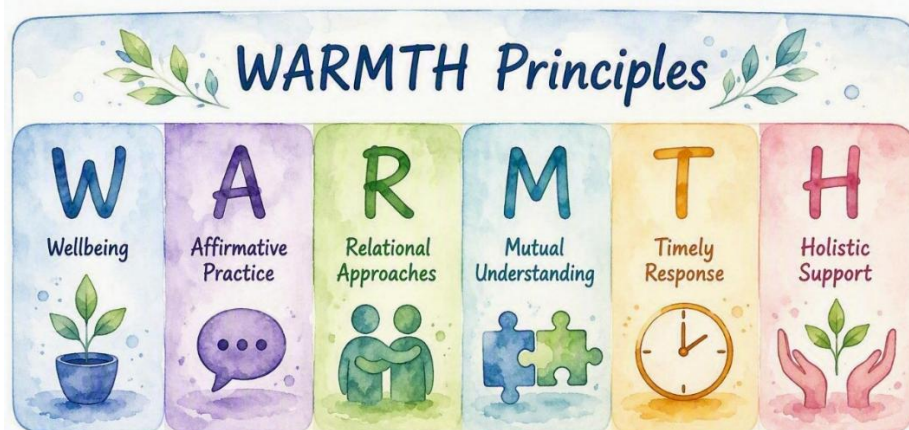
Key Considerations

When planning adjustments:

- Build on strengths and interests
- Focus on participation and engagement, not attendance alone
- Consider changes to the environment as well as support for the child or young person
- Involve the child, family and relevant professionals
- Keep plans realistic and achievable
- Start with the smallest change likely to make a meaningful difference
- Review and adapt regularly

[See Appendix 3: Barriers and Support Mapping Tool](#)

Putting it all together: A Responsive Return and Re-Engagement Plan



The sections within this guide are intended to help schools develop a shared understanding of a child or young person's experiences, identify barriers and strengths, and plan supportive adjustments. The next stage is to bring this information together to develop a graduated return and re-engagement plan that reflects the child or young person's individual circumstances, needs and goals.

As schools move into planning and implementation, it is important that the WARMTH principles remain central and consistent throughout the process. Wellbeing, affirmative practice, relational approaches, mutual understanding, timely response and holistic support should not be viewed as separate from the re-engagement process, but rather as the foundations that underpin every decision, adjustment and interaction.

The phases described below are intended to support planning and reflection rather than provide a fixed programme or sequence of steps. Children and young people do not always move smoothly from one phase to the next and the process is unlikely to be successful if we are trying to move children through a predetermined sequence as quickly as possible. It's important to recognise and accept (and even expect) that progress may accelerate, slow, pause or appear to move backwards at times. A child or young person may revisit an earlier phase, draw upon support from several phases simultaneously, or require different levels of support at different points in time. This should not be viewed as failure, regression or a lack of progress. Changes in attendance, engagement and wellbeing provide valuable information about what the child or young person may be experiencing and what support may be needed. Revisiting earlier phases can be an important part of building sustainable engagement and participation.



Phase 1: Maintaining Connection

Purpose

To preserve relationships, belonging and a sense of connection with education during periods when attendance and engagement are reduced or becoming more difficult. The focus is on ensuring that the child or young person continues to feel remembered, valued, included and connected to important people, relationships and aspects of school life.

Why This Phase Matters

When children and young people become disconnected from school, rebuilding attendance can become increasingly difficult. Maintaining connection can help to:

- Preserve a sense of belonging
- Reduce feelings of isolation
- Strengthen trust and relationships
- Reduce uncertainty about returning
- Support wellbeing and emotional safety
- Provide opportunities for positive experiences linked to school
- Maintain hope and motivation for future participation

What This Might Look Like

Maintaining Relationships

- Regular contact from a trusted adult
- Agreed check-ins with key staff
- Short supportive conversations
- Relationship-focused rather than attendance-focused contact
- Opportunities to remain connected with peers where appropriate

Maintaining a Sense of Belonging

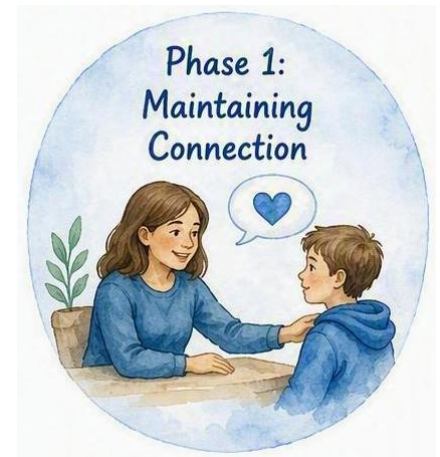
- Including the child or young person in class newsletters, celebrations and school events where appropriate
- Sharing photographs of activities and achievements
- Sending messages that demonstrate that the child or young person is missed, valued and remembered
- Maintaining membership of clubs, groups or communities where possible

Maintaining Links with Learning

- Sharing optional learning opportunities without pressure
- Encouraging engagement with areas of interest
- Providing activities that support feelings of success and competence
- Avoiding overwhelming amounts of work or expectations

Supporting Emotional Wellbeing

- Recognising that attendance difficulties can be stressful and emotional
- Providing reassurance and consistency
- Maintaining predictable communication arrangements
- Offering opportunities for the child or young person to share their views and experiences



Questions to Consider

- Who are the key people the child or young person feels most connected to?
- How can these relationships be maintained?
- What helps the child or young person feel that they belong?
- What contact feels supportive rather than overwhelming?
- How can learning remain accessible without creating additional pressure?
- What strengths and interests can be used to support connection?

Examples of Support Strategies

Relational Approaches

- ✓ Trusted adult check-ins
- ✓ Consistent point of contact
- ✓ Peer buddy contact
- ✓ Positive messages from staff
- ✓ Celebrating strengths and achievements



Practical Approaches

- ✓ Weekly communication plan
- ✓ Photographs or updates from school
- ✓ Virtual check-ins where appropriate
- ✓ Maintaining access to preferred activities
- ✓ Optional learning linked to interests
- ✓ Transition objects or reminders of school connection



Environmental Approaches

- ✓ Agreement around how and when communication will occur
- ✓ Predictable routines for contact
- ✓ Reduced pressure and expectations
- ✓ Maintaining familiarity with people, places and routines



Signs That Connection is Strengthening

- Increased ability to communicate with trusted adults
- Initiating or responding to contact more regularly and consistently
- Positive engagement during check-ins
- Increased openness and demonstrating curiosity when talking about school, learning, or future participation
- Expressing a desire to see particular adults, peers or places within the setting
- Reduced distress associated with communication from school
- Greater feelings of safety, trust or predictability
- Increased confidence in discussing worries, needs or goals
- Improved ability to use agreed regulation or coping strategies when required
- Showing interest in school news, events or activities
- Positive responses to photographs, messages or updates from school
- Demonstrating a desire to maintain links with the school community
- Shared agreement that additional opportunities may feel manageable

Readiness is not about the absence of anxiety, worry or uncertainty. Children and young people may continue to experience these feelings whilst becoming increasingly able to reconnect, participate or explore new opportunities. The goal is not to wait until all difficulties disappear, but to identify when the child or young person has enough safety, trust, support and confidence to take a manageable next step.

Phase 2: Rebuilding Familiarity

Purpose

To increase comfort, predictability, confidence and familiarity with people, places, routines and experiences associated with education. The focus remains on creating positive, low-pressure opportunities for reconnection. The aim at this stage is not necessarily for the child or young person to attend lessons or engage fully with learning, but to gradually rebuild a sense of safety and familiarity within the educational environment.

Why This Phase Matters

Periods of reduced attendance can create distance between the child or young person and their educational setting. The longer this distance remains, the more unfamiliar and uncertain school may begin to feel to them.

Rebuilding familiarity can help to:

- Reduce uncertainty and unpredictability
- Increase feelings of safety and confidence
- Restore positive associations with school
- Reduce avoidance linked to unfamiliarity
- Strengthen trust in adults and the environment
- Create opportunities for successful experiences without excessive pressure
- Support the transition towards increased participation over time



What This Might Look Like

Rebuilding Familiarity with People

- Spending time with a trusted adult
- Meeting key staff members in a low-pressure way
- Gradually reconnecting with peers
- Positive social opportunities built around interests and strengths
- Maintaining consistency in the adults involved

Rebuilding Familiarity with Places

- Visiting the school site outside busy times
- Spending time in preferred or low-demand spaces
- Revisiting familiar areas before accessing less familiar environments
- Walking around school when corridors and shared spaces are quieter
- Identifying places that feel safe and comfortable

Rebuilding Familiarity with Routines

- Practising arrival and departure routines
- Visiting at predictable times
- Becoming familiar with what will happen before and during visits
- Using visual schedules or transition supports
- Gradually reintroducing aspects of school life

Rebuilding Familiarity with Learning

- Participating in preferred activities
- Engaging with areas of interest
- Taking part in low-demand learning experiences
- Revisiting activities that previously felt successful
- Focusing on confidence rather than outcomes

Questions to Consider

- Which people does the child or young person feel most comfortable with?
- Which places feel safest and most manageable?
- What routines or experiences previously supported attendance and engagement?
- What environments currently feel too challenging?
- What strengths and interests could be used to support familiarity?
- How can experiences be structured to maximise success and minimise overwhelm?



Examples of Support Strategies



Relational Approaches

- ✓ Scheduled time with a trusted adult
- ✓ Small-group social opportunities
- ✓ Supported peer contact
- ✓ Consistent adults involved in visits
- ✓ Positive relationship-building activities



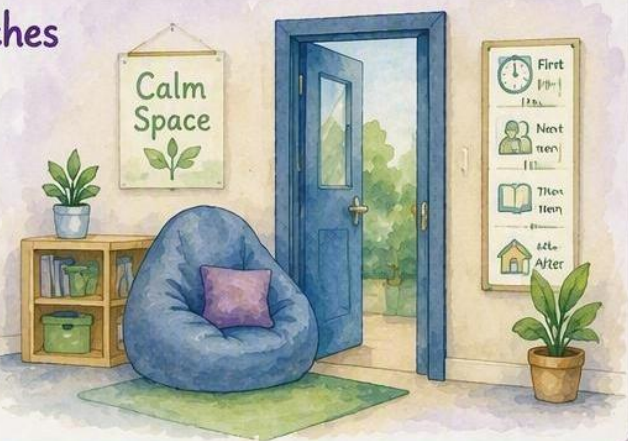
Practical Approaches

- ✓ Planned visits outside busy times
- ✓ Visual schedules
- ✓ Social stories or preparation materials
- ✓ Photographs of environments, adults and routines
- ✓ Familiarisation visits
- ✓ Strength-based activities



Environmental Approaches

- ✓ Access to quieter spaces
- ✓ Reduced sensory demands where possible
- ✓ Predictable routines and expectations
- ✓ Opportunities to leave situations if needed
- ✓ Familiar locations used consistently
- ✓ Gradual introduction to less familiar environments



Signs That Familiarity is Building

- Increased comfort with trusted adults
- More able to authentically engage in conversation
- Positive interactions with peers
- Increased curiosity about people in the setting
- Reduced uncertainty about visits or contact
- Greater confidence entering familiar spaces
- Increased willingness and ability to ask questions or seek support

- Improved ability to tolerate manageable levels of challenge
- Increased interest in visiting school or college
- Comfort spending longer periods in familiar spaces
- Greater confidence with established routines
- Reduced need for reassurance in previously unfamiliar situations
- Engagement in preferred activities during visits
- Interest in aspects of learning or school life
- Willingness to explore additional spaces or opportunities
- Discussion about possible future participation
- Families reporting increased confidence or comfort
- Greater predictability in responses to agreed opportunities
- Shared agreement that participation opportunities may feel manageable

Phase 3: Increasing Participation

Purpose

To support the child or young person to engage in meaningful activities, experiences and aspects of school life that feel achievable, successful and manageable. The emphasis shifts from reconnecting with people, places and routines towards increasing participation in educational, social and wider school opportunities. The focus remains on creating positive experiences and building confidence rather than increasing attendance for its own sake.

Why This Phase Matters

For many children and young people, confidence and participation are rebuilt through successful experiences. Opportunities to engage in meaningful activities can help strengthen self-belief, increase feelings of competence and reinforce a sense of belonging.

Increasing participation can help to:

- Build confidence and self-efficacy
- Increase engagement with learning and school life
- Create opportunities for success
- Strengthen relationships with peers and adults
- Increase motivation and enjoyment
- Develop feelings of competence and achievement
- Support gradual increases in participation and attendance

What This Might Look Like

Increasing Participation in Learning

- Attending preferred lessons or curriculum areas
- Engaging in activities linked to strengths and interests
- Completing manageable learning tasks
- Taking part in practical, creative or hands-on activities
- Using agreed adjustments to support access and success



Increasing Social Participation

- Spending time with identified peers
- Participating in small-group activities
- Joining clubs or enrichment opportunities linked to interests
- Developing confidence in social situations
- Participating in shared activities with trusted adults and peers

Increasing Participation in School Life

- Attending agreed parts of the school day
- Taking part in assemblies, events or community activities if appropriate
- Becoming involved in responsibilities or leadership opportunities
- Participating in aspects of school life that feel meaningful and motivating
- Experiencing success within the wider school community

Building Confidence Through Success

- Setting manageable goals
- Celebrating achievements and effort
- Recognising progress, however small
- Providing opportunities for choice and autonomy
- Building on existing strengths and interests

Questions to Consider

- Which activities currently generate the greatest engagement, confidence or enjoyment?
- What strengths, interests and positive experiences can be built upon?
- Which opportunities feel meaningful and motivating to the child or young person?
- What participation currently feels manageable?
- What adjustments continue to be important for success?
- How can we ensure experiences are positive and achievable?
- Which educational, social or wider school opportunities might the child or young person be willing to explore?
- How can success be recognised and celebrated?
- What might increase confidence without creating unnecessary pressure?
- What would help participation feel sustainable rather than overwhelming?

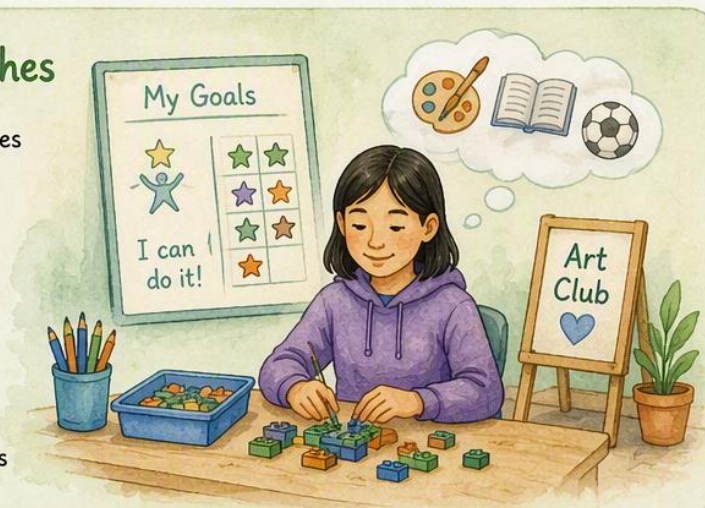
Examples of Support Strategies





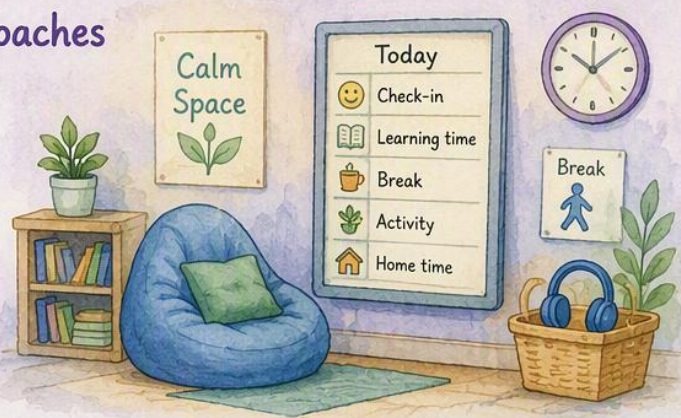
Practical Approaches

- ✓ Participation in preferred activities
- ✓ Flexible expectations and success criteria
- ✓ Adapted or scaffolded learning tasks
- ✓ Opportunities for choice and autonomy
- ✓ Strengths-based goal setting
- ✓ Clubs or enrichment opportunities linked to interests



Environmental Approaches

- ✓ Continued access to supportive spaces
- ✓ Adaptations to reduce unnecessary demands
- ✓ Flexible timetabling where needed
- ✓ Opportunities to take breaks when required
- ✓ Predictable routines and expectations
- ✓ Appropriate adjustments remaining in place



Signs That Participation is Increasing

Learning and Participation

- Increased engagement in activities and learning opportunities
- More able to attempt tasks
- Increased confidence when participating
- Growing interest in new opportunities

Relationships and Belonging

- Increased interaction with peers
- More positive social experiences
- Seeking support from trusted adults when needed
- Greater sense of connection to the school community

Emotional Wellbeing

- Increased confidence and self-belief
- More able to take manageable risks
- Increased tolerance of challenge and uncertainty
- Positive responses to success and achievement

Independence and Confidence

- Growing confidence to engage without direct support

- More able to make choices and decisions
- Greater participation across different activities and environments
- Expressing aspirations, interests or future goals

Family and School Feedback

- Families reporting increased confidence, motivation or enjoyment
- Staff noticing increased participation and engagement
- More positive discussions about school or learning
- Shared agreement that broader participation opportunities feel manageable

Phase 4: Broadening Engagement

Purpose

To support the child or young person to engage across a wider range of learning, social and school experiences whilst maintaining wellbeing, confidence and a sense of success. At this stage, the focus shifts from participation in selected or preferred activities towards engaging more broadly in school life. Any increase in participation should continue to be guided by the child or young person's needs, strengths and readiness, with appropriate adjustments remaining in place.

Why This Phase Matters

As confidence, familiarity and participation increase, children and young people often become more willing to engage across a wider range of experiences. However, increasing expectations too quickly can risk undermining progress. Broadening engagement provides opportunities to develop confidence, resilience, independence, belonging and competence whilst ensuring that support remains responsive and achievable.

What This Might Look Like

Broadening Participation in Learning

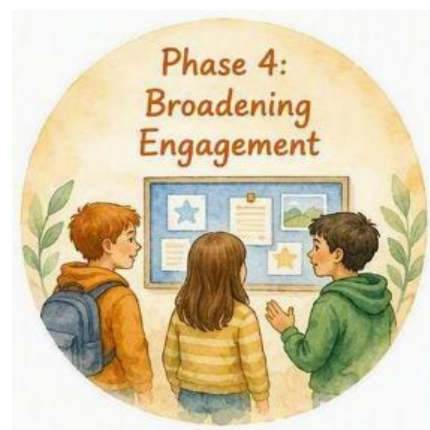
- Engaging across a wider range of curriculum areas
- Participating in lessons that may previously have felt more difficult or less preferred
- Increasing confidence in learning situations
- Taking part in collaborative and group learning opportunities
- Developing greater independence within learning activities

Broadening Social Engagement

- Expanding friendship groups and peer interactions
- Participating in a wider range of social opportunities
- Increasing involvement in clubs, enrichment activities or wider school events
- Developing confidence across different social situations
- Strengthening feelings of inclusion and belonging

Broadening Engagement with School Life

- Participating in different parts of the school day
- Engaging with a wider range of environments, adults and experiences
- Becoming involved in responsibilities, leadership opportunities or school community activities



- Building confidence in less familiar situations
- Maintaining engagement across a broader range of activities and settings

Building Independence and Self-Advocacy

- Increasing opportunities for choice and decision-making
- Recognising and communicating support needs
- Developing confidence to seek help when needed
- Taking on increasing ownership of agreed goals and strategies
- Building confidence to manage change and transitions

Questions to Consider

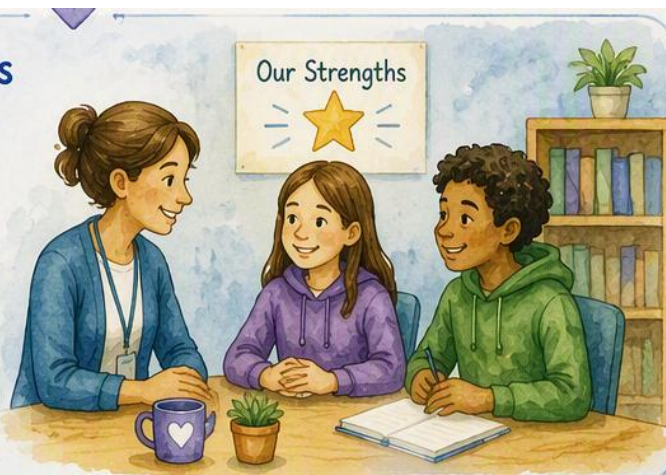
- Which aspects of school life currently feel most comfortable and successful?
- Which new opportunities might feel manageable to explore?
- What adjustments remain important for success?
- How can participation be broadened without creating unnecessary pressure?
- What strengths, interests and relationships can continue to support engagement?
- How can independence and self-advocacy be encouraged?
- What does sustainable engagement look like for this child or young person?
- What support will remain important as participation broadens?

Examples of Support Strategies



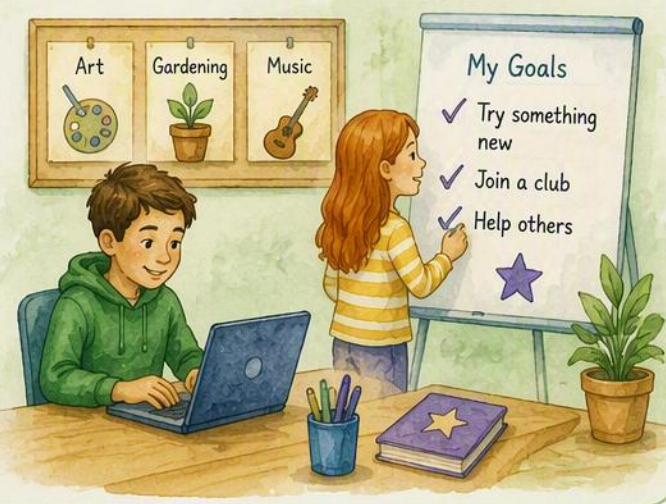
Relational Approaches

- ✓ Continued access to trusted adults
- ✓ Encouragement to develop wider peer connections
- ✓ Opportunities to build confidence with different staff members
- ✓ Positive feedback linked to effort, confidence and progress
- ✓ Support to develop self-advocacy and independence



Practical Approaches

- ✓ Gradual introduction of new learning or social opportunities
- ✓ Participation in clubs, enrichment activities or responsibilities
- ✓ Flexible planning around identified barriers
- ✓ Opportunities for leadership, contribution or choice
- ✓ Continued strengths-based goal setting
- ✓ Planned support for transitions and changes





Signs that Engagement is Broadening

Learning and Participation

- Increased participation across a wider range of lessons and activities
- Growing confidence in less preferred or previously challenging situations
- Increased independence within learning activities
- More able to try new experiences

Relationships and Belonging

- Broader peer connections and social participation
- Increased confidence interacting with a wider range of adults
- Stronger sense of belonging within the school community
- Greater participation in group and community activities

Emotional Wellbeing

- Increased confidence when faced with manageable challenge
- More able to engage with unfamiliar situations
- Improved ability to use support and regulation strategies independently
- Increased trust in their ability to cope with change

Independence and Self-Advocacy

- Greater confidence expressing needs and preferences
- Increased use of self-help and regulation strategies
- Taking greater ownership of goals and support plans
- Seeking support proactively when required

Family and School Feedback

- Families reporting increased confidence and participation outside of school
- Staff noticing engagement across a wider range of contexts
- Increased consistency in participation and engagement
- Shared agreement that participation is becoming broader and more sustainable

Phase 5: Sustaining Participation

Purpose

To support the long-term sustainability of attendance, engagement, participation and wellbeing by ensuring that successful supports, relationships and adjustments remain in place as needs evolve over time. The focus of this phase is not on removing support, but on understanding what helps the child or young person continue to feel safe, connected, included and able to participate successfully. For some children and young people, ongoing adjustments may remain an important part of successful participation.

Why This Phase Matters

Successful re-engagement is not simply about returning to education. It is about ensuring that engagement, participation and wellbeing can be maintained over time, particularly during periods of change, challenge or transition. This can help prevent barriers from becoming overwhelming again and build confidence in managing future challenges.

What This Might Look Like

Sustaining Engagement in Learning

- Continuing to access learning in ways that support success
- Monitoring engagement and participation over time
- Maintaining helpful adjustments where needed
- Supporting confidence when demands increase
- Preparing for changes in curriculum, expectations or routines

Sustaining Relationships and Belonging

- Maintaining access to trusted adults
- Continuing positive peer connections
- Supporting participation in school life and wider community activities
- Maintaining opportunities for contribution, responsibility and leadership
- Ensuring the child or young person continues to feel valued and included

Preparing for Change and Transition

- Planning ahead for upcoming transitions
- Identifying potential barriers before they arise
- Reviewing successful strategies and supports
- Providing additional preparation during periods of change
- Ensuring effective communication between key adults and services

Building Independence and Self-Advocacy

- Developing confidence to communicate needs and preferences
- Supporting self-awareness of what helps and what feels difficult
- Encouraging use of strategies independently where appropriate
- Building confidence to seek support when needed
- Supporting participation in planning and decision-making



Questions to Consider

- Which supports and adjustments continue to be helpful?
- What have we learned about what enables successful participation?
- What might become more challenging during future transitions or changes?
- How can a sense of belonging and connection be maintained?
- How can the child or young person continue to understand and communicate their needs?
- What plans need to be in place to respond early if difficulties begin to re-emerge?
- Which relationships remain particularly protective and important?
- How will progress and wellbeing continue to be monitored over time?

Examples of Support Strategies



Relational Approaches

- ✓ Continued access to trusted adults when needed
- ✓ Maintaining strong home-school partnerships
- ✓ Opportunities for participation, contribution and belonging
- ✓ Ongoing encouragement, recognition and celebration of strengths
- ✓ Support with self-advocacy and communication of needs





Practical Approaches

- ✓ Transition planning and preparation
- ✓ Regular review of support and adjustments
- ✓ Personalised wellbeing or participation plans where appropriate
- ✓ Opportunities to reflect on strengths, successes and goals
- ✓ Early identification and response to emerging difficulties
- ✓ Continued use of successful strategies and resources





Signs that Participation is being Sustained

Learning and Participation

- Sustained participation across learning and school life
- Greater ability to access a range of activities and opportunities
- Continued engagement during periods of challenge or change
- Increasing confidence in managing new or unfamiliar situations

Relationships and Belonging

- Strong and consistent relationships with adults and peers
- A secure sense of belonging within the school community
- Continued participation in social, enrichment or community opportunities
- Greater ability to access support from others when needed

Emotional Wellbeing

- Increased confidence and self-awareness
- Greater ability to identify and communicate needs
- Greater ability to use helpful strategies when difficulties arise
- Increased confidence in managing change and uncertainty

Independence and Self-Advocacy

- Greater ability to communicate preferences, needs and goals
- Increased participation in planning and decision-making
- Greater ability to seek support proactively when required
- Increased confidence in understanding what helps and what may be needed in the future

Family and School Feedback

- Families reporting sustained engagement, confidence or wellbeing
- Staff observing stable participation across different contexts
- Consistent use of successful strategies and supports
- Shared confidence that participation is becoming increasingly sustainable over time

Appendices

Using the Planning Tools

These tools are provided to support reflection, conversation and collaborative planning. They are not a sequence of forms that must all be completed, nor are they intended to create additional paperwork. Schools and settings can select and adapt the tools that are most useful and accessible for the child or young person, family and current situation. Information already gathered should be carried forward rather than repeatedly collected. The aim is to develop a shared understanding, agree meaningful support and keep the plan responsive as circumstances change.

[Appendix 1A: My Voice, My Experience](#) - For children and young people who prefer to communicate through conversation, writing, drawing or supported discussion. It does not need to be completed in one sitting, and the child or young person can pause, skip questions or communicate in another way.

[Appendix 1B: Understanding my Experience](#) - For younger children and children or young people who communicate in different ways, including gesture, body movement, facial expression, eye gaze, vocal sounds, photographs, symbols, objects of reference, communication aids, play, actions or changes in participation. It is designed for use over time and across different people, places and activities, rather than relying on a single conversation or observation.

[Appendix 2: Family Engagement and Partnership](#) – To help families and educational settings share their perspectives, develop a fuller understanding of attendance and engagement difficulties, and agree helpful communication, support and next steps.

[Appendix 3: Barriers and Support Mapping](#) - Brings together information already gathered to identify the key barriers, strengths and adjustments that could inform the re-engagement plan. Helps to outline priority areas for support.

[Appendix 4: Graduated Return and Re-integration Plan](#) - To bring together information from the previous tools into a practical support plan.

[Appendix 5: A Worked Example](#) – To illustrate how information gathered through the child or young person's views, family partnership, professional discussion and the barriers and support mapping process can be brought together into a graduated return and re-engagement plan.

APPENDIX 1A: MY VOICE, MY EXPERIENCE

Share your ideas in the way that works best for you. You can stop, pause or skip anything.

My name:	Date:
HOW I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE MY IDEAS	
☐ Talk	☐ Write
☐ Draw	☐ Point or choose
☐ Use photos	☐ Use symbols
☐ Use a communication aid	☐ Show through play or actions
☐ Ask someone I trust to help	☐ Other: _____
ABOUT ME	
Things I enjoy, care about or look forward to DRAW, ADD PHOTOS, USE SYMBOLS OR WRITE HERE	
Things I am good at or proud of	People who are important to me
MY EXPERIENCE OF EDUCATION	
Things that help school or college feel more manageable	Things that can make school or college feel more difficult

HELPING ADULTS UNDERSTAND ME

My actions, words and communication can all tell adults something important.

WHEN SOMETHING IS BECOMING DIFFICULT	
☐ I become quieter	☐ I communicate less
☐ I need more reassurance	☐ I move away or leave
☐ I find it harder to concentrate	☐ I become more active or restless
☐ I need more time	☐ I notice discomfort in my body
☐ Something else: _____	
This might mean... <i>What might you be trying to communicate?</i>	
WHAT HELPS ME	
☐ A trusted adult	☐ A familiar person or peer
☐ A quiet or smaller space	☐ Knowing what will happen
☐ Extra time to think	☐ A movement or sensory break
☐ A preferred activity	☐ Help with learning
☐ Fewer words or visual information	☐ Choice about how I take part
☐ Time away without pressure	☐ Something else: _____
Ways adults can help	Things adults do that are not helpful

LOOKING AHEAD

The plan should include what matters to me and what feels manageable.

WHAT I WOULD LIKE
I would like school or college to feel...
Something I would like to be able to do...
The next step that feels doable...
The support I would need...
One thing I would like adults to understand <i>DRAW, ADD PHOTOS, USE SYMBOLS OR WRITE HERE</i>

APPENDIX 1B: UNDERSTANDING MY EXPERIENCE

For younger children and children or young people who communicate in different ways

Child or young person:	Date:
People contributing:	Places or situations observed:

HOW THE CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON COMMUNICATES

☐ Speech or vocal sounds	☐ Gesture or body movement
☐ Facial expression	☐ Pointing or eye gaze
☐ Photographs	☐ Objects of reference
☐ Symbols or visual choices	☐ Communication aid or device
☐ Play and actions	☐ Changes in behaviour or participation
☐ A familiar adult helps interpret	☐ Other: _____

STRENGTHS, INTERESTS AND IMPORTANT PEOPLE

Things the child or young person enjoys, chooses or returns to	People the child or young person seeks out, responds to or appears comfortable with

WHAT WE NOTICE

Gather information over time and across different places, people and activities

COMFORT, INTEREST AND ENGAGEMENT

☐ Approaches or stays near	☐ Looks, points or reaches
☐ Uses words, sounds, signs or device	☐ Joins in or takes a turn
☐ Explores or returns to the activity	☐ Communicates more
☐ Accepts support	☐ Shows a familiar sign of comfort
☐ Other: _____	

What signs of comfort, interest or engagement are familiar for this child or young person?

WHEN SOMETHING MAY BE BECOMING DIFFICULT

☐ Becomes quieter or communicates less	☐ Moves away, leaves or turns away
☐ Seeks a familiar person	☐ Needs more repetition or processing time
☐ Finds it harder to join in	☐ Becomes more active or restless
☐ Shows changes in sleep, appetite or physical comfort	☐ Uses a familiar sign for stop, no, break or help
☐ Shows a change from their usual communication	☐ Other: _____

What might these signs be communicating?

Use tentative language. Consider the activity, people, demands, sensory environment, health, communication and wider context.

PATTERNS ACROSS SITUATIONS

More manageable	<i>When, where, with whom, doing what?</i>
More difficult	<i>When, where, with whom, doing what?</i>
What happened beforehand?	<i>Changes, demands, transitions or experiences</i>
What appeared to help?	<i>People, adjustments, routines or responses</i>

WHAT HELPS

Identify the conditions that increase access, comfort, communication and participation

HELPFUL PEOPLE, PLACES AND SUPPORT

☐ A trusted or familiar adult	☐ A familiar peer or small group
☐ A quieter or more predictable space	☐ Visual timetable or now-and-next support
☐ Objects, photographs or symbols	☐ Additional processing time
☐ Movement or sensory support	☐ A preferred activity or interest
☐ Adapted learning or fewer demands	☐ Choice about how to take part
☐ A clear way to ask for stop, break or help	☐ Preparation for changes and transitions
☐ Time to reconnect after difficulty	☐ Other: _____

Helpful adult responses	Responses that may be unhelpful

APPENDIX 2: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP

A shared conversation to understand what is happening and agree helpful support

Child or young person:	Date:
Family members contributing:	Setting staff contributing:

ABOUT THE CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON

Strengths, interests and things they feel proud of	Important people, relationships and sources of support

What helps the child or young person feel safe, comfortable, included and able to engage?

--

THE CURRENT PICTURE

What is going well?	What is making attendance or engagement more difficult?

DEVELOPING A SHARED UNDERSTANDING

Listen for patterns, changes, strengths and exceptions rather than searching for a single cause

WHAT THE FAMILY HAS NOTICED

When did concerns begin, and have there been any changes or significant events?

Are particular days, times, places, people, lessons, transitions or activities easier or harder?

What do mornings, journeys, arrivals and transitions currently look like?

What does the child or young person communicate about education?

Include words, actions, physical signs, behaviour, play, drawings, messages or communication through familiar systems.

WHAT HELPS

What has helped previously?

What appears to make things more manageable now?

What would the family particularly like staff to understand?

APPENDIX 3: BARRIERS AND SUPPORT MAPPING

Guidance for staff: summarise rather than repeat Appendices 1 and 2. Record what has been observed or reported, avoid presenting assumptions as facts, and delete or adapt the guidance notes as the table is completed.

Area	What may be making attendance or engagement difficult?	What support, adjustment or strength may help?
Relationships and belonging	<i>Summarise relevant information already gathered. Use descriptive, tentative language. Consider friendships, peer dynamics, bullying, trusted adults, inclusion and belonging.</i>	<i>Record practical adjustments, protective factors, helpful relationships or existing strengths. Consider what may increase access, safety, belonging or participation.</i>
Learning and curriculum access	<i>Consider literacy, learning demands, task accessibility, pace, confidence and recording.</i>	
Sensory and environmental factors	<i>Consider noise, crowds, lighting, busy spaces, movement, predictability and quieter areas.</i>	
Emotional wellbeing and regulation	<i>Consider worry, uncertainty, overwhelm, confidence, regulation needs and adult responses.</i>	
Health and development	<i>Consider physical health, sleep, fatigue, communication, neurodiversity and developmental needs.</i>	
Family and contextual factors	<i>Consider significant events, caring responsibilities, bereavement, housing, transport and family pressures.</i>	

Area	What may be making attendance or engagement difficult?	What support, adjustment or strength may help?
Routines, transitions and attendance arrangements	<i>Consider mornings, travel, arrival, transitions, unstructured times, timetable changes and current arrangements.</i>	

APPENDIX 4: GRADUATED RETURN AND RE-ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Turning shared understanding into coordinated, manageable and regularly reviewed action

Use this plan to carry forward the key information from Appendices 1 to 3. You do not need to repeat the full child, family or contextual narrative. The phases are not linear: support may draw on several phases at once, and any area can be revisited as circumstances change.

PLAN DETAILS

Child or young person:	School or setting:
Plan start date:	Review date:
Named contact:	People involved in developing the plan:

CURRENT AREAS OF FOCUS



☐ Maintaining Connection	☐ Rebuilding Familiarity	☐ Increasing Participation
☐ Broadening Engagement	☐ Sustaining Participation	

Why have these areas been selected?

Refer to the child or young person's current experience, priorities, capacity and the conditions that support engagement.

KEY INFORMATION TO CARRY FORWARD

Strengths, interests and protective factors	
Child or young person's priorities	
Important relationships	
Main barriers identified	
Adjustments and support already helping	

CURRENT RE-ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Plan meaningful opportunities, the support needed and what adults may notice

Meaningful opportunity or goal	Support and adjustments needed	When, where and who?	What might we notice? / Review date
<i>What will the child or young person be supported to access, experience or participate in?</i>	<i>What will adults or the environment put in place to reduce barriers and enable access?</i>	<i>Day, time, location, arrival or transition arrangements, and who will help.</i>	<i>Observable signs of increased safety, connection, communication or participation. Add the review date.</i>

Insert more rows as needed

Communication and contingency arrangements

How and when home and the setting will communicate	How the child or young person can show that something is becoming difficult
How adults will respond	What can be shortened, adapted, paused or revisited
Support that should remain available throughout	What happens if a key adult is unavailable
Who needs to know about the plan	Agreed way to ask for help, a pause or an early finish

REVIEW AND ADAPTATION

Treat changes and difficulties as useful information, not failure or regression

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT?

What has become more manageable?	What remains difficult?
What has the child or young person communicated?	What has the family noticed?
What have staff or other professionals noticed?	Which adjustments and supports are helping?
What did not work as expected?	What might this tell us?

UPDATING THE PLAN

CONTINUE	PAUSE	CHANGE OR EXPLORE
Support, adjustments and opportunities that remain helpful	Opportunities that are not currently manageable or useful	Elements that need adapting or further understanding

The next manageable opportunity we will explore

Support and adjustments that need to be in place

The child or young person's views about this

Next review date:

Named person co-ordinating the review:

APPENDIX 5: A WORKED EXAMPLE

About this example

This example is fictional and draws together common types of presenting information. It is not a model timetable or a sequence to copy. The pace, areas of focus, support and adjustments will be different for every child or young person.

INTRODUCING SAM

Sam is a Year 8 pupil in a mainstream secondary school. Sam enjoys art, animals, practical technology and creative activities. Sam has a strong visual memory, communicates thoughtfully when given enough time, and has positive relationships with a small number of trusted adults and peers.

Sam has identified specific literacy difficulties, including reading fluency and spelling and also struggles with organising extended written work and processing lengthy written instructions. Sam can understand and discuss ideas more effectively than written work sometimes suggests. As curriculum demands have increased, reading aloud, extended writing and expectations to complete missed work have become increasingly difficult.

Sam has also experienced adverse events during childhood, including changes in family circumstances, periods of instability and the loss of an important relationship. These experiences do not inevitably explain Sam's attendance difficulties, but may be relevant to Sam's need for predictability, dependable relationships, clear communication and a sense of control during change.

The developing picture

Difficulties increased following changes within the tutor group, friendship difficulties, increasing literacy demands, concerns about peers noticing Sam's work, busy transitions, family change and periods of absence that made returning feel less familiar. Sam initially arrived late, avoided some lessons and used the pastoral area more often. Attendance later became intermittent.



MY VOICE, MY EXPERIENCE

Share your ideas in the way that works best for you. You can stop, pause or skip anything.

My name: Sam	Date: 16.09.2026
HOW I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE MY IDEAS	
☒ Talk	☐ Write
☐ Draw	☐ Point or choose
☐ Use photos	☐ Use symbols
☒ Use a communication aid	☐ Show through play or actions
☒ Ask someone I trust to help	☐ Other: _____
ABOUT ME	
Things I enjoy, care about or look forward to <i>DRAW, ADD PHOTOS, USE SYMBOLS OR WRITE HERE</i> Art, design technology and activities involving animals. Things that are more hands-on and spending time with my friend.	
Things I am good at or proud of Remembering visual things, explaining my ideas when I don't have to write them down, being creative.	People who are important to me My family, [pastoral staff member], [art teacher], and [friend]
MY EXPERIENCE OF EDUCATION	
Things that help school or college feel more manageable • When I can be in a quiet space on my own. • When I know what is going to happen and that adults don't ask me questions I can't answer, like where I have been and why I have not been in school. • When I do art and don't have to read or write. • Not having to read out loud. • Giving me more time to do things.	Things that can make school or college feel more difficult • Reading aloud in front of others feels particularly difficult. • Writing for a long time is really hard – it hurts my hand. I also can't do it quickly so I found that I was much further behind than other people and then it was already time to move on to the next lesson. • Pages with lots of words on as the words move around and I don't always know what they are saying. I don't know what to do. • The school is busy and loud. • People ask me why I have not been in school and I don't know what to say to them.



HELPING ADULTS UNDERSTAND ME

My actions, words and communication can all tell adults something important.

WHEN SOMETHING IS BECOMING DIFFICULT	
☒ I become quieter	☒ I communicate less
☐ I need more reassurance	☒ I move away or leave
☒ I find it harder to concentrate	☐ I become more active or restless
☒ I need more time	☐ I notice discomfort in my body
☒ Something else: I cannot come into school	
This might mean... <i>What might you be trying to communicate?</i> I don't really know! I just find things hard and I don't always know why.	
WHAT HELPS ME	
☐ A trusted adult	☐ A familiar person or peer
☒ A quiet or smaller space	☒ Knowing what will happen
☒ Extra time to think	☐ A movement or sensory break
☐ A preferred activity	☒ Help with learning
☒ Fewer words or visual information	☒ Choice about how I take part
☒ Time away without pressure	☐ Something else: _____
Ways adults can help Keep plans the same; give me time; use a calm voice; say I can stop or finish; help me answer questions about why I'm not in school; don't ask me to read out loud or write so much.	Things adults do that are not helpful When adults make me stay longer than planned; asking about why I am not in school; changing several things at once; telling me I'm clever when I'm not.





LOOKING AHEAD

The plan should include what matters to me and what feels manageable.

WHAT I WOULD LIKE
I would like school or college to feel... Easier so I can do it.
Something I would like to be able to do... See my friends, get better at reading and writing, get a good job, do lots of art and making things.
The next step that feels doable... An art activity in a familiar room on my own with [trusted adult]
The support I would need... [staff name] in case I need to ask questions, calm music playing in the background, a quiet space with no other people or noise.
One thing I would like adults to understand <i>DRAW, ADD PHOTOS, USE SYMBOLS OR WRITE HERE</i> I want to be in school, and I am trying my best. It's really really hard and I don't want to be called lazy.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP

A shared conversation to understand what is happening and agree helpful support

Child or young person: Sam	Date: 16.09.2026
Family members contributing: [Mum's name], [Grandma's name]	Setting staff contributing: [Pastoral Lead], [Art teacher], [SENCo], [Form Tutor]

ABOUT THE CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON

Strengths, interests and things they feel proud of Sam is creative, caring and observant; he has a strong visual memory; he has thoughtful ideas; he loves art, animals and technology.	Important people, relationships and sources of support Mum, Maternal Grandparents, little sister, art teacher, [friend's name]
---	--

What helps the child or young person feel safe, comfortable, included and able to engage?
Predictable communication, familiar adults, visual preparation, quiet environments, activities linked to strengths and a clear finish time.



THE CURRENT PICTURE

What is going well?

- Sam responds positively to planned online check-ins and interest-led contact.
- Sam can discuss school more easily when there is no immediate attendance pressure.
- He seems to be able to open up more with one particular member of staff and can talk about what he wants to do in the future when the conversation is not around attendance.
- He can participate more in practical and visually supported activities.
- He shares thoughtful ideas.

What is making attendance or engagement more difficult?

- increasing difficulty sleeping before planned attendance and then significant tiredness when he has made it into school
- headaches and stomach discomfort on school mornings
- Sam hates reading out loud and worries he will be asked to do this, even when we tell him he doesn't have to.
- He is becoming more worried about leaving the house.
- Busy environments cause him to 'shut down'.

DEVELOPING A SHARED UNDERSTANDING

Listen for patterns, changes, strengths and exceptions rather than searching for a single cause

WHAT THE FAMILY HAS NOTICED

When did concerns begin, and have there been any changes or significant events?

Difficulties increased following tutor-group changes, friendship difficulties, increased literacy demands, family change and periods of absence.

Are particular days, times, places, people, lessons, transitions or activities easier or harder?

Not sure – it all feels really hard at the moment. Having to have discussions around part-time work to be at home more to support him.

What do mornings, journeys, arrivals and transitions currently look like?

Really stressful. He usually struggles to sleep the night before and then will say he has a headache or stomachache and that he feels sick.

What does the child or young person communicate about education?

Include words, actions, physical signs, behaviour, play, drawings, messages or communication through familiar systems.

He really wants to learn and he understands how important it is to learn. He particularly struggles with reading and writing and often refers to himself as "stupid" and "thick".

WHAT HELPS

What has helped previously?

One familiar contact, clear plans, quiet arrival, practical activities, reduced written demands and adults following agreed arrangements.

What appears to make things more manageable now?

Don't know – he isn't coping and struggles to leave the house.

What would the family particularly like staff to understand?

Sam's literacy needs should not be interpreted as lack of effort. He is not lazy and he tries really hard. We can see how much it takes out of him. Personal experiences should also be treated sensitively and not repeatedly explored.

BARRIERS AND SUPPORT MAPPING

Area	What may be making attendance or engagement difficult?	What support, adjustment or strength may help?
Relationships and belonging	Friendship difficulties; concern about peer questions; reduced contact with the school community; uncertainty about relationships following absence	Contact with one chosen peer; trusted pastoral adult; prepared response to peer questions; low-pressure opportunities to reconnect
Learning and curriculum access	Specific literacy difficulties; extended writing; reading aloud; lengthy written instructions; concern about catching up; feeling exposed in front of peers	Assistive technology; visual and verbal instructions; reduced copying and recording demands; scaffolded tasks; alternative recording; no unexpected reading aloud; planned literacy support
Sensory and environmental factors	Busy entrance; crowded corridors; noise; lesson changeovers; unpredictable unstructured times	Quieter entrance; arrival outside peak movement; access to a familiar low-demand space; planned transitions; reduced waiting
Emotional wellbeing and regulation	Worry about returning; uncertainty; reduced confidence; anticipation of literacy and social demands; physical responses to stress	Predictable plans; trusted adult; agreed regulation support; clear start and finish; manageable activities; opportunity to communicate what is difficult
Health and development	Disrupted sleep; fatigue; headaches and stomach discomfort; literacy needs affecting curriculum access	Attention to fatigue and capacity; accessible learning; flexible pacing; appropriate health support where required; regular review of adjustments
Family and contextual factors	Previous adverse experiences; family changes; potential sensitivity to loss, uncertainty and unreliable arrangements; family feeling under pressure	Stable and transparent communication; dependable relationships; privacy and sensitivity; no-blame partnership; advance notice of changes
Routines, transitions and attendance arrangements	Leaving home; entering school; moving through crowded spaces; uncertainty about how long Sam will be expected to remain	Clear visual plan; consistent arrival routine; agreed finish time; quiet entrance; no unplanned extension; contingency plan if an opportunity becomes difficult

GRADUATED RETURN AND RE-ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Turning shared understanding into coordinated, manageable and regularly reviewed action

PLAN DETAILS

Child or young person: Sam	School or setting: [School name]
Plan start date: 17.09.2026	Review date: October half term
Named contact: [Name]	People involved in developing the plan: Sam, Sam's family [names], School staff [names]

CURRENT AREAS OF FOCUS



☒ Maintaining Connection	☒ Rebuilding Familiarity	☒ Increasing Participation
☐ Broadening Engagement	☐ Sustaining Participation	

Why have these areas been selected?

Refer to the child or young person's current experience, priorities, capacity and the conditions that support engagement.

Sam currently needs reliable connection, renewed familiarity with the setting and positive experiences of accessible participation. The phases will be used flexibly rather than as a fixed sequence, in keeping with the main framework.

KEY INFORMATION TO CARRY FORWARD

Strengths, interests and protective factors	• Creative, caring and observant. • Strong visual memory and practical problem-solving skills. • Able to explain ideas thoughtfully through discussion, when feeling safe and regulated. • Interests in art, animals, design technology and practical activities. • Positive relationships with family, a trusted pastoral adult, the art teacher and one familiar peer. • Responds well to predictable plans, visual information and interest-led activities. • Family support and adults who are committed to understanding and adapting the environment. • Increasing ability to communicate what feels manageable and which support is helpful.
Child or young person's priorities	• To take part in art and practical technology activities. • To reconnect with one chosen peer. • To access learning without extensive reading or written recording. • To know clearly what will happen during each visit. • To use a quiet entrance and avoid busy movement times. • To have a trusted adult nearby. • To have an agreed finish time that is not extended unexpectedly. • To receive help with responding to questions from peers. • For adults to understand that difficulty attending does not mean that learning is unimportant.
Important relationships	• Family members who know Sam well and provide ongoing support. • The trusted pastoral adult who maintains predictable, low-pressure contact. • The art teacher, who supports engagement through an area of strength and interest. • One chosen peer with whom Sam would like to reconnect. • A back-up adult who will be introduced gradually during a familiar activity.



Main barriers identified	• Specific literacy difficulties affecting reading fluency, spelling, extended writing and the processing of lengthy written instructions. • Unexpected reading aloud and tasks containing large amounts of text. • Concern about catching up with missed work. • Friendship difficulties and worries about questions from peers. • Busy entrances, crowded corridors, lesson changeovers and unstructured times. • Reduced confidence and uncertainty following periods of absence. • Sleep disruption, fatigue, headaches and stomach discomfort. • Experiences of change, instability and loss, which may contribute to a need for greater predictability and dependable relationships. • Unexpected changes to agreed adults, places, activities or finish times. • Pressure linked to discussion of a full-time return.
Adjustments and support already helping	• Brief, predictable contact with one trusted pastoral adult. • A quiet entrance and arrival outside busy movement times. • Visual preparation, including photographs and a clear plan. • Familiar rooms, adults and activities. • Clear start and finish arrangements, with no unexpected extension. • Interest-led art and practical activities. • No unexpected reading aloud. • Instructions provided verbally and visually. • Reduced written recording and alternative ways to demonstrate understanding. • Access to assistive technology, including speech-to-text. • No expectation to complete all missed work. • An agreed way to request help, a pause, a change or an early finish. • Supported contact with one chosen peer. • One consistent weekly communication route between the family and setting. • Calm, affirmative language and sensitive handling of Sam's past experiences.

CURRENT RE-ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Plan meaningful opportunities, the support needed and what adults may notice

Meaningful opportunity or goal	Support and adjustments needed	When, where and who?	What might we notice? / Review date
Maintain a predictable connection with school Sam will take part in a brief, regular check-in with the trusted pastoral adult. The contact will focus on Sam's interests, current experiences and what feels manageable, helping Sam remain connected to school without creating an immediate expectation to attend on site or discuss a full-time return.	The trusted pastoral adult will lead the check-in. The conversation will begin with Sam's interests, such as art, animals or practical technology. Sam can contribute through conversation, written messages or visual choices. Adults will not ask when Sam will return full-time, discuss attendance targets or introduce unplanned activities. The date, time, adult and expected duration will be confirmed beforehand. Sam can end the check-in at the agreed time or earlier if needed.	When: Tuesday at 3.30 pm for up to 15 minutes. Where: Online, accessed from home. Who: Sam and the trusted pastoral adult. Back-up: A second familiar adult will initially join one successful check-in briefly, rather than replacing the pastoral adult without preparation.	• Greater ability to respond to or initiate contact. • Greater ability to communicate what currently feels manageable. • Increased ability to talk about people, interests or activities connected with school. • Reduced need for reassurance about what will happen during the check-in. • Sam or the family reporting that contact feels supportive rather than pressurising. Review date: After three planned check-ins.



Meaningful opportunity or goal	Support and adjustments needed	When, where and who?	What might we notice? / Review date
Rebuild familiarity with the school environment Sam will make short, planned visits to a familiar room using a quiet entrance and an agreed arrival and departure routine. The purpose is to rebuild familiarity with the school environment and increase Sam's sense of predictability and safety, rather than to access lessons at this stage.	A photograph of the entrance, route, room and adult will be shared beforehand. Sam will receive a simple visual plan showing arrival, activity, pause options and departure. The pastoral adult will meet Sam at the entrance. Sam will not be expected to use the main entrance or move through crowded corridors. The visit will have a clear finish time and will not be extended unexpectedly, even if it appears to be going well. Sam can use an agreed word, card, gesture or message to request help, pause, finish or change. A family member can accompany Sam to the entrance if helpful.	When: Thursday at 3.30 pm, after most pupils have left the site. Where: Quiet side entrance, followed by the familiar pastoral room. Who: Sam, the trusted pastoral adult and, if Sam chooses, a family member to the entrance. Duration: Up to 15 minutes initially. Departure: Sam will leave through the same entrance at the agreed time.	• Reduced uncertainty before the visit. • Greater ability to leave home for the agreed opportunity. • Greater ability to approach or enter the school site. • Greater ability to remain in the familiar room for some or all of the agreed time. • Increased communication about what felt helpful or difficult. • Use of the agreed communication method to request support, a pause or an early finish. • Sam and the family reporting that the visit felt predictable and manageable. Review date: Following two visits.

Meaningful opportunity or goal	Support and adjustments needed	When, where and who?	What might we notice? / Review date
Participate in a meaningful art activity Sam will take part in a chosen art activity in a familiar environment. The activity will build on Sam's strengths and interests and provide an accessible experience of enjoyment, competence and participation without extensive reading, writing or assessment demands.	Sam will choose from two or three art activities in advance. Materials will be prepared before arrival so Sam is not required to wait or decide under pressure. There will be no unexpected reading aloud, extended writing or written evaluation. Sam can communicate ideas verbally, visually or through the artwork. The trusted pastoral adult will be nearby, while the art teacher will lead the activity. The session will follow the established quiet arrival routine. Sam will have access to the agreed pause or finish communication and a quieter space if needed. No missed-work or catch-up discussion will take place during the activity.	When: Thursday at 3.30 pm, following successful familiarisation visits. Where: Art room, accessed through the quiet side entrance. Who: Sam and the familiar art teacher, with the trusted pastoral adult nearby. Duration: Initially 20 to 30 minutes, with an agreed finish time. Transition: Sam will move directly from the entrance to the art room without waiting in shared areas.	• Greater ability to enter the art room and begin the activity. • Engagement with materials or the selected task. • Evidence of enjoyment, interest, concentration or creative choice. • Greater ability to communicate preferences, ideas or support needs. • Use of the pause or finish option when needed. • A positive experience of competence without extensive literacy demands. • Greater ability to return for another planned session. • Sam identifying parts of the activity or environment that should remain the same. Review date: After two art sessions.



Meaningful opportunity or goal	Support and adjustments needed	When, where and who?	What might we notice? / Review date
Reconnect with a chosen peer Sam will take part in a structured, shared activity with one chosen peer. The contact will take place within a familiar and manageable activity, with Sam retaining choice about when the peer joins, how long the interaction lasts and when it should pause or finish.	Sam will identify the peer and agree the shared activity in advance. The peer will receive brief, sensitive guidance from staff about avoiding questions regarding Sam's absence unless Sam raises the subject. The contact will take place during a familiar art activity rather than an unstructured social period. An adult will remain available but will not unnecessarily direct the interaction. Sam can use the agreed communication to pause or finish the contact. The peer will initially join for only part of the session. There will be no expectation for Sam to access breaktime, lunchtime or a larger peer group.	When: During the final 10 minutes of an established art session, once Sam has indicated that this feels manageable. Where: Art room or adjoining quiet space. Who: Sam, one chosen peer and the art teacher, with the pastoral adult available nearby. Preparation: Sam and the peer will know the planned activity, length and finish arrangement beforehand.	• Greater ability to remain in the shared activity when the peer enters. • Increased communication or shared attention between Sam and the peer. • Greater ability to make choices about the interaction. • Greater ability to communicate when contact should pause or end. • Increased references to the peer or shared activity after the session. • A stronger sense of connection or belonging reported by Sam. • Greater ability to consider another structured peer opportunity. Review date: After two supported peer contacts.

Explore an accessible practical curriculum activity Sam will participate in a short, practical technology activity using visual instructions, minimal written recording and agreed literacy adjustments. The purpose is to explore how Sam can access curriculum learning and demonstrate understanding without extensive reading, writing or catch-up demands.	The activity will be practical, clearly defined and shared with Sam beforehand. Instructions will be presented visually and verbally, one step at a time. There will be minimal written text and no unexpected reading aloud. Sam can demonstrate knowledge through discussion, practical work, photographs, diagrams, typing or speech-to-text. Staff will not describe the activity as catch-up work or present a backlog of missed tasks. Sam will be shown the room and introduced to the adult in advance. The established quiet entrance, trusted-adult support, agreed finish and pause arrangements will remain in place. Only one new element will be introduced at a time.	When: After the review of familiarisation and art sessions confirms that this additional opportunity may be manageable. Where: A quieter area of the technology room, outside a busy lesson changeover. Who: Sam and a familiar technology member of staff. The pastoral adult will support arrival and remain available. Duration: Initially 15 to 20 minutes. Arrival and departure: Through the established quiet route, with no additional activity added on the day.	• Greater ability to approach and enter the technology space. • Greater ability to understand and begin the task using visual and verbal instructions. • Engagement with the practical elements of learning. • Successful use of speech-to-text or another agreed recording method. • Increased ability to demonstrate knowledge without extensive writing. • Greater ability to ask for clarification, support or additional processing time. • Sam identifying which literacy adjustments were most helpful. • Participation remaining manageable after returning home and before the next planned opportunity. Review date: After the first two technology opportunities.
--	---	---	---

Meaningful opportunity or goal	Support and adjustments needed	When, where and who?	What might we notice? / Review date
Prepare for questions from peers Sam will work with the trusted pastoral adult to develop an agreed response to questions about absence or return. This will help Sam reconnect with peers while protecting privacy and reducing the expectation that Sam must explain personal circumstances.	A trusted adult will offer Sam several possible responses, such as: “I’ve been away, but I don’t want to talk about it,” “I’m doing a gradual return,” or “Please ask me about something else.” Sam can choose, change or write another response. Staff will agree how to intervene if peers continue asking questions. Relevant staff will be told that Sam should not be required to discuss the absence publicly. The chosen peer can be supported to redirect conversations. Sam may also choose a non-verbal response or ask an adult to answer.	When: Prepared during an online or pastoral check-in before peer contact or curriculum participation increases. Where: Online or in the familiar pastoral room. Who: Sam and the trusted pastoral adult, with Sam’s chosen response shared only with relevant staff. Use: Available during art, technology and any future peer contact.	• Greater ability to discuss possible peer interactions during planning. • Sam selecting or creating a response that feels acceptable. • Reduced uncertainty about seeing peers. • Greater ability to use the response, seek adult help or move away if questions arise. • Staff responding consistently and protecting Sam’s privacy. • Increased ability to participate in peer activities without needing to explain the absence. Review date: Reviewed after the first supported peer interactions and whenever the social context changes.



Meaningful opportunity or goal	Support and adjustments needed	When, where and who?	What might we notice? / Review date
Become familiar with a back-up adult Sam will gradually become familiar with a second supportive adult during activities that are already predictable and manageable. This will widen the network of trusted support without abruptly removing or replacing Sam's established relationship with the pastoral adult.	The back-up adult will first be introduced through a photograph and brief information chosen with Sam. The adult will then join part of an activity that is already familiar and manageable. The pastoral adult will remain present initially. The back-up adult will use the same language, communication arrangements and agreed adjustments. The back-up adult will not independently lead a new or more demanding activity until familiarity has been established. Sam will be asked, using accessible choices, what felt helpful and whether further contact feels manageable.	When: Introduced after Sam has completed familiar contact with the pastoral adult and at least one established art activity. Where: Familiar pastoral room or art room. Who: Sam, trusted pastoral adult and identified back-up adult. Initial contact: Approximately five minutes as part of an existing session, rather than a separate meeting.	• Greater ability to remain in the activity while the back-up adult is present. • Increased recognition or communication with the back-up adult. • Greater ability to receive limited support from the back-up adult while the pastoral adult remains nearby. • Sam communicating what should remain consistent across adults. • Reduced uncertainty when the back-up adult is mentioned in future planning. • Over time, greater ability to access an established activity when the primary pastoral adult is unavailable. Review date: After two supported introductions, before changing the back-up adult's role.

Communication and contingency arrangements

How and when home and the setting will communicate The trusted pastoral adult will be the main point of contact for Sam and Sam's family. The pastoral adult will make one planned telephone call to the family each Friday afternoon to share: • what Sam has accessed or participated in that week; • what appeared to help; • anything that remained difficult; • what Sam communicated about the experience; • any practical information needed for the following week. The family can contact the pastoral adult by email if circumstances change or if information may affect a planned opportunity. Repeated attendance-focused calls or messages from different members of staff will be avoided. Any proposed change to the plan will be discussed with Sam and the family before it is introduced. A brief written or visual summary of the agreed plan for the following week will be sent after the call, including the activity, date, time, location, adult involved and agreed finish time.	How the child or young person can show that something is becoming difficult Sam may show that an experience is becoming difficult by: • becoming quieter or communicating less; • taking longer to respond; • finding it difficult to begin an activity; • moving away from the task, person or environment; • seeking proximity to the pastoral adult; • repeatedly checking what will happen next or when the activity will finish; • experiencing increased difficulty entering or remaining in the building; • reporting headaches, stomach discomfort or tiredness; • using the agreed word, card, gesture or message for help, pause, change or finish. Adults will consider changes from Sam's usual communication and participation rather than relying on one predetermined sign. Staff will check their interpretation with Sam, where possible, using simple language and accessible choices.
How adults will respond When Sam communicates that something is becoming difficult, adults will: • remain calm and use brief, clear language; • acknowledge the communication without questioning, challenging or persuading; • reduce immediate verbal, social, sensory or learning demands; • remind Sam of the available options, such as help, pause, change or finish; • allow additional processing time;	What can be shortened, adapted, paused or revisited Any element of the plan can be reviewed if it becomes unmanageable or is no longer helping. This may include: • shortening the length of a visit or activity; • reducing the number of activities planned within one visit; • moving an opportunity to a quieter time or location; • changing the arrival or departure arrangements; • returning to a more familiar room or activity;



• support Sam to move to the agreed quieter space if this is helpful; • maintain the agreed finish time and avoid extending the opportunity unexpectedly; • avoid introducing further demands, discussing attendance targets or asking Sam to explain personal experiences; • inform the family through the agreed contact route if the plan has changed; • record what happened before the difficulty arose, what Sam communicated and what appeared to help. Adults will treat the experience as useful information about the accessibility of the activity, support or environment, rather than as defiance, failure or a lack of motivation.	• reducing reading, writing or recording demands; • providing information visually or verbally; • using speech-to-text, diagrams, photographs or discussion instead of extended writing; • delaying peer contact or reducing the size of the group; • reintroducing the trusted pastoral adult if support has reduced too quickly; • pausing a curriculum activity while retaining contact, familiarity and interest-led participation; • revisiting an earlier area of focus, such as maintaining connection or rebuilding familiarity. A change to one part of the plan will not automatically result in all opportunities being paused. Elements that remain manageable and helpful will continue wherever possible.
Support that should remain available throughout The following support should remain available across all areas and phases of Sam's plan: • access to the trusted pastoral adult and an introduced back-up adult; • predictable communication and advance information about activities; • a quiet entrance and arrival outside busy movement times; • clear start, transition and finish arrangements; • no unexpected extension of an agreed visit; • an agreed way to request help, a pause, a change or an early finish; • access to a familiar, quieter space; • visual and verbal instructions; • additional processing time; • no unexpected reading aloud; • adapted and scaffolded learning tasks; • reduced copying and written recording;	What happens if a key adult is unavailable A back-up adult will be identified and introduced gradually during an activity that Sam already experiences as familiar and manageable. Sam will receive the back-up adult's name and photograph beforehand. If the trusted pastoral adult is unexpectedly unavailable: • the family will be informed as early as possible; • Sam will be told who is available instead; • the agreed opportunity will not automatically proceed with an unfamiliar adult; • Sam will be offered an accessible choice to continue with the introduced back-up adult, shorten or adapt the activity, rearrange it, or maintain contact in another way; • the back-up adult will use the same communication arrangements, language and adjustments;



• alternative ways to demonstrate understanding, including discussion, diagrams, typing, photographs and speech-to-text; • no expectation to complete all missed work; • activities linked to Sam's strengths and interests; • calm, affirmative and non-blaming language; • sensitive treatment of personal and family information; • one consistent communication route between home and the setting. These supports will not be removed simply because Sam's attendance or participation has increased. They will be reviewed according to whether they continue to enable access, wellbeing and sustainable participation.	• no additional or unfamiliar activity will be introduced at the same time; • Sam will not be disadvantaged if continuing is not manageable. The purpose of the back-up arrangement is to increase predictability and continuity, not to remove the established trusted relationship prematurely.
Who needs to know about the plan The full plan will be shared only with the people who need the information to implement or coordinate Sam's support. This includes: • Sam and the family; • the trusted pastoral adult; • the identified back-up adult; • the SENCO; • the attendance lead; • the art teacher; • the technology teacher; • other staff directly involved in agreed activities; • relevant support staff responsible for arrival, transition or access to the quieter space. Other staff who may encounter Sam need a brief summary of the practical arrangements relevant to their role, such as the quiet entrance, agreed finish time, literacy adjustments and how to respond if Sam needs a pause. They do not need detailed information about Sam's adverse experiences or family circumstances.	Agreed way to ask for help, a pause or an early finish Sam can communicate a need for support in more than one way. The agreed options are: • saying or messaging "help", "pause", "change" or "finish"; • showing the corresponding visual card; • pointing to the relevant option on the visual plan; • sending a short message to the pastoral adult; • placing the agreed card on the table; • moving to the agreed quieter space, when safe to do so. Adults will accept any of these as valid communication. Sam will not be required to provide a detailed explanation before support is offered. When Sam communicates help, an adult will clarify what kind of support may be useful using brief choices. When Sam communicates pause, the activity will stop temporarily, and Sam can access the agreed quieter space or remain without demands.

Information shared with staff will describe Sam's needs and agreed support without using blaming or deficit-based language. Sam and the family will know what information is being shared and with whom.

When Sam communicates **change**, adults will explore whether the task, environment, communication or support can be adapted.

When Sam communicates **finish**, adults will support the agreed departure arrangements without challenge or shame. The experience can be discussed later, when Sam is able to reflect, rather than during the moment of difficulty.

REVIEW AND ADAPTATION

Treat changes and difficulties as useful information, not failure or regression

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT?

What has become more manageable?

- Sam has accessed all planned online check-ins with the trusted pastoral adult.
- Sam now requires less reassurance about the content and duration of familiar check-ins.
- Sam has completed two planned visits using the quieter entrance and has remained in the familiar pastoral room for the agreed period.
- Sam has taken part in familiar art activities without being expected to read aloud or complete written recording.
- Sam has used the agreed communication system to request a pause and has returned to the activity after the pause on one occasion.
- Sam has begun to communicate more clearly about which environments, activities and adjustments feel manageable.
- Sam has spent time with one chosen peer during structured art activities.
- Sam has used speech-to-text to record ideas during a short practical technology task.
- Sam has become more able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding when extensive literacy demands are removed.
- The family has reported reduced uncertainty before familiar, clearly planned activities.

What remains difficult?

- Entering the school site during busy arrival periods or lesson changeovers.
- Moving through crowded corridors and shared spaces.
- Seeing larger groups of peers, particularly when Sam is uncertain what they may ask.
- Participating during unstructured periods, including breaktime and lunchtime.
- Thinking about missed work or being told that an activity is intended to help Sam “catch up”.
- Beginning tasks that contain extensive written information or several written instructions presented at once.
- Reading aloud, particularly when this is unexpected or takes place in front of peers.
- Completing extended written work without alternative recording methods or scaffolding.
- Meeting unfamiliar adults or experiencing an unexpected change to the adult providing support.
- Changes to agreed locations, activities, start times or finish times.
- Participating in a new activity when several other aspects of the experience are also unfamiliar.
- Managing fatigue and physical discomfort before or after less familiar activities.

Planned contact with school has become less focused on whether Sam will attend full-time and more focused on connection, access and meaningful participation.	Discussing broader curriculum participation while the immediate arrangements are still uncertain.
What has the child or young person communicated? Sam has communicated that: - contact with the trusted pastoral adult is helpful when it is predictable and does not focus immediately on attendance; - art and practical technology feel more manageable than activities involving extensive reading or writing; - visual instructions make it easier to understand what is expected and begin an activity; - speech-to-text makes it easier to demonstrate ideas without being limited by spelling or written organisation; - a clear finish time helps because Sam knows that agreed arrangements will be followed; - being asked to stay for longer than planned would make future opportunities feel less predictable; - the quiet entrance and familiar room make entering school more manageable; - seeing one chosen peer as part of an agreed activity feels easier than entering a larger or unstructured social situation; - being asked about missed work or full-time attendance increases pressure; - the phrase “catching up” creates concern about a large and possibly unmanageable backlog; - Sam needs advance information about any new adult, activity or location; - the short English lesson involved too many unfamiliar or difficult elements at the same time;	What has the family noticed? - Sam is more able to discuss planned activities when the information is clear and shared in advance. - Sleep is more settled before activities that are familiar and have previously been manageable. - New activities continue to require careful preparation and may be associated with increased tiredness, headaches or stomach discomfort. - Sam responds more positively when communication comes through one trusted member of staff. - Repeated messages from different members of staff increase uncertainty and pressure. - The agreed finish time is particularly important because it demonstrates that adults will follow through on the plan. - Sam speaks more positively about art and practical technology than about lessons involving extensive reading or writing. - Sam appears more confident after activities in which understanding can be demonstrated verbally, visually or practically. - The introduction of the English lesson led to increased difficulty before the activity and affected confidence before the next art visit. - Sam recovered more readily when adults treated the experience calmly and did not frame it as failure. - The current pace feels more sustainable than attempting a rapid increase in attendance.



- difficulty entering the English lesson did not mean that Sam did not want to learn;
- Sam would like to continue art and explore another short practical technology activity before considering a more literacy-demanding lesson.

- The family feels better able to work in partnership with the setting because communication is focused on understanding and support rather than blame or proof.

What have staff or other professionals noticed?

- Sam communicates more openly during familiar, low-pressure contact.
- Sam contributes thoughtful ideas when given sufficient processing time.
- Sam's knowledge and understanding are more visible when information is presented verbally and visually.
- Practical and creative activities provide effective opportunities for participation and success.
- Sam is more able to begin tasks when instructions are short, clearly sequenced and supported visually.
- Speech-to-text and alternative recording methods reduce the demands associated with spelling and written organisation.
- Sam is able to use the agreed pause communication when adults respond consistently.
- The quieter entrance and arrival outside busy transition periods reduce environmental and social demands.
- Sam engages more successfully with a peer when the contact is structured around a shared activity.
- Predictable adults, places and routines support greater access and participation.
- Sam's difficulties increase when several demands change simultaneously.
- Adjusting the length of a task without changing its literacy, sensory, relational or emotional demands is not sufficient.

Which adjustments and supports are helping?

Relationships and communication

- One named pastoral contact who maintains predictable, low-pressure communication.
- Gradual introduction of a back-up adult during an activity that is already familiar.
- Calm, affirmative and non-blaming language.
- One planned weekly communication route between home and the setting.
- Support to reconnect with one chosen peer through a structured shared activity.
- A prepared response to questions from peers about Sam's absence.
- Respectful handling of personal and family information.

Literacy and curriculum access

- No unexpected reading aloud.
- Visual and verbal instructions presented in manageable stages.
- Reduced copying and written recording.
- Alternative methods of demonstrating understanding, including discussion, practical work, diagrams, typing, photographs and speech-to-text.
- Activities with a clear and achievable purpose.
- Tasks linked to Sam's strengths and interests.
- Removal of the expectation that all missed work must be completed.



- The unsuccessful English opportunity reflected difficulties with the design and timing of the activity rather than a lack of motivation.
- Progress is more visible through Sam's communication, connection and participation than through attendance percentages alone.

- Identification of priority learning rather than presentation of a backlog.
- Additional processing time.

Environment and transitions

- Use of a quieter entrance.
- Arrival outside busy movement and lesson-changeover times.
- Access to familiar rooms and quieter spaces.
- Photographs and visual information shared before visits.
- Direct movement from the entrance to the agreed activity, without waiting in shared areas.
- A clear start, sequence and finish.
- Preparation for changes to adults, activities or locations.

Regulation and contingency support

- An agreed way to communicate help, pause, change or finish.
- Adults reducing immediate demands when Sam communicates difficulty.
- Access to a pause without needing to provide a detailed explanation.
- Opportunities that can be shortened, adapted or revisited.
- Maintaining support from earlier phases while new activities are explored.
- Avoiding the introduction of several unfamiliar elements at the same time.

What did not work as expected?

Following two successful art visits, the team introduced a short English lesson. Although the intended duration was brief, several new or difficult elements were introduced simultaneously:

- Sam was asked to arrive during a busy lesson changeover.
- The activity took place in a less familiar curriculum environment.

What might this tell us?

The experience suggests that the plan introduced too many changes and demands at the same time.

More specifically, it may indicate that:

- familiarity with one activity or location did not automatically transfer to a more demanding curriculum environment;

- Sam was met by an adult who had not previously been introduced.
- The worksheet contained several written instructions.
- The activity required more reading and written recording than Sam had expected.
- The task was described as an opportunity to begin “catching up”.
- The literacy adjustments that had supported success in art and technology were not consistently applied.
- The social, sensory and curriculum demands were all increased within the same opportunity.

Sam was unable to enter the building for the lesson and experienced greater difficulty before the next planned art activity.

- a short activity is not necessarily a manageable activity if the literacy, sensory, social or relational demands remain high;
- the visual and written demands of the English activity were not sufficiently adjusted;
- describing the task as “catching up” increased Sam’s awareness of missed work and created additional pressure;
- arrival during lesson changeover increased noise, movement, unpredictability and the likelihood of peer contact;
- the involvement of an unfamiliar adult reduced the predictability and relational safety of the opportunity;
- the trusted pastoral adult and established adjustments need to remain available as participation broadens;
- new adults should be introduced within familiar and successful activities before independently supporting Sam;
- the next curriculum opportunity should build on Sam’s practical strengths and established learning adjustments;
- only one significant new element should be introduced at a time where possible;
- subsequent difficulty before the art activity does not represent failure or loss of all previous progress;
- returning temporarily to familiar support may help restore predictability and confidence;
- the English lesson should be paused and redesigned rather than repeated in the same form;
- Sam’s experience and feedback should guide when and how a literacy-demanding curriculum activity is reconsidered.

UPDATING THE PLAN

CONTINUE	PAUSE	CHANGE OR EXPLORE
Support, adjustments and opportunities that remain helpful	Opportunities that are not currently manageable or useful	Elements that need adapting or further understanding
• Maintain the brief weekly check-in with the trusted pastoral adult, focused on Sam's interests, experiences and what currently feels manageable. • Continue using one named member of staff as the main contact for Sam and the family. • Continue introducing the back-up adult gradually during activities that are already familiar and manageable. • Retain the quiet entrance and arrival times outside busy movement and lesson-changeover periods. • Continue sharing visual information before each visit, including the adult involved, location, activity, sequence and agreed finish time. • Maintain clear start and finish arrangements, without unexpectedly extending activities or visits. • Continue familiar art sessions, as these provide a meaningful and accessible	• Pause the English lesson in its current form. • Pause arrival during busy lesson changeovers. • Pause activities that combine an unfamiliar adult, unfamiliar environment and increased learning demands within the same opportunity. • Pause the use of language about 'catching up', missed work or returning to the expected level. • Pause any expectation that Sam should complete a backlog of work accumulated during absence. • Pause activities requiring extended reading or written recording until appropriate adjustments have been planned with Sam. • Pause unexpected reading aloud, including within small groups or individual support sessions.	Curriculum access • Explore a short practical technology activity as the next curriculum opportunity, building on Sam's interests and strengths. • Use visual and verbal instructions presented one step at a time. • Agree with Sam how ideas will be recorded before the activity begins. • Explore the use of speech-to-text, typing, diagrams, photographs, practical demonstration or verbal explanation. • Identify essential or priority learning rather than presenting all missed work. • Review how literacy needs are supported consistently across different subjects. • Consider how written materials can be reduced, structured and visually organised.



experience of competence, enjoyment and participation. • Maintain structured contact with the chosen peer during familiar activities, with Sam retaining control over when the contact begins and ends. • Continue providing verbal and visual instructions in short, manageable stages. • Retain the agreement that Sam will not be asked to read aloud unexpectedly. • Continue reducing copying and extended written recording. • Maintain access to alternative recording methods, including discussion, diagrams, typing, photographs and speech-to-text. • Continue identifying priority learning rather than expecting Sam to complete all missed work. • Allow additional processing time before expecting a response or task initiation. • Retain the agreed ways for Sam to communicate help, pause, change or finish. • Continue providing access to a quieter or familiar space. • Maintain calm, affirmative and non-blaming adult responses when an activity becomes difficult. • Continue the weekly communication arrangement between the family and the trusted pastoral adult.	• Pause the introduction of curriculum tasks containing several written instructions on one page. • Pause unstructured peer contact during breaktime or lunchtime. • Pause participation in larger groups where the social context and likely peer responses have not been prepared for. • Pause the involvement of unfamiliar staff who have not been introduced to Sam in advance. • Pause any reduction in trusted-adult support during new or less familiar activities. • Pause adding extra activities to a visit because the initial activity appears to be going well. • Pause discussion of increasing to full-time attendance while the current opportunities are still being established. • Pause any assumption that successful participation in art means that Sam can immediately access a more literacy-demanding lesson. • Pause repeated questioning about why the English lesson did not take place. Sam should not need to justify	• Before reconsidering English, explore which aspects of the subject might be accessible, meaningful and connected to Sam's interests. • Ensure that any future English activity is not framed as catching up or recovering missed work. Relationships • Continue introducing the back-up adult gradually during familiar art activities before the adult independently supports Sam. • Explore whether the chosen peer can join another structured and interest-led activity. • Prepare an agreed response that Sam can use if peers ask about absence or return. • Clarify how staff will respond if peers continue asking questions after Sam has indicated that the subject is private. • Explore which other adults Sam may already recognise or experience as predictable, without assuming that all familiar staff are trusted adults. Environment and transitions • Move new activities away from busy lesson-changeover periods.
---	--	--



• Continue measuring progress through Sam's communication, connection, curriculum access, confidence, participation and belonging, alongside attendance. • Maintain these adjustments as participation increases, rather than removing them simply because Sam has accessed more time on site.	the difficulty before the plan is adapted. • Pause the English opportunity rather than repeating it in the same form, as doing so would not address the literacy, sensory, social and relational barriers identified at review.	• Explore whether Sam can visit the technology space when the surrounding area is quiet. • Continue using the established entrance and route when introducing new curriculum opportunities. • Introduce only one significant new element at a time where possible. • Share photographs or visual information about any new location before the activity. • Clarify what Sam will experience between arriving at school and beginning the activity, reducing waiting or movement through shared areas. • Explore whether noise, lighting, room layout or the presence of other pupils affects Sam's access to particular activities. Communication and regulation • Review whether the existing help, pause, change and finish options remain accessible across different environments. • Explore whether Sam would benefit from carrying the visual communication card between activities.
--	--	--

		• Agree how adults will check whether Sam needs support without asking repeated questions. • Record what adults notice before difficulty increases, including changes in communication, task initiation, physical comfort or proximity-seeking. • Explore what helps Sam reconnect following an experience that has not gone as planned. • Ensure that the agreed finish time remains reliable across all activities. Timing and pacing • Continue familiar art sessions while introducing only one new practical curriculum opportunity. • Review the practical technology activity after two planned opportunities rather than increasing demands after the first successful experience. • Consider the impact of fatigue and physical discomfort before deciding whether to extend time on site. • Explore whether the spacing between planned opportunities gives Sam sufficient time to recover and prepare. • Use Sam's, the family's and staff's feedback to decide the next change
--	--	---

		rather than relying solely on elapsed time or attendance figures. Further understanding • Explore which aspects of literacy demand are most significant for Sam, such as reading fluency, volume of text, spelling, written organisation, speed, public performance or fear of peer judgement. • Consider whether physical discomfort is associated with particular demands, days, transitions or levels of uncertainty. • Explore whether the difficulty with the English lesson was primarily influenced by the task, timing, environment, unfamiliar adult or the cumulative effect of all these factors. • Continue gathering Sam's views about what made the art and technology activities more accessible. • Review whether Sam's experiences of change and loss are relevant to particular situations, while avoiding repeatedly asking Sam to recount personal experiences. • Consider whether existing literacy provision and classroom adjustments are sufficient across the broader curriculum.
--	--	--

		• Review how learning, relational, sensory and contextual factors interact rather than addressing each in isolation.
--	--	--

The next manageable opportunity we will explore

Sam will continue attending the familiar art sessions while beginning a short, practical technology activity. The technology activity will build on Sam's interests and provide an opportunity to access curriculum learning without extensive reading, writing or catch-up demands.

Initially, the activity will:

- last for approximately 15 to 20 minutes;
- take place in a quieter area of the technology room;
- involve one clearly defined practical task;
- be introduced outside busy lesson-changeover times;
- use the established quiet entrance and familiar arrival routine;
- be supported by a familiar technology member of staff;
- retain access to the trusted pastoral adult;
- have a clear, agreed finish time;
- introduce no other new activity or expectation on the same day.

Sam will be shown photographs of the technology space, equipment and supporting adult beforehand. The activity will be discussed with Sam before it is added to the plan. Familiar art sessions will continue alongside the new opportunity so that the introduction of curriculum participation does not replace activities that already support connection, confidence and belonging. The purpose is to explore whether Sam can access a practical curriculum activity using established adjustments. It is not intended to test whether Sam is ready for broader lesson attendance.

Support and adjustments that need to be in place

Preparation and predictability

- Sam will receive a short visual plan showing the entrance, route, room, adult, activity, pause options and finish time.
- The activity and equipment will be explained beforehand using brief verbal and visual information.
- Sam will know exactly which task will be offered and will not be presented with additional work on arrival.
- Any unavoidable change to the adult, location or activity will be communicated to Sam and the family as early as possible.
- If a significant element changes unexpectedly, Sam can choose to adapt, shorten or rearrange the opportunity.

Literacy and curriculum access

- Instructions will be presented verbally and visually, one step at a time.
- Written information will be brief, clearly organised and limited to what is essential for the activity.
- Sam will not be asked to read aloud.
- There will be no expectation to copy instructions or complete extended written recording.
- Sam can demonstrate knowledge through practical work, discussion, photographs, diagrams, typing or speech-to-text.
- Additional processing time will be provided before instructions are repeated or further prompts are given.
- The activity will not be described as catch-up work.
- Sam will not be shown a backlog of missed work.
- Success will be understood through access, participation, communication and demonstration of understanding, rather than the quantity of written work produced.

Relationships and support

- The familiar technology member of staff will lead the activity.
- The trusted pastoral adult will support Sam's arrival and remain available nearby.
- The back-up adult will not replace the trusted pastoral adult during this new opportunity unless the arrangement has been discussed and agreed beforehand.
- Adults will use calm, concise and affirmative language.
- Sam will not be repeatedly asked whether the activity feels manageable. Adults will allow time and attend to Sam's communication and participation.

Environment and transitions

- Sam will enter through the established quiet entrance.
- The activity will take place outside busy transition periods.
- Sam will move directly to the technology space without waiting in a crowded shared area.
- A quieter space will remain available if Sam needs to pause.
- The room layout and equipment will be prepared before Sam arrives.
- The session will finish at the agreed time and will not be extended unexpectedly, even if it appears to be going well.
- Sam will leave through the same established route.

Communication and contingency planning

- Sam can say, point to, show or message **help, pause, change** or **finish**.
- Sam will not need to provide a detailed explanation before support is offered.
- If the task becomes difficult, adults will first reduce demands and clarify the available options.
- The activity may be shortened, simplified, demonstrated differently or paused.
- If Sam chooses to finish, the agreed departure arrangements will be followed calmly and without shame.
- Any difficulty will be reviewed later as information about the task, timing, environment or support, rather than being treated as failure.
- Familiar art sessions and the established trusted-adult contact will continue even if the technology opportunity needs to be paused or redesigned.

The child or young person's views about this

"Technology feels easier than doing English because I can show what I know without loads of writing."

"I'm okay trying it if I know exactly what's going to happen first."

"I want to see pictures of where I'm going and who will be there."

"I don't want loads of instructions all at once."

"It helps if someone talks me through things instead of giving me loads to read."

"I'm more likely to have a go if I know when it starts and when it finishes."

"I don't want people talking about catching up."

"I still want to keep doing the art sessions because I know they're okay."

"If it doesn't work, I want us to change it rather than just keep doing the same thing."

“Afterwards, I’d like people to ask me what helped, what didn’t help and what should be different next time.”

Next review date: Two weeks after the first technology opportunity, provided that two planned opportunities have taken place.

If an opportunity is postponed or does not take place, the review should still proceed so that Sam, the family and staff can consider what affected access and whether the plan needs adapting.

The review should consider:

- Sam’s views about both opportunities;
- the family’s observations before and after each activity;
- Sam’s ability to access the agreed arrival and transition arrangements;
- whether the visual and verbal instructions were accessible;
- whether speech-to-text or other recording methods were helpful;
- whether the length and timing were manageable;
- any impact on fatigue, physical discomfort or subsequent activities;
- which adjustments should continue;
- whether anything should pause or change;
- whether another technology opportunity remains the most appropriate next focus.

Named person co-ordinating the review: SENCo or trusted pastoral adult [Name]