

DATE

Dear _____,

An informational letter regarding Cleft Lip and Palate, from CLAPA

Re: Secondary School Transition for _____

Here at The Cleft Lip and Palate Association (CLAPA) we provide information and support to families, adults, children and young people born with a cleft from across the UK. As _____, who will be joining you in _____, was born with a _____, we thought it would be useful to offer some support and guidance on the specific challenges and additional needs that may arise for a child born with a cleft.

While many people born with a cleft report that they had a wonderful time in school, it can also be the peak age for teasing and name-calling and for children born with a facial difference, who look or sound different this can be especially difficult.

Psychological Impact

- There are particular times when a child born with a cleft may be more vulnerable and in need of support, including times of change and before operations.
- For those born with a cleft, there may be issues relating to self-esteem as they may look or feel different to others.
- A 2015 study, *Psychological Adjustment in Children with a Cleft Lip and/or Palate*, found that those with a visible difference like a cleft scar or noticeably different speech can face challenges that have a big impact on mental wellbeing, particularly during school years.
- In another 2015 study of 16- year-olds born with a cleft, 42% reported bullying at least daily, 50% reported sadness, 31% depression, and 26.3% felt 'marked for life'.

Recommendations

The fundamental need to have stability and a support system around children born with a cleft at a key transitional time is vital to ensure they can thrive in the next stage of their education. We have found that the primary -secondary transition is a period when more acute needs can develop and, as a charity, we want to support schools to ensure that young people can thrive in the next stage of their education.

There is a chance a child born with a cleft will need to deal with multiple absences to attend cleft clinics, undergo surgeries and potentially due to bullying and worries about operations. A flexibility with any attendance reward policies should be considered as well as liaising with parents to find time to catch up on the work the child may have missed.

Listed below are some suggested questions that you may want to consider discussing with the family, prior to their child starting at your school:

- 1. How much does their child want people to know their cleft journey?*
- 2. Is there any language that their child does/doesn't like when referring to a cleft lip and/or palate?*
- 3. What could the school say if someone makes a comment or asks a question?*
- 4. How would the child like the school to support them as they transition to their new school?*
- 5. Does the child have any speech/hearing difficulties that the school should be aware of? If so, how can the school support with this? (more information around possibly ways to support a child with speech/hearing difficulties can be found in the links below)*

Additional Resources

Attached to this letter is a helpful guide discussing ways to support young people born with a cleft at school. There are also some great resources available on the CLAPA website (clapa.com) and Changing Faces website (changingfaces.org.uk) that can provide more information about supporting a child born with a cleft in moving schools.

If you would like any more information about cleft lip and palate or would like to arrange an awareness raising presentation at your school, please feel free to contact CLAPA on info@clapa.com.

Yours Sincerely,



Antonia Sinclair
Community Engagement Coordinator

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 Cleft Lip and Palate Association  www.clapa.com