

GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS WHO CONTEMPLATE CHANGING A SM CHILD'S SCHOOL

SMIRA is asked from time to time whether a change of school might break the vicious circle of non-speaking. Here are some comments made by knowledgeable professionals that might be helpful.

1. Before contemplating a change, it is desirable that the child should be in full agreement. If the child is well-settled and the teachers sympathetic, then a change may have an adverse effect.
2. A change of school may be beneficial if the child already speaks outside the school situation, both with adults and children who do not go to the same school. This may indicate a decreased anxiety level, but the child may be currently afraid of how his/her peers in class will react should he/she start talking. This is a perfectly normal reaction as, like adults, children like to present a consistent picture of themselves to the outside world. Also, the child may feel it does not have the social skills to deal with the new situation.
3. Once the parents and the SM child have agreed on a change of school, the new school must be taken into full confidence and with their help a gradual introduction should be planned. Meeting a member of staff, perhaps a classroom assistant, within home is likely to be very beneficial. The SM child should get to know at least one child attending the new school and preferably meet him/her at home for tea. Visits to the new school should be preferably when the building is empty. This could be combined with meeting the head and classroom teacher in as informal a situation as possible. Younger siblings, if available, should be taken. Good times for a transfer might be the end of term events, a Christmas Party or charity sale in the hall! It is inadvisable to rush a transfer, even if the child reassures parents that he/she feels very confident. Becoming a 'talking person' in class is likely to be a great event in the child's life, requiring readjustment emotionally and involving responses of the sympathetic nervous system, which need time.
4. If the transfer brings about the required result, i.e. the SM child is now talking in class, this should not be taken as a sign that the previous school had been at fault. On the contrary, it should be acknowledged that most of the groundwork had been done there and due to this the SM child is now ready for the next step, which is talking in class to peers and teachers. Perhaps this needs to be said as it would be a pity if the previous school, who might have taken a lot of trouble with a program etc., were left to feel unappreciated.