

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY
AND COUNSELLING
(IJEPC)www.ijepec.comFROM EARLY CHILDHOOD TO PRIMARY SCHOOLS:
A REVIEW OF TRANSITION PRACTICES FOR CHILDREN
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Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 30.09.2025

Revised date: 15.10.2025

Accepted date: 17.11.2025

Published date: 01.12.2025

To cite this document:

Zahri, A. F., & Zainal, M. S. (2025). From Early Childhood to Primary Schools: A Review of Transition Practices for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling*, 10 (61), 234-248.

DOI: 10.35631/IJEPC.1061018

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Abstract:

The transition from early childhood settings to primary school represents a pivotal stage for children with disabilities, often characterized by emotional, social, systemic, and educational challenges. This review synthesizes existing literature to outline a multilevel framework for supporting these transitions, with a particular emphasis on developmental disabilities such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Common barriers include limited teacher preparedness, inadequate inter-agency coordination, rigid curricula, restricted access to early intervention, and persistent social stigma. For children with ASD, these difficulties are further magnified by social exclusion, bullying, and fragmented service continuity, leading to heightened anxiety and emotional dysregulation. Evidence highlights the role of early intervention centers in promoting school readiness through individualized plans, collaborative family-professional partnerships, and structured programs. Effective strategies include transition planning meetings, targeted teacher training, peer-mediated approaches, and parent empowerment initiatives that demonstrate the value of socially validated, classroom-embedded practices. Importantly, the success of such efforts depends on sustained collaboration among schools, families, service providers, and policymakers. This review emphasizes the need for inclusive, child-centered practices that are tailored to individual strengths and initiated well before school entry. Addressing systemic shortcomings, enhancing teacher capacity, and reducing stigma through coordinated policy reform are critical to ensuring continuity and equity in education. By conceptualizing an integrated framework, this article advocates for proactive, holistic approaches that safeguard positive transitions and support the long-term well-being of children with disabilities.

Keywords:

Transition, Early Childhood, Primary Schools, Autism Spectrum Disorder

Introduction

The transition from early childhood programs to formal primary education represents a pivotal stage in every child's development. It signifies not only the beginning of structured learning but also the foundation for social, emotional, and cognitive growth. For children with disabilities, however, this transition is far from straightforward. Research highlights that this period is often marked by heightened complexity and systemic challenges (Hartle et al., 2023; Lo et al., 2020). Unlike their typically developing peers, who typically experience school entry as a relatively predictable and structured process, children with disabilities are confronted with multiple layers of barriers. These barriers are often rooted in fragmented services, limited resources, and educational systems that remain underprepared to accommodate diverse learning needs.

One of the most pressing issues during this transition is the shift from early intervention services to school-based programs. Early childhood services often provide highly individualized, family-centered approaches. In contrast, primary education tends to emphasize standardized classroom environments that can lack the flexibility necessary to meet diverse developmental needs. Parents frequently report confusion in understanding how early intervention aligns with formal schooling, while educators may feel uncertain about adapting teaching practices for students with specific disabilities. This gap in coordination often results in children entering primary schools that are poorly equipped to deliver personalized support, leading to experiences of exclusion, delayed learning, or unmet developmental goals (Walker et al., 2012). Families are particularly affected by these discontinuities. Parents must manage multiple roles simultaneously—navigating educational systems, liaising with healthcare providers, coordinating therapy services, and advocating for their child's rights. For many, this process is overwhelming, especially in contexts where support services are scarce or bureaucratic procedures are difficult to navigate (Timmons et al., 2004). The stress associated with managing these intersecting responsibilities can also strain family well-being, reinforcing the urgency of creating smoother, more integrated transition pathways.

For children with disabilities, the challenges of entering primary school extend beyond academic readiness. They must also manage social integration, emotional regulation, and access to specialized resources. These needs highlight that the difficulties they encounter are not simply a result of personal deficits but are shaped by structural, financial, social, and institutional barriers. For example, limited teacher training, inadequate funding for inclusive classrooms, and inconsistent policies across regions often restrict children's opportunities for meaningful participation. Consequently, the transition to school becomes a period of compounded disadvantage rather than growth. Well-coordinated transition planning emerges as a critical strategy for addressing these challenges. Research indicates that individualized transition plans—tailored to children's strengths, interests, and unique developmental needs—are highly effective in supporting smoother adjustments (Dreyzehner et al., 2021; Kearney & Bookspan, 2023). Such plans are most beneficial when grounded in collaboration, ensuring that families, educators, therapists, and community services communicate clearly and work

toward shared goals. A holistic approach not only facilitates academic success but also enhances social inclusion and emotional well-being.

Beyond immediate school readiness, successful transitions must also account for long-term considerations. Healthcare continuity, for instance, is vital, as many children with disabilities require ongoing medical or therapeutic support that cannot be disrupted when they enter formal schooling. Legal and policy frameworks also play a crucial role, particularly in relation to guardianship, supported decision-making, and ensuring children's rights to equitable education and participation (Turchi et al., 2024). Planning that incorporates these long-term aspects supports not only the child's entry into school but also their autonomy, dignity, and overall quality of life as they grow. Ultimately, measuring the success of school transitions for children with disabilities requires moving beyond narrow academic benchmarks. While literacy and numeracy skills are important, they do not capture the full picture of a child's development or the inclusivity of the educational environment. Instead, success should be evaluated based on the degree to which systems enable children to participate holistically in school life—socially, emotionally, and academically—and to feel valued as part of the broader community. Achieving this vision requires systemic change, including better service coordination, improved teacher preparation, and greater recognition of families as key partners in the transition process.

Challenges Transition to Primary School

Many children with disabilities enter primary school without sufficient preparation due to inadequate access to early intervention or preschool education (Janus et al., 2008; Lo et al., 2020). Once in school, the lack of teacher training, rigid curricula, and inconsistent implementation of individualized education programs (IEPs) undermine their chances of success (Lamichhane, 2013; Ishikawa et al., 2024). These educational gaps place the burden of adaptation on children, rather than on systems designed to meet diverse learning needs, resulting in frustration and disengagement.

Table 1: Key Challenges and Impacts of School Transitions on Children with Disabilities

Barrier Type	Key Challenges	Impact on Children with Disabilities
Financial Barriers	High costs of therapies, support services, and adaptive technologies- Transportation expenses to inclusive schools- Parents reducing work hours or leaving jobs to care for children	Limited access to necessary resources- Widening inequality between families who can/cannot afford support- Increased family stress and economic strain
Social Barriers	Disability stigma influencing delayed or avoided school enrollment- Peer rejection and difficulties forming friendships- Negative attitudes from teachers or staff	Social isolation, low self-esteem, disengagement in learning- Long-term effects on socioemotional development- Reinforcement of exclusionary school cultures
Educational Barriers	Limited access to early childhood education or early intervention- Teachers lack training in inclusive education-	Children arrive unprepared for academic tasks- Schools fail to adapt to diverse learning needs-

	Rigid, standardized curricula- Weak or inconsistent individualized education programs (IEPs)	Repeated failure leading to disengagement and poor outcomes
Systemic Barriers	Bureaucratic delays in assessments and placements- Fragmented coordination between schools, health, and social services- Inaccessible school infrastructure (stairs, toilets, furniture)- Unsafe or unreliable transportation	Gaps or delays in support- Families overwhelmed navigating systems- Physical exclusion from school environment- Reinforces inequality and marginalization
Integrated Solutions	Strengthening collaboration among families, educators, health providers, and policymakers- Policy reforms to reduce administrative burdens- Public awareness campaigns to reduce stigma- Investment in teacher training, inclusive curricula, and infrastructure	Consistent, holistic support for children- Greater equity and access in education- Shifting perceptions toward disability as diversity- Ensuring social justice and inclusion

Based on Table 1, financial constraints represent one of the most pressing challenges in this transition. Families from low-income households or marginalized communities often lack the financial resources necessary to access specialized support services, therapies, or adaptive technologies that can facilitate school readiness and participation (Soni et al., 2022; Lamichhane, 2013). In contexts where such services are available, the costs can be prohibitively high, forcing families to make difficult choices between essential daily needs and their child's educational development. Transportation to schools that are physically accessible or provide inclusive programs adds another layer of financial strain. Parents may also experience income loss when they must reduce work hours or leave employment to care for their child or attend school-related meetings. These economic burdens exacerbate inequality and create disparities between children whose families can afford additional resources and those who cannot, thereby perpetuating cycles of exclusion.

Equally important are the social barriers that shape children's experiences as they enter school. Disability-related stigma remains pervasive across many societies, often influencing parents' decisions to delay or avoid school enrollment due to fear of rejection or discrimination (Lamichhane, 2013). Even when children with disabilities are enrolled, they may struggle to find acceptance among peers, leading to difficulties in forming friendships and participating fully in classroom and playground activities. The lack of meaningful peer interactions frequently results in social isolation, undermining self-esteem and engagement in learning (Andriana & Evans, 2021; Couper & Rietveld, 2019). For children at this developmental stage, where peer relationships are central to socioemotional growth, exclusion can have long-lasting effects. Moreover, negative attitudes from teachers or school staff, whether explicit or implicit, may further reinforce feelings of otherness and discourage children from participating actively. In this sense, social barriers are not merely interpersonal challenges but structural issues embedded within school cultures that prioritize conformity over diversity.

Educational barriers present another significant layer of difficulty. Many children with disabilities lack adequate preparation for primary schooling due to limited access to early childhood education or early intervention programs (Janus et al., 2008; Lo et al., 2020). Without these foundational experiences, children may arrive at school unprepared for academic

tasks or classroom routines. This gap is compounded by the limited capacity of many schools to provide tailored support. Teachers often lack specialized training, and individualized education programs are either underdeveloped or inconsistently implemented (Lamichhane, 2013; Ishikawa et al., 2024). In many contexts, curricula remain rigid and standardized, failing to reflect the diverse learning needs of students with disabilities. As a result, children are expected to adapt to the system rather than the system adapting to them. Such educational barriers not only hinder academic achievement but also affect broader developmental outcomes, as children who experience repeated failure or exclusion may become disengaged from learning altogether.

Systemic challenges further complicate the picture, highlighting the role of governance, policy, and institutional structures in shaping school transitions. Bureaucratic processes often create long delays in assessments and school placements, leaving children without timely access to necessary support (Janus et al., 2008). Families are required to navigate complex administrative systems that are frequently opaque and inconsistent. The lack of coordination among key stakeholders—including schools, healthcare providers, social services, and families—creates fragmented systems of care where important information is lost and responsibilities are blurred (Riesen et al., 2014; Lieberman, 2023). Such fragmentation undermines continuity and results in duplication of effort or, worse, gaps in support. Physical infrastructure represents yet another systemic concern. Many schools remain inaccessible to children with physical disabilities due to architectural barriers such as staircases without ramps, classrooms without adapted furniture, or toilets not designed for diverse needs. Unsafe or unreliable transportation routes to and from school further deter participation (Lamichhane, 2013). These structural limitations send a broader message of exclusion, reinforcing the notion that children with disabilities are secondary within education systems.

Addressing these barriers requires an integrated, multidimensional approach. Enhancing collaboration among families, educators, healthcare providers, and policymakers is essential to ensure that children receive consistent and holistic support (Riesen et al., 2014; Lieberman, 2023). Communication between stakeholders must be proactive, transparent, and centered on the child's needs. Policy reforms are also necessary to reduce administrative burdens and ensure that support systems are both accessible and equitable. Equally important are public awareness campaigns that challenge stigma and promote inclusion by reframing disability as part of human diversity rather than a deficit (Lamichhane, 2013; Janus et al., 2008). Such efforts must be coupled with investments in teacher training, school infrastructure, and accessible curricula that recognize and accommodate different learning profiles.

Ultimately, the challenges faced by children with disabilities in their transition to primary school cannot be understood in isolation but as part of a complex interplay of financial, social, educational, and systemic barriers. These barriers intersect to produce inequities that limit the full participation of children with disabilities in education and society at large. If unaddressed, these challenges compromise not only individual development but also broader societal goals of equity and inclusion. By adopting holistic strategies that address these barriers simultaneously, educational systems can better support children with disabilities in realizing their potential. Ensuring a successful school transition is not simply a matter of academic preparedness but a fundamental issue of social justice and human rights.

Challenges Faced by Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the Transition to Primary School

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) experience unique challenges during the transition to primary school, a stage that demands adaptation to new environments, routines, and social expectations. This developmental milestone is particularly complex for children with ASD, whose differences in social communication, sensory processing, and behavioral regulation often interact with rigid school structures that are not designed with neurodiversity in mind. Unlike many of their peers, children with ASD must navigate environments where expectations for independence, interaction, and compliance are high, yet support systems are often limited or inconsistent. As a result, what should be a moment of growth and opportunity frequently becomes a period of stress and exclusion for these children and their families.

Table 2: Key Challenges and Impacts of School Transitions on Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Domain	Key Challenges	Impact on Children with ASD
Social Communication	Difficulty with reciprocity, turn-taking, and non-verbal cues- Struggles with group work and oral instructions- Risk of peer rejection, teasing, or exclusion	Social withdrawal, frustration, or conflict- Isolation and low self-esteem- Limited opportunities to practice social skills
Sensory Processing	Hyper- or hypo-sensitivity to noise, light, touch, or crowds- Overwhelm from busy, unpredictable classrooms	Anxiety, meltdowns, or avoidance behaviors- Perception of school as hostile- Lack of sensory-friendly supports
Routine & Flexibility	Reliance on predictability and comfort with sameness- Disruptions (e.g., schedule changes, substitute teachers) trigger distress	Heightened anxiety, resistance, or emotional outbursts- Behaviors misinterpreted as defiance- Punitive responses reinforce exclusion
Academic Demands	Uneven cognitive profiles: strengths in memory/patterns vs. challenges in language, executive functioning, attention- Standardized curricula and limited differentiation- Weak implementation of IEPs	Risk of academic underachievement or disengagement- Strengths overlooked due to difficulties- Lack of tailored teaching approaches
Systemic Barriers	- Teachers lack training in autism-inclusive practices- Limited collaboration with families and healthcare providers- Policies inconsistent or weakly enforced	- Misinterpretation of behaviors- Fragmented, unequal support across schools- Ongoing inequities in access to inclusion
Emotional & Psychological Well-being	Repeated exposure to non-inclusive environments- Ongoing stress for children and families	Anxiety, depression, social withdrawal- Family stress and advocacy burden- Reduced quality of life

Social communication difficulties form one of the most profound challenges for children with ASD entering primary school. Social reciprocity, turn-taking, and understanding non-verbal cues are central to classroom interactions, yet these are areas where children with ASD may struggle significantly (Radley et al., 2014). Teachers often expect children to work collaboratively in groups, follow oral instructions, or participate in classroom discussions. For a child with ASD, difficulties in interpreting tone of voice, body language, or facial expressions can result in misunderstandings, leading to withdrawal, frustration, or conflict with peers (Scheerer et al., 2020). Peer relationships, which are crucial for socioemotional development, are often disrupted as children with ASD face rejection, teasing, or exclusion. Without intentional scaffolding, these children risk social isolation, which not only affects their self-esteem but also limits their opportunities to practice and develop social skills. The social domain therefore remains a critical area of concern, particularly as schools continue to prioritize conformity and group dynamics over individualized interaction styles.

In addition to social communication, sensory sensitivities present another barrier to school adjustment. Classrooms are typically busy, noisy, and unpredictable environments filled with visual, auditory, and tactile stimuli. For children with ASD, who may be hyper- or hypo-sensitive to sensory input, these conditions can be overwhelming (Radley et al., 2014). A buzzing fluorescent light, the scraping of chairs, or the chaotic sounds of recess may trigger anxiety or behavioral outbursts. Similarly, crowded hallways and transitions between classes can become highly distressing, leading to avoidance behaviors or meltdowns. While neurotypical children gradually adapt to these environments, children with ASD may perceive them as persistently hostile, creating ongoing barriers to learning and participation. Despite the prevalence of sensory difficulties in ASD, few schools are equipped with sensory-friendly spaces or strategies to support children in regulating their responses. This gap reflects a lack of systemic recognition of sensory needs as integral to educational inclusion.

Rigid routines and inflexibility further complicate the transition to primary school. Many children with ASD rely heavily on predictable schedules and find comfort in familiar structures (Scheerer et al., 2020). Primary schools, however, often introduce variability in daily routines through special events, changes in teachers, or unanticipated shifts in classroom activities. Such disruptions can trigger heightened anxiety or resistance, as children with ASD may struggle to adjust quickly to new expectations. For example, a sudden cancellation of art class or a substitute teacher may provoke distress, resulting in emotional or behavioral challenges that teachers misinterpret as defiance. When viewed through a deficit lens, these reactions are often punished rather than accommodated, reinforcing negative experiences of school. The rigidity of educational systems that prioritize uniformity exacerbates these challenges, failing to account for the ways children with ASD process change.

Academic demands also pose significant obstacles for children with ASD. While some children demonstrate strong cognitive skills, particularly in areas such as memory or pattern recognition, others may struggle with executive functioning, language processing, or attention regulation (Scheerer et al., 2020). Standardized curricula and instructional methods often do not reflect these diverse profiles, creating mismatches between student needs and teaching practices. Teachers may lack the training to differentiate instruction, and individualized education plans are not always adequately implemented. As a result, children with ASD may fall behind academically or disengage from learning altogether. Even those with above-average abilities may be misunderstood, as their strengths in certain areas are overshadowed by difficulties in

others. The uneven cognitive profiles characteristic of ASD demand tailored approaches, yet many schools lack the flexibility or resources to deliver them consistently.

Beyond the classroom, systemic barriers further exacerbate the challenges faced by children with ASD. A recurring issue is the lack of teacher preparation in understanding and supporting neurodiverse learners (Ishikawa et al., 2024). Teachers often enter classrooms with limited knowledge of autism, leading to misinterpretations of behavior and missed opportunities for effective intervention. Schools may also lack collaboration with healthcare providers, therapists, or families, creating fragmented support systems where crucial information is not shared (Riesen et al., 2014). Furthermore, policy frameworks often fail to prioritize inclusive practices, leaving implementation to the discretion of individual schools. This inconsistency means that children with ASD may receive vastly different levels of support depending on where they are enrolled, perpetuating inequities across educational systems.

The emotional and psychological well-being of children with ASD is deeply affected by these compounded barriers. Constant exposure to environments that do not accommodate their needs can lead to heightened anxiety, frustration, and diminished motivation to learn. Over time, repeated experiences of exclusion or failure may contribute to secondary mental health difficulties such as depression or social withdrawal (Scheerer et al., 2020). Families, too, experience stress as they advocate for appropriate support, navigate bureaucratic hurdles, and cope with the emotional toll of watching their child struggle. The burden is not merely academic but extends into the broader quality of life of both children and their caregivers.

Addressing these challenges requires a fundamental shift in how schools conceptualize inclusion. Rather than expecting children with ASD to adapt unilaterally to rigid structures, schools must evolve to embrace flexibility, diversity, and individualized approaches. Practical strategies such as implementing visual schedules, creating sensory-friendly classrooms, and providing targeted social skills training can significantly ease transitions (Radley et al., 2014). Teacher training must prioritize autism awareness and evidence-based strategies, while collaboration between families, educators, and healthcare professionals should become standard practice. On a systemic level, policy frameworks need to mandate inclusive practices, allocate resources for specialized support, and establish accountability mechanisms to ensure consistent implementation.

The challenges faced by children with ASD during the transition to primary school are not insurmountable but demand intentional, coordinated responses. By recognizing the interplay of social, sensory, behavioral, academic, and systemic factors, educational systems can move beyond reactive approaches to proactive inclusion. Ensuring that children with ASD are supported during this crucial developmental stage is not only an educational imperative but also a matter of equity and human rights. A successful transition paves the way for long-term academic engagement, social participation, and emotional well-being, laying the foundation for a more inclusive society that values neurodiversity as a strength rather than a deficit.

Promising Practices and Interventions Supporting Transition

Despite the multiple barriers faced by children with disabilities, particularly those with ASD, research and practice continue to highlight strategies that can significantly improve their transition to primary school. These approaches emphasize early preparation, individualized planning, collaborative partnerships, and the integration of evidence-based interventions within

inclusive educational environments. The underlying goal of these practices is not only to facilitate academic adaptation but also to promote social belonging, emotional stability, and long-term resilience. Effective transition supports recognize that children with disabilities bring unique strengths and needs that must be addressed holistically, through systems that prioritize inclusion and flexibility rather than uniformity and rigid expectations.

One of the most consistently recognized practices in successful transition planning is the role of early intervention. Services delivered in the preschool years, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, and behavioral supports, establish a developmental foundation that prepares children for the demands of primary school (Lim et al., 2021). For children with ASD, early intervention programs like Early Intensive Behavioral Intervention (EIBI) have been shown to enhance communication skills, reduce maladaptive behaviors, and increase adaptive functioning, thereby improving school readiness (Reichow et al., 2012). However, the true strength of early intervention lies not only in its therapeutic impact but also in the collaborative networks it fosters between families and professionals. Parents become equipped with strategies to support their child's learning, while schools gain valuable insights into a child's needs and strengths prior to formal enrollment. This continuity ensures that the transition process begins well before the first day of school, reducing anxiety and confusion for both children and their families.

Another promising practice is the use of structured transition planning. Programs such as Building Better Bridges (BBB) demonstrate the effectiveness of deliberate, step-by-step transition processes designed to reduce uncertainty and increase predictability (Nuske et al., 2025). These initiatives often include pre-visit sessions, where children and their families can tour the new school, meet teachers, and become familiar with classroom routines. Teachers, in turn, receive detailed information about the child's developmental profile, including sensory needs, learning preferences, and behavioral strategies that have proven successful in previous settings. Structured planning also involves clear communication between early intervention providers, schools, and families, ensuring that vital information does not get lost during the handover process. Such coordinated efforts not only enhance the child's readiness but also build trust between families and educational institutions.

Teacher professional development represents another cornerstone of effective transition practices. Teachers often report feeling underprepared to support children with disabilities, particularly those with ASD, whose needs may not align with standard instructional methods (Ishikawa et al., 2024). Professional development programs that emphasize autism awareness, classroom strategies, and collaborative approaches can transform teacher confidence and competence. Evidence-based training encourages teachers to adopt practices such as visual supports, structured routines, and differentiated instruction, which are beneficial not only for children with ASD but for all learners. Additionally, training can help teachers adopt more empathetic perspectives, moving away from deficit-based interpretations of behavior toward an appreciation of neurodiverse strengths. Such a shift fosters inclusive classrooms where differences are normalized and valued.

Beyond the teacher-student relationship, peer-mediated interventions have shown strong promise in supporting the social inclusion of children with ASD. Programs like Joint Attention, Symbolic Play, Engagement, and Regulation (JASPER) highlight the importance of embedding social learning opportunities within natural classroom activities (Kasari, 2012). By training

peers to model social behaviors, initiate interactions, and provide supportive feedback, these interventions create a more welcoming environment for children with ASD. Peer involvement not only enhances social reciprocity and communication skills but also reduces the risk of exclusion and bullying. Importantly, peer-mediated approaches reinforce the idea that inclusion is a shared responsibility among all members of the school community, rather than a burden placed solely on teachers or parents.

Parental empowerment is equally vital in facilitating smooth transitions. Parents are often the most consistent advocates for their children, yet they frequently encounter systemic barriers that limit their participation in decision-making processes (Timmons et al., 2004). Programs that actively involve parents through workshops, support groups, and collaborative planning meetings strengthen the capacity of families to navigate school systems and advocate effectively. When parents are empowered, transitions are more likely to reflect the child's unique needs and preferences, reducing mismatches between home and school expectations. Furthermore, engaged parents contribute to more consistent reinforcement of learning strategies across settings, promoting generalization of skills.

The broader success of these practices hinges on sustained stakeholder collaboration. Transition is not the responsibility of a single party but requires coordinated efforts from families, teachers, service providers, and policymakers. Effective partnerships ensure continuity of services, reduce fragmentation, and promote accountability across systems. For example, inter-agency collaborations between health, education, and social services can provide integrated support plans that address both academic and non-academic needs, such as healthcare and family well-being (Hartle et al., 2023). Policy frameworks also play a critical role by mandating inclusive practices, allocating resources for transition supports, and embedding accountability measures to ensure equitable implementation across schools.

While individual programs like BBB and JASPER demonstrate the power of targeted interventions, their broader significance lies in the principles they represent: inclusion, personalization, collaboration, and sustainability. These principles must guide all transition practices to ensure they are not isolated innovations but part of a systemic shift toward more equitable education. Schools must commit to fostering environments where children with disabilities are not viewed as exceptions but as integral members of the learning community. Such a paradigm shift requires political will, resource investment, and cultural change, yet it promises long-term benefits not only for children with disabilities but for the inclusivity of the entire educational system.

Future Directions

The transition into primary school is often described as one of the most significant milestones in childhood, shaping academic, social, and emotional development. While this stage presents challenges for all children, it is particularly complex for children with disabilities, especially those with ASD. For these learners, school entry is not simply a matter of academic readiness but involves navigating multiple, overlapping barriers across financial, social, educational, and systemic domains. Families may carry the economic strain of specialized care and therapies, while stigma and negative societal attitudes erode confidence and restrict opportunities for meaningful participation. Within schools, the lack of resources, rigid curricula, and insufficient teacher preparation often result in environments that are ill-equipped to address the diverse needs of children with ASD. At a systemic level, fragmented service delivery and inaccessible

infrastructure compound these challenges, threatening not only immediate school readiness but also long-term educational success, social inclusion, and overall well-being.

Table 3: Policy and Practice Actions to Support Children with ASD in School Transitions

Domain	Policy/Practice Actions
Financial & Social	Expand affordable intervention services; launch anti-stigma awareness campaigns
Education & Readiness	Strengthen teacher training; provide differentiated instruction; allocate resources for inclusive classrooms
Systemic Gaps	Build integrated service models; ensure inter-agency collaboration; enforce inclusive education policies
ASD-Specific Needs	Early intervention; structured transition plans; peer support programs; parent empowerment
Families	Involve parents as equal partners; provide training and peer-support networks
Teachers	Continuous professional development; co-teaching with specialists; disability inclusion in pre-service curricula
Peers	Buddy programs; cooperative learning; promote empathy and inclusion culture
Technology	Use platforms for parent-teacher communication; online training; virtual school tours
Equity	Expand services to underserved communities; equity-focused funding; culturally responsive approaches

The experiences of children with ASD illustrate the urgency of these issues. Many face difficulties with social communication, heightened risks of bullying, and challenges with emotional regulation that can make the transition especially stressful. Parents, too, frequently express anxiety and uncertainty, questioning whether the school environment can truly meet their child's needs. These concerns highlight broader systemic shortcomings, where one-size-fits-all approaches fail to capture the diversity of the autism spectrum. Without targeted supports, the risk of exclusion, disengagement, and diminished developmental outcomes remains high.

Despite these barriers, evidence points to a range of strategies that can support successful transitions. Early intervention programs are particularly valuable, equipping children with foundational communication, social, and cognitive skills that ease the shift into structured learning environments. Transition planning that emphasizes structure, predictability, and familiarity can also reduce stress, particularly when schools coordinate closely with early intervention providers to ensure continuity of care. Equally important is investment in teacher training, equipping educators with practical strategies for inclusion and confidence in managing diverse classrooms. Peer-mediated interventions, such as buddy systems or cooperative learning approaches, have been shown to foster belonging and reduce social isolation. Additionally, empowering parents through training and advocacy support ensures that their perspectives and their child's unique needs are fully reflected in decision-making processes. Together, these practices demonstrate that the transition to school, while challenging, can also be transformative when supported through deliberate, collaborative, and evidence-based approaches.

Moving forward, isolated initiatives must give way to systemic change. At the policy level, inclusive education must be treated as a foundational principle rather than an optional add-on. This requires governments and ministries of education to prioritize policies that mandate accessibility, allocate sufficient resources, and establish accountability mechanisms to ensure inclusion is consistently implemented. Strengthening inter-agency collaboration is equally essential. Too often, fragmented systems across health, education, and social services leave families to shoulder the burden of coordination. Integrated service models, where schools partner with healthcare providers, therapists, and community organizations, can create more seamless support for children's holistic development.

The role of families also deserves greater recognition. Parents are often their child's strongest advocates, but they need information, training, and emotional support to navigate complex systems effectively. Schools should regard parents as equal partners, offering structured opportunities for collaboration, workshops on advocacy, and peer-to-peer support networks. Parallel to this, investment in teacher capacity-building must remain a priority. Teachers are the central figures in shaping children's daily school experiences, and their preparedness directly influences inclusion. Ongoing professional development, co-teaching with specialists, and curriculum reforms that embed disability and inclusion training at the pre-service stage are essential steps toward building confidence and competence among educators.

Peer engagement also holds transformative potential. Programs that encourage classmates to act as buddies or partners not only support children with disabilities but also cultivate empathy, respect, and social responsibility across the entire student body. Over time, such approaches can help build inclusive school cultures that normalize diversity and celebrate difference. Technology provides further opportunities, from digital platforms that enhance communication between parents, teachers, and service providers to tools such as social stories or virtual school tours that help children prepare for transitions. However, technology should complement rather than replace human interaction, ensuring that relational aspects of support remain central.

Finally, equity must remain at the heart of reform efforts. Families in rural or low-income settings often face the greatest barriers to accessing early intervention, specialized services, or inclusive schools. Policies must address these disparities by expanding affordable services, extending resources to underserved communities, and considering cultural attitudes that shape how disability is understood and supported. Without this focus, promising practices risk becoming privileges for the few rather than rights for all.

Conclusion

Effective transition to primary school is a critical milestone for children with disabilities, yet it is often disrupted by emotional, social, educational, and systemic barriers. Anxiety, stigma, difficulties in forming peer relationships, and limited access to specialized support are especially pronounced among children with ASD. Inadequate teacher training and inconsistent communication between families, schools, and early intervention programs further undermine inclusive practices and continuity of care. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated, individualized, and holistic approach. Early intervention centers play a pivotal role by equipping children with foundational cognitive, social, and emotional skills while preparing families to advocate effectively within the school system. Structured transition plans developed collaboratively among parents, educators, and service providers are essential to ensure consistency and support. Professional development for teachers, evidence-based practices such

as JASPER, and peer-mediated programs can foster inclusion and reduce social isolation. Key priorities include strengthening inter-agency collaboration, expanding access to early intervention, and empowering parents through programs like Building Better Bridges (BBB). Policy reforms to streamline services, enhance accessibility, and reduce stigma are equally vital. Together, these strategies can create inclusive, child-centered frameworks that promote smoother transitions and long-term success for children with disabilities.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express sincere gratitude to the Centre for Educational and Community Wellbeing, Faculty of Education, for funding the Article Processing Charge (APC), which enabled the publication of this article. Appreciation is also extended to all authors for valuable contributions, support, and dedication in the preparation of this manuscript.

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