



Transition to Secondary School

A Parent's Guide



Herts & West Essex
Mental Health Support Teams



Making the change from primary to secondary school can be a daunting time, both for your child and for you! This guide is for you as a parent to read and share with your child to help you both prepare for the transition.

By taking into account some practical and emotional considerations about your child's education you should both be able to negotiate the transition with ease and enjoy this milestone event.

Help for parents

Do you remember your first day at big school? Were you daunted by how large your new school seemed or maybe you felt a bit lost amongst all those teenagers at breaktime? How about all the new subjects, the fact that you had lots of different teachers and, of course, new school mates to try and make friends with? When preparing your child for secondary school it can help to step back in time and remember all those emotions you felt as you stood in your new school uniform and prepared to make the leap into the great unknown.

Whatever you do, don't dismiss any apprehension your child says they're feeling about starting secondary school. It's important to listen to their worries and have a think about what you can do to help. Perhaps they're worried about the bus journey they'll be making to school? If so, perhaps a few runs in the car to familiarise them with the route may help. Or it might be that they're nervous about making friends, so be sure to emphasise the fact that everyone will be feeling the same. In many cases, they'll be starting alongside friends from primary so they won't be 'alone'. Whatever fears your child may have, they're all equally valid, so try not to dismiss them. And if you didn't have a very positive experience at school try not to let that influence your child!

In the early days of starting at secondary give your child a bit of leeway - they're going to need a bit of 'bedding in' to their new routine, getting used to following a timetable, increased responsibility and absorbing all that physics, biology and french etc. Expect your child to be tired at the end of the day so cut them some slack and think about the impact weekend activities may have on their ability to cope. However it will pay to get into a routine regarding homework sooner rather than later. After-school study and revising will become part of your child's education for the next few years so helping them to get into good homework habits early will reap huge rewards for your child, both on an academic and personal level. As preparation for the world of work, having some self-discipline and an ability to work to a deadline is something they will get used to through

doing their homework. Ensure that they are eating and sleeping well to give them the energy to cope with the increase of workload.



Preparation

As a parent there's lots of practical matters you'll need to consider before the start of school and thereafter. Having all of the required school uniform is an obvious one, as well as more sophisticated items of stationery and various books. You might need to buy:

- *Calculator*
- *pencil case*
- *plenty of pens*
- *pencils, rubber*
- *ruler*
- *pencil sharpener*
- *an appropriate sized rucksack/bag*

Ask the school about lockers, lunches, term dates, uniform guidelines (including hairstyles, jewellery and footwear) after school activities, equipment needed, school policy brochures, school transport etc.

Help your child get organised. Together make a checklist of equipment and books needed, names of teachers and timetables. If your family is split and your children divide their time between two households, ensure they have a replica checklist at both homes.

Ensure your child knows how to contact you or the emergency services.

It is your legal responsibility to ensure that your child attends school regularly and on time. Punctuality is an important part of a routine and will also help prepare them for the world of work. Important information can be missed if your child is late to school and it can leave them feeling lost and unprepared for the day. Find out what time school starts and ensure your child arrives at least 5 minutes before to enable them to be at registration on time. A few test runs of the route to school before term starts can help give you an idea of the time needed to get there. If your child is to be absent for any reason inform the school in writing with as much advance notice as possible. This may not be authorised as it is at the discretion of the Head teacher to grant leave of absence. Contact the school on the day of an illness before 9:30am and on your child's return provide a note. Any lengthy absence due to illness may require a doctor's note.

Non-emergency medical and dental appointments must be taken out of school time and any holiday taken during the school holidays. Every day counts at school and with the increase of subjects and coursework any time missed can be difficult for your child to catch up on if they are absent.



Building your child's confidence

As your child prepares to enter a new, unknown world of secondary education there's perhaps never a more important time to nurture their confidence and self-esteem. Of course, parents praise, encourage and give love, affection and attention to their children throughout their childhood, but it can often be at this point in their lives that many children can become self-doubting, introverted and unsure of their place in the big, wide world. These feelings may only intensify as they reach adolescence, a scary period of bewildering physical change and strong emotions, passions, opinions and increase in independence.

As such it makes sense to do your best to ensure you help your child grow in confidence as they prepare to take on the demands of secondary school. From having the self-belief to tackle difficult new academic challenges to developing their social skills as they widen their group of friends,



confidence and assertiveness will be invaluable in ensuring their time at secondary school is both happy and successful.

Find out about fun activities outside of school such as Martial Arts, Music, Drama, Cadets, Guides, Scouts to help children develop new skills and relationships. It helps put school life and friendships in perspective.

Give praise willingly and often – don't highlight your child's shortcomings or show frustration if they are struggling with a new school subject, for example. Concentrate on what they are doing well and let them know how pleased you are with them, then work together on the subjects that don't come so naturally to them.

Devote quality time in the evenings - take the time out to read their essays or find out what happened in PE today. Don't focus solely on academic success - sports and extra-curricular activities they have excelled at are equally worthy of praise.

Emphasise the fact that everyone makes mistakes - if your child has had a bad day and not done so well in something try not to be critical. The important thing to remind your child of is that sometimes failing at things is part and parcel of life - we can't be brilliant at everything!

Always give your full attention to your child when they are trying to express their concerns about something - don't brush their anxieties under the carpet and say "we'll talk about it later..." they will feel you're not taking their problems seriously and may not come to you in the future when they have a problem.

FAST FACTS

7.7 million School days are lost through absence each year.

90% Attendance over an academic year is 4 weeks missed

5 minutes Late every day is the equivalent of missing 3.4 days a year.

8–10 hours Sleep needed for the average 11 year old.

EVERY DAY COUNTS

Encourage their independence and free thinking. Try to provide a stimulating home environment where their opinions on things – such as current affairs or music - are listened to and integrated into adult conversation. Not only will this help your child to develop good social skills but it will give them a strong sense of self and help them to know their own minds. Remind them of the importance of not blindly 'following the herd'. Giving them more responsibility now with things



such as getting themselves up with an alarm clock, setting out their uniform the night before and ensuring their bag is packed ready are all good ways to start to increase their independence.

It's inevitable that your child will fall in and out of favour with different groups of friends during their secondary education. Girls in particular can be extremely changeable and cliquey at times so assure your child there is nothing 'wrong' with them if they're feeling excluded from the 'in crowd' or are having difficulty forming special friendships. Friendships take time and effort and sometimes they don't work out. This is one area where children have to find their own way - but if you have any concerns that your child is struggling to settle and make friendships contact the school for advice.

Recognising the signs of bullying

Sometimes it feels that aggressive banter, name calling and teasing has always been a part of playground culture. But there is a big difference between brief school yard disputes that are soon forgotten about and actual bullying. True bullying has a lasting effect on the victim. At its worst it can ruin lives and leave severe emotional scars children carry with them into adulthood. Today's parents not only have to worry about verbal jibes; the internet and mobile phone technology has given rise to sinister strains of bullying such as 'happy slapping' or dispersing hate campaigns via online chat rooms and social networking sites. Be aware of online gaming and who your child is communicating with.

As a parent you need to be in tune to your child's emotional state wherever possible - a noticeable change in their behaviour could indicate there's a problem at school which they may not be telling you about. Here are some signs you should look out for in your child - of course, be wary of assuming they are definitely being bullied if they display any of the below so tread carefully and approach the subject as sensitively as possible if you think something isn't right.

- Your child appears to suddenly go off school. They may complain of 'feeling ill' (more frequently than usual) and ask to stay off school.
- Your child seems withdrawn, anxious and stressed but 'closes up' quickly if you comment on their behaviour.
- Your child has nightmares, panic attacks or may wet the bed.
- Any interest they may have had in after-school activities or hanging out with friends seems to dry up.
- Clothes, belongings or dinner money goes missing.
- Your child may come home with physical markings such as bruises or burns.

Take their concerns seriously. Stay calm. Phone the school to arrange an appointment.



The first point of reference should be the form tutor or Head of Year. The appointment will most likely be outside of teaching hours. Make sure that your child knows what's happening and is involved as much as possible.

Keep notes of the incidents. If there are any bruises, take photos or if anything has been stolen, write down details.

It may be helpful to take a calm friend who can act as note-taker and supporter. Tell the school that you would like to work with them to solve the problem but ensure that anything agreed at the meeting is acceptable to you and to your child. Ask how the school deals with these matters and how long they will need to deal with the problem effectively. Arrange a follow-up appointment to review the situation.

After the meeting write up what was agreed. You may want to send a copy to the school. Reassure your child that they were right to tell you. It is up to the school to be vigilant, it should not be your child's responsibility to continually tell on the bully.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome, raise your concerns with the Headteacher and/or Chair of the Board of Governors.

Communicating with the school

If your child is going through a difficult time such as divorce, bereavement or any family or medical problems, tell the Form tutor so they will know to act gently and to be particularly supportive.

Tell the school of any medication, and when it needs to be taken. Your child may need to carry a card or bracelet detailing medication.

If there are problems, make an appointment to discuss them with the subject teacher. Don't wait for Parents' Evening. Ask what extra support you can give at home.