

Children, Young People and Families Occupational
Therapy Team

TRANSITION TO SECONDARY SCHOOL ADVICE FOR PARENTS

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Transition to Secondary School

The transition to secondary school is a huge step for all children. It is an especially big step for children who have any kind of special needs. Teachers in secondary school can best meet your child's needs if they are fully informed about any special needs and areas of particular difficulty.

When a child moves to secondary school they no longer remain in one class all day, but are required to move around the school. Children have to deal with timetables and a wide variety of subjects. They are expected to independently organise themselves for the school day bringing the correct books and equipment for each day. Children have to be able to plan and complete homework.

Common Transitional Problems

Some common transitional problems for children are as follows:

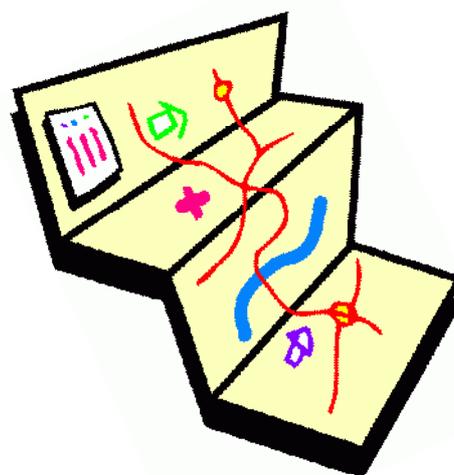
- When leaving primary school, children go from being the oldest to the youngest in their new school.
- From having one teacher in primary school your child will probably have to cope with as many as ten or more teachers with different teaching styles and personalities.
- Secondary school is much bigger and your child will go from having one classroom to ten or more classrooms.
- There is more homework to be done as there are usually 6-8 subject periods in one day.
- A larger number of textbooks to be transported and organised.
- Longer school day.
- Greater competition both academically and in sports and activities.
- Faster pace of teaching – in secondary school each teacher only has around a 40-minute subject period whereas in primary school the teacher can devote extra time to any subjects the children are struggling with.
- Having to make new friends – this is especially difficult if none of a child's primary school friends have moved on to the same secondary school.

Orientation and Organisation

When starting a new school children may have no close friends to go around with and are more likely to get lost and less likely to have strategies for finding where they should be.

Getting around the school

- If possible visit the school with your child before they start and talk about how the school is laid out. Sometimes schools are laid out in subject blocks, for example sciences, languages.
- Reassure your child that they will quickly become familiar with where everything is and that children move around the school in groups to begin with. Teachers are very understanding about children getting lost at the beginning and often there are teachers or helpers to guide and direct new beginners.
- Draw or get hold of a simple plan of the school if your child is worried about getting from one place to the other.
- Extra trips to the school may be useful when there are few children about, so they can practice navigation skills, e.g. from Science Lab to Canteen. Carrying a map and having an emergency plan may be reassuring.
- Get a copy of your child's timetable. These can sometimes look very complicated. Go through the timetable with your child, breaking it down, talking about how it works. Talk about the time of lessons and how best to get from one place to another.
- Get a list of your child's teachers – sometimes it helps to know who teaches which subject.
- Make sure your child knows what to do if they get lost.
- Get a watch for your child so that they are able to tell the time independently.



Timetables

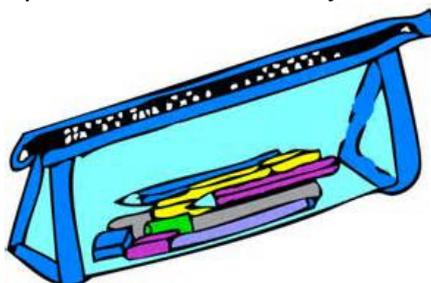
- Find out what strategies the school uses to help students organise their work.
- Some schools operate a two-week timetable and have homework diaries, which are completed each day.
- Help your child with their school timetable. If handwriting and spacing is a problem, timetables will be easier to read if you copy them out neatly.
- Timetables prepared on a word processor are particularly clear.
- The use of colour helps some children to read timetables more easily.
- Familiarise yourself with these systems to assist your child. Your child will have a timetable of lessons and also a homework timetable. After your child has been at school a short while it may be helpful to prepare a third timetable listing exactly what your child needs to take to school each day.
- Magnetic 'time slices' for the fridge or child's notice board may help the child organize what they need on different days of the week. (Available from Kleeneze – Tel: 0113 2526949.)
- Help your child to think only in terms of his/her year at secondary school, especially if moving from a small primary school. It can be daunting thinking about the size of the school and the number of pupils who attend it.



Getting organised

- Help your child to organise their living space so that they have a place for everything to do with school, a 'school space'.
- Try to make sure that they have access to a desk or table, good light and storage space for their school books.
- Try to encourage your child to complete homework in this area so books and equipment are not lost around the home.
- Use a wall calendar to mark deadlines for homework, indicate what timetable week (week 1 or week 2) or to record special school events.
- Display the school's timetable on a wall and colour code each subject.

- Cover all books on that subject, in the same colour e.g. Maths is red, highlight Maths lessons red on the timetable and cover Maths books in red paper.
- A stacking system or a box file helps in organising work – each file can be labelled with the subject and all books, work sheets, etc can be kept in the file ready to be put in your child’s school bag when needed.
- Equip your child with everything that they will need when they start. A useful home toolkit consists of:
 - Pencils
 - Pens
 - Rubber
 - Sharpener
 - Crayons
 - Felt pens
 - Ruler
 - Maths equipment
 - Glue-stick
 - Compass, set-square, calculator
 - Lined and plain paper
- Choose a see-through pencil case to enable your child to find items easily.



- An office two-tier in-tray can be useful for “homework to be done” and “homework completed”. Teach your child a routine for emptying their bag. The subject books or folders are placed in the system. Any subjects that have homework goes into the “homework to be done” tray. Do this with your child at the beginning and then gradually let them take over as they become more familiar with the routine. When they are more independent it may be worth just checking that they are sticking to the routine.
- Encourage your child to glue any worksheets or pieces of work into their workbook if possible each night – otherwise the amount of paper grows and it can become impossible.
- When homework is completed, supervise your child packing their bag. This is always best done the night before.
- The displayed timetable can be used as a checklist for subject folders, books and equipment.
- If you know that your child has food technology on a certain day check at the beginning of the week if they need ingredients.

Dressing

- Make sure that you are familiar with the school uniform requirements. Schools usually provide a list of school uniform regulations.
- Name everything, even shoes. If labels are not used a permanent marker pen is as good.
- If possible have spares of important items of uniform – for when they go missing just as you are about to leave for school!
- When your child gets home from school make sure they change and hang their uniform up straight away ready for the next day.
- Make sure your child knows where to put clothing items away.
- You may need to make a check list for your child that includes each item of uniform so they can check items off as they put them on.
- Make sure that the uniform is put out and ready to wear the night before – this avoids looking for ties or jumpers when everyone is pressed for time.
- Have a clear routine for making sure that items of uniform are clean and ready.
- A general rule is that the earlier your child takes responsibility the better: whatever system you have in place, both you and your child need to be clear what that is.
- Consider keeping essential items at school, perhaps in a locker, for example PE shorts.



Travelling

For many children this is the first time they have needed to use public transport. If there is a designated school bus there will be fewer problems than if scheduled public transport is to be used. However, all children should be familiar with the route their bus will take.

ALL CHILDREN SHOULD BE TAUGHT NOT TO RUN INTO THE ROAD IN FRONT OF OR BEHIND A BUS OR ANY OTHER VEHICLE.

If your child is to use public transport for your peace of mind, as well as ensuring a confident child, you should have a number of trial runs.

Their progression could be as follows:

- Show your child exactly where to board the bus and board the bus with them. Point out landmarks on the journey. Show your child where they need to be ready to alight from the bus.
- Encourage your child to wear a watch so they can monitor how long they have got left to walk to the bus stop or to school.
- Repeat this process allowing your child tell you what to do until your child feels confident about the journey.
- See your child safely on to the school bus. You travel by car being ready to meet your child at the other end of the journey.
- You may also like to drive to school at a discreet distance to ensure that the correct bus has been boarded then go home and wait for your child's return.
- A bus pass or weekly ticket may be useful, however, strategies should be put into place if it is lost or forgotten.



YOU ARE THE BEST JUDGE OF WHETHER YOUR CHILD WILL MANAGE ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT

If your child has a long walk to school, plan and practice the route.

Talk to other parents and arrange for a group of children to walk together or ask an older child to accompany them.

Lunch Time/ Break Time

School Meals

- Find out what is available.
- Discuss with them whether they are able to cope with carrying food on a tray, managing money or using a knife and fork. Practice these skills at home.
- If your child feels that they would not be able to cope with school meals, choose sandwich boxes and cartons that are easy to open.
- If using a knife and fork is difficult, offer a packed lunch instead of school dinners.



Knowing where to go

- Rehearse with your child what they will do at break times, e.g. go to the toilet, go to the tuck shop, go to the form room, etc.
- Find out where children are expected to go at break times.
 - Are they allowed in their form rooms?
 - Can they go to the library?
 - Is there a homework club (or similar) at lunch time?
 - Where is the tuck shop?

Managing the dinner hall

- Find a purse/wallet that is easy to open and that may be clipped to a school bag.
- Practice handling money and putting away change.
- Find out how much items cost and work out which coins it would be best to send to school each day.

Coping with busy corridors

- Work out a strategy with the child, e.g. leaving the class after the others, arriving at the first lesson after break early.
- Set a digital watch alarm to go off 3 minutes before the end of break/ lunch time to give enough time for them to make their way back to their classroom.
- Discuss strategies for avoiding busy times with the child's form tutor.

Handling Money

- This may be the first time that your child really needs to be able to handle money.
- Begin early to teach your child to recognise coins.
- A small amount of regular pocket money which your child can choose how to spend is a good way of learning to handle money.
- Give your child every opportunity to handle money both in play and real situations.
- If your child will be eating lunch in the school canteen, make a game of choosing items from a written menu which you have prepared and calculating how much the chosen tem will cost. Many schools will give you a copy of their lunch menu so that you can discuss it with your child.



Managing Belongings

- Encourage the child to pack their bag the night before to reduce stress and anxiety in the morning. A checklist or the school diary can be cross referenced.
- Consider the types of bag used to carry books and the impact the bag has on your child's posture. An over-the-shoulder bag can affect your child's balance as can a bag with insufficient support. Bags should be worn over both shoulders. Select one with sections so books can be easily found.
- Give consideration to where lockers are allocated – the end of a row is an easier option.
- The option of having two lockers in a very large school may help your child by giving them a dumping ground to leave some books – the downside of this is that they may become confused as to where they have left their belongings.
- Spare keys are essential if the originals are lost or forgotten. These could be held by reception.
- A see-through pencil case will help your child to see what's inside.



Home Routines

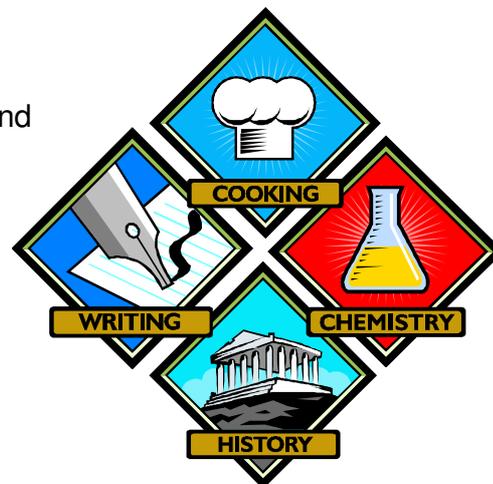
- Prompt your child to pack their bag the night before school.
- Assist your child to organise their school uniform. Laying it out on a chair in the correct order.
- If your child has difficulty dressing, knot the tie or buy a tie on elastic. Button up some shirt buttons, so your child just slips the items over their head, making dressing easier.
- Discuss with the teacher if your child needs extra time or help to change.



- Find out if the school run a club and what activities they offer.
- Activities can range from drama groups to homework clubs.
- Non-sports based activities can be ideal, building up your child's self esteem and confidence.
- Some schools run a buddy system where older pupils assist the Year 7 children helping them find their way around the school.

Subjects

- Your child will participate in a wider variety of sports and subjects.
- If you feel they may have difficulties with certain sports or subjects contact the school to discuss your concerns.
- Concerns could range from safely using laboratory equipment to their ability to cope with certain sports.

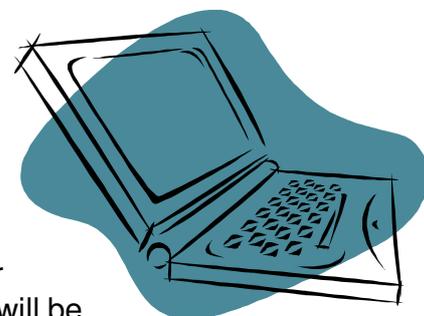


Homework

- Find out what is an acceptable time each night for your child to spend completing homework.
- If you feel your child may have difficulties dealing with the volume of work. Ask the school for assistance with prioritising the workload.
- Many children are exhausted when they come home after their first days at secondary school. Children who have special needs are often particularly tired.
- It is often best to have a complete break and a period of relaxation before beginning homework.
- Rather than working from beginning to end it can be helpful to complete homework in short concentrated bursts with short 'rest periods' of a completely different activity.
- If your child takes much longer than the prescribed time to complete homework let all the teachers concerned know of the problem.
- Should your child have difficulty understanding what is required in homework, let the teachers concerned know.

Strategies for Recording

- Ask lesson notes to be taken by the classroom assistant or have summary notes prepared in advance by the teacher.
- Access to word processing facilities and printer. A 'typing tutor' computer programme may be beneficial to ensure their typing is up to speed.
- Use of Dictaphone for drafts of project work, preparation of ideas, written assignments and recording homework.
- The provision of the outlines of diagrams, apparatus drawings, worksheets, maps etc, so the child only has to label the relevant parts or annotate the diagrams, fill in the blanks.
- Parents may be willing to act as scribe in the privacy of the home and thereby take some pressure off homework tasks.



Computers, Laptops and Word Processors

- Your child may have already learned keyboard skills at primary school. If so, you should talk to the teachers at your child's secondary school to ensure that suitable equipment will be available for your child.
- If you feel that your child would benefit from using a word processor for long pieces of written work discuss this possibility with your child's teachers.
- If your child does not already have keyboarding skills it is usually best to wait a while before beginning to learn to use a keyboard. There are so many new and unfamiliar things happening during the early weeks and months at secondary school that it is best not to burden your child with learning yet another new skill.

Revision for Exams

- This is probably the first time that your child has had to work on formal revision for exams. Help may be needed to learn how to revise systematically.
- Making a plan of items to be revised is helpful so that all the necessary work is covered.
- Many children find it effective to work in short concentrated bursts then have a complete change of activity in which to relax. Short periods of work followed by a short period of relaxation are usually best.

Disaster Management

Discuss with your child what they might do in the following circumstances:

- What do you do if you are late for a lesson?
- What do you do if you feel unwell?
- Who do you contact if your parents are not available?
- What do you do if you have forgotten your homework?

Books of Interest

Life skills; Practical Solutions for Specific Learning Difficulties. Jan Poustie 1998.
Dyspraxia Foundation.

The adolescent with development coordination disorder (DCD) Amanda Kirby 2004.
Jessica Kingsley Publishers.