

Parents' Q and A

Making the Jump from Primary to Secondary School

Moving from primary to secondary school is an exciting and significant event in the life of your daughter. It is an important milestone which, for many parents and teachers, marks a change in expectations regarding crucial life-skills such as independent working and self-organisation.

When students start at secondary school, they are expected to cope with a wide variety of new experiences and changes, many of which demand skills and abilities that they have not had to use before. The problem is that these skills do not spontaneously develop in students in the summer before they begin secondary school – like reading and writing, they have to be taught and our students need support in developing them.

How can I help as a parent?

Most parents would like to reassure their children, prepare them for these changes, and support them in developing the skills they need, but feel they lack the information and expertise to do so. For many of us our own experience of secondary schools is all we have to go on.

The most significant worries that Year 6 students express are around social concerns, such as friendship. Although common, most students report that they are no longer worried about these after just one or two weeks at secondary school and often put their previous concerns down to nerves. If your daughter expresses these worries it is useful to tell her this, and to emphasise that everyone else will also be feeling anxious. As there will be many more students in Year 7 than in Year 6, everyone has a good choice of making new friends, and even students who move up with several students from their Year 6 class tend to make new friends at secondary school.

In an effort to ensure a smooth start for all our students, our Year 9 ambassadors will also act as 'buddies' and mentors to new Year 7 students, both on the Induction Day and then again in September.

The aim of this section of the website is to provide you with the information you need to help your daughter to achieve independence, while supporting her in getting there. To achieve the balance between doing too much or too little for your daughter is hard – a useful rule of thumb is:

'never do anything regularly for your daughter that she is capable of doing for herself'

In September, time spent on in establishing good habits of work and independence is an investment that will save endless time, battles and heartache in the long run. The habits and routines that students develop in Year 7 are those that will stay with them throughout their secondary schooling and often throughout their working lives – it's worth the effort of getting it right to start with (so much easier than putting things right when they've gone wrong).

If you can help your daughter to do this, you will really be making a difference.

How do I prepare my daughter for the changes to her routine?

- Time the journey to school or bus stop.
- Be sure your daughter is clear about what time she is expected to be home and what to do if she is held up for any reason.
- Make sure she knows/has your contact numbers.
- Buy an alarm clock or make sure your daughter knows how the alarm on



her phone works. Do a test run before the first day at school.

- Work out with your daughter what time she will need to get up to get to school on time. Work backwards from the time she needs to be at school (8:30am at the latest). Include all the things she will need to do.
- Agree a routine for the mornings and after school.
- Will she shower/bath in the morning or the evening?
- Will she get her school bag ready the night before or in the morning?
- Who will make the packed lunch? When?
- Agree a bed time for schooldays with your daughter that will ensure she gets enough sleep.
- Have a couple of practice runs ... set your daughter the challenge of getting up at the correct time and getting ready.
- Do you need to make any changes?
- If possible, be around for your daughter for the first few days and 'supervise'. Praise and encourage independence but be ready to offer a helping hand.
- Keep to your side of the bargain – if you have arranged to leave dinner money on top of the fridge make sure it is there!
- Go through the routine regularly with your daughter, if necessary provide a tick-list to help her.
- Insist on the routine being kept to – it will save you hours in the long run

How do I help with her organisation skills?



- Check the uniform requirements including rules regarding make-up and jewellery. (In the Parents Induction Booklet.) Make sure she is in the correct new school uniform.
- Name everything, even shoes – you would not believe what students lose! A marker pen is as good as labels.
- Have spares of essentials at home if possible, it prevents panic when things get mislaid at 8.00a.m. (and they do!)
- If your daughter is very disorganised check items one by one, or give a checklist at first.
- Encourage your daughter to put everything out (including shoes, socks or tights, and underwear) the night before (there's much more time in the evening for finding odd socks...).
- Have a system for making sure that clothes are clean and ready – the earlier students take responsibility the better but whoever does it, both parties need to know 'the system'.
- Once she has a timetable display it for her (a good idea) colour the days when your daughter has PE & Dance, so she can see each day if she needs to take her PE bag.
- Visit the school on the Induction Evening – talk about how it is laid out/organised (usually in 'subject blocks')
- Reassure your daughter that she will quickly get to know her way around (most have it mastered within a couple of weeks), and that she moves around as a group to start with. Teachers are very understanding about students getting lost to begin with and usually help is at hand if it is needed.
- Encourage your daughter to learn what lessons she has on which days so that she can become independent.
- Make sure your daughter knows what to do if she is late or gets lost.
- Get your daughter a watch.
- Help your daughter organise her living space so that she has a place for everything to do with school, try to make sure she has access to a desk, good light and storage space for her school books.

- Equip her with the tools she will need at home (it's best to keep two sets of everything – one for school and one for home so that losing a pen at school does not stop her doing her homework).
 - A useful home 'tool kit' consists of:
 - pencils, pens, rubber, sharpener, crayons, felt-pens, ruler, maths equipment (protractor, compass, set-square and calculator), sellotape, glue-stick, paper (lined and plain) and plastic wallets.
- A box-file or stacking system is useful for students with organisational problems – each file can be labelled with the subject and all books, worksheets etc. can be kept ready to pull out and put in the school-bag when required.
- A labelled A4 plastic or card folder to take to school for each subject is useful – students are given lots of worksheets which they are not used to organising. Folders can hold all work sheets, books etc.
- An office two-tier 'in-tray' is useful for 'homework to be done' and 'homework completed'.
- An additional A4 plastic or card folder for finished homework is useful for students with poor memories – they can check it each lesson to see if there is homework to be given in.

How can I help my daughter with her homework?



- Agree a routine for homework with your daughter. Life can become a constant 'nag' if you don't start this from the beginning. Homework becomes an increasingly important part of the curriculum as your daughter goes through school – what she starts off doing is what she will do until she leaves
 - A good time for homework is after a short break when your daughter returns from school, get it out of the way early, leaving the rest of the evening free – who wants to start work at 7.00pm?
- Agree with your daughter that TV, other activities, phone-calls etc. will only be possible after homework is done. Although many students say that listening to music helps them concentrate and do their work.
- Be prepared to invest time at first – for example be available for a set time each day to help with the homework until the routine is established – it will be time well spent....
- Using the ideas in 'organising books and equipment' will help enormously – make sure your daughter has a comfortable place to work (with as few distractions as possible); set up a double 'in-tray' and label it 'homework to be done' and 'homework completed'. Provide a 'finished homework' folder for your daughter to take to school.
- Stick to your agreed routine whenever possible.
- Try to ensure that homework is done on the night it is set to prevent 'build-up'.
- Encourage your daughter to unpack her bag in an organised way, placing homework to be done in her tray. Check the planner with your daughter for what homework needs to be done, and when it is to be done for. Check she has everything she needs to complete the tasks (ask her to tell you what she will need, to encourage independence).
- Recognise how hard it is to work unsupervised. Help your daughter structure her time and use it usefully – provide a clock or timer and agree the tasks that should be done in each eg. half-hour period. Try to be available to do 'progress checks' – has she completed the task in the set time? (But otherwise leave her to it – don't establish a pattern of always doing homework with her – it's unsustainable and she won't learn to work independently).
- Make sure your daughter always writes the date and title, and clearly labels it as homework (either in her book or on a worksheet or computer print out).
- Point out the rewards of working in this way – homework doesn't drag on all night, it feels good to have completed tasks etc.

- Don't let students struggle on for longer than the recommended time – if they have done half an hour and only answered half the questions, let them stop. (If they are worried about the consequences, write a note on the homework, confirming that the correct amount of time was spent on the task).
- If students are stuck – either because they don't understand the task they have written down, or because they 'can't do it', offer support but don't 'do it for them'.
- Encourage your daughter to check in the lesson if she hasn't understood what the task means – it's too late by the time she gets home.
- Encourage her to write down exactly what the teacher says (not 'finish stuff in book' – she'll have forgotten what 'stuff' by the time she gets home). If you and your daughter really cannot work out what has to be done, try ringing a friend in the same group, or, as a last resort, write a note to the teacher asking for clarification and explaining that the homework will be done as soon as possible.
- If there is a problem with the level of work, it is important that the teacher knows this. If work is consistently too difficult or too easy, it is important to let the teacher know.
- Check that your daughter has given homework in and, if she has not, check why (she may have had a supply teacher) and encourage her to write in her planner when she will give it in.
- Take an interest in the marks and comments on the homework your daughter gets back – celebrate success and give the clear message that homework is valuable and important.
- If your daughter is consistently not getting homework when she should, do contact the school.



What do I do if my daughter has a problem at school?

Just as it is hard to know how to achieve the balance between offering your daughter too much support (and being accused of fussing) and leaving her to flounder, it is also hard to achieve the balance between becoming the 'over-anxious parent' (on the phone to the school every time your daughter falls out with a friend or grazes her knee) and letting things go on too long because you don't want to interfere.

The job is made much easier if you keep talking to your daughter about how things are done at school. You will have a good idea about how the work is going, and your daughter's general feelings about the school.

You know your daughter best, and if any aspect of school life is persistently distressing her it is probably best to err on the side of caution and intervene early. If you have talked to your daughter, offered reassurance, helped her come up with ways of solving the problem herself and things still haven't changed after a couple of weeks, then it is time to speak to the school.

If you do need to make contact with us, in the first instance you should contact your daughter's form tutor, as they are the teacher who will know your daughter best and be able to offer assistance. You may also wish to contact your daughter's head of year, who oversees your daughter's year group and therefore will be in a position to resolve any concerns.

What problems could my daughter encounter and what do I do about them?

Falling out with friends

This is very common as students form new friendships and new 'pecking orders' are established. Give advice but don't overreact – the tears and anger are normal but most friendship patterns sort themselves out without adults getting involved. Contact the school if your daughter becomes

depressed or severely withdrawn over this for more than a couple of weeks, or if you suspect that what is happening may be bullying. The hallmarks of bullying are intentionality (a deliberate attempt to make someone unhappy); persistence (i.e. an ongoing 'campaign', not isolated incidents or arguments about specific issues) and an imbalance of power.

Worrying about particular lessons or feeling 'picked on' or disliked by certain teachers

Try to find out what it is exactly that your daughter is worried about or why she finds it hard to work with a certain teacher or subject. If it is because the work is too hard (or too easy), try to spend some time working with her on the subject. It does take time for new teachers to find out an individual's strengths and weaknesses. Contact the school if your daughter continues to find the work too easy or too hard after half a term or so, or raise it at parent's evening. Contact the Year Leader if the problem persists.

Losing belongings

This is very common for students with organisational difficulties (and very expensive for their parents). Follow the suggestions in the chapter on 'Organising books and equipment'. If after half a term this is not making a difference, contact your daughter's tutor and ask for their support – they can often provide 'checks' at key times and be very creative in supporting your daughter towards independence in school.

Getting into trouble for not completing homework

In many ways, homework makes the most demands on both Year 7 students and their parents. If your daughter is consistently not getting homework (over a period of five or six weeks), not able to do the homework set, or writing down tasks that are so general that neither you nor they can work out what has to be done do contact your daughter's Year Leader and explain the problem.