Moving to secondary school – checklist and tips to help prepare your child

The most important thing you can do to help your child is to be prepared. Below is a checklist of things you can do to prepare.

**Be informed**

- Talk with teachers at your child’s primary school to find out how the school is helping Year 6 students prepare for the move to secondary school.
- Attend parent nights and information sessions at your child’s school (both primary and secondary). These are good opportunities to find out what is happening, ask questions and meet other parents.
- Visit the website of your child’s secondary school, have a look to see what is happening at the school and read some of the recent newsletters.
- Don’t forget to read your child’s school newsletter as there is often information and updates on the move to secondary school.
- Find out when your child’s secondary school is holding an orientation day and make sure your child attends. If they can’t attend, contact the school and arrange a tour for both of you together.
- At the secondary school orientation day your child should receive a handbook. Make sure you read it together and are both familiar with school processes and policies – such as school times, homework and uniforms.
- Find out what your child’s school is doing to support students to make the move as seamless as possible and ensure your child takes part. For example, your school may be running orientation activities and camps.
- Contact your child’s secondary school if your child has a medical condition, any special needs or you are concerned about something. Speak with the appropriate member of staff, for example the year coordinator, student services manager or school nurse.

**Preparing for the year**

- Make sure you have your child’s school uniform, books, stationery and any other items well before the school year starts.
- Have travel arrangements in place and make sure your child knows the routine and what time they have to leave home. If using public transport, do a test run so they feel comfortable. If they are being picked up after school make sure they know where to meet you.
☐ Have a plan for the first day – such as getting your child to meet up with a friend and make sure they know where to go when school starts.

☐ Place a copy of your child’s timetable where it’s clearly seen at home – such as on the fridge.

☐ Have a map of the school and your child’s timetable easily accessible during each day.

☐ Be organised at home – encourage your child to use a diary, have a daily routine to do homework, schedule homework with other activities, and have a place for homework to be completed.

☐ Have a plan on how you to manage home/school communication such as returning notes.

☐ Develop a plan each week so your child knows what equipment and books to take each day to school.

☐ On the first day of school make sure your child goes to school well prepared for the day by:
  • being well rested – a good sleep is important
  • having a good breakfast
  • wearing the uniform (jewellery is restricted in many schools)
  • arriving in plenty of time
  • knowing where to meet friends inside the school grounds
  • knowing where to assemble for day one
  • taking a file, organised into sections, notepaper and pencil case
  • taking healthy food for morning recess and lunch
  • having all belongings clearly named
  • arranging an agreed pick-up time and place and have a back-up plan in case something unexpected happens.

**Talk with your child**

**Before they start secondary school**

☐ Ask questions such as ‘What do you think secondary school will be like?’ and ‘What are you looking forward to?’

☐ Listen to your child’s concerns and help them deal with them before they happen. What action do they think they will try first? What will they do if they get lost or are late for class?

☐ Talk about meeting new people, making friends and getting to know the teachers.

☐ Talk about bullying and peer pressure. Make sure your child knows where to find the year coordinator or student services staff in case they need help or advice.

☐ Talk about the school routine and timetables, and get them familiarised with the school map.

☐ Help your child to be realistic about taking time to settle into the new environment.

☐ Be available to listen when your child has questions or wants to talk about school.
During the first weeks of school
☐ Ask how their day at school was and what secondary school is like – the campus, teachers, new subjects and friends.

☐ Talk positively with your child about school and focus on their successes.

☐ Reinforce strategies such as thinking positively, taking deep breaths, getting enough sleep at night and eating well.

☐ Listen – provide opportunities for your child to talk.
Moving to secondary school – questions often asked by parents

What is transition?
Transition is the time of change in your child’s education when they move from primary to secondary school. Staff at both your primary and secondary school are very keen to make the transition a comfortable, happy time for your child, and will help them prepare for and become familiar with the new school and routines. In many secondary schools older students take the role of peer leaders to help new students settle in. They may act as guides offering advice, re-assurance and answering questions from new students. Check to see if your school has peer leaders.

Will my child get to visit their new secondary school before they start?
Most schools have opportunities for children to visit during Term 4. Visits usually include a guided tour of the school and students can try some sample lessons - such as science and drama. These opportunities help your child get to know the secondary school and feel more comfortable about starting the following year. If your child cannot go on to the orientation day, contact the school and you may be able to arrange a tour for both of you together. Secondary school is different from primary school, as students usually move between rooms for different lessons and have several teachers each day. Read the information sent from the school such as the handbook and talk about it with your child. If you need further information, contact the school. A secondary school size and layout might be confusing and the school map is very helpful for those first few days. Your child will adapt more easily to new routines if they know what to expect so talk about the differences in break times, rules and expectations of the school.

Can I visit my child’s secondary school?
You might like to visit the school yourself to get to know the school layout and meet staff. If you are familiar with the school, its programs and teachers, it is easier to chat at home together about your child’s day. Many schools offer parent forums which are very useful and informative. These are also good opportunities to meet other parents and their children. It could be a good refresher to visit the school in the week before day one.

What can I do if I am concerned about my child?
Talk with your child privately and ask about the problem. Listen to what they have to say. Call the school - sooner rather than later. Arrange a meeting if necessary to discuss any matters with the year coordinator or a staff member at student services. If you suspect your child is being bullied, contact the school and work together to address the matter. Here are some tips that may help your child deal with the situation:
- Tell the bully to stop or ignore the behaviour and walk away.
- Show that it doesn’t upset you.
- Bullying thrives on silence. Talk with friends, family and teachers. If you say nothing you are actually protecting the bully.
- Give an assertive response and avoid an audience situation. Remember that bullying is about response and audience.
- Don’t be afraid of being called a ‘dobber’. Know the difference between ‘dobbing’ and being assertive and taking control.
Do I need to communicate with the school? Always keep the school advised of information that contributes to the wellbeing of your child such as:

- major commitments that impact on study time or attendance
- conditions such as allergies, ADHD, learning difficulties and mental health issues
- illness
- living arrangements such as sharing between households (extra newsletter if required), family separations, parent/carer travelling or working away
- change of address or telephone number
- major illness or situations in the family or with close friends
- court orders.

Always read the school newsletter. Keep up to date with what is coming up and, if necessary, help your child be prepared and equipped. It may help to have a timetable on the fridge. Offer to help out at the school canteen or the uniform shop if you can. Join the parents and citizens’ association or school council/board and be involved in decisions that affect the education of your child.
Moving to secondary school – questions often asked by children
What time do I have to be at school? When and how long are recess and lunch breaks? When does school finish?
Check your school handbook or website. Have a copy of these details on a card in your pocket.

What will I do if I get lost?
In a large school this is not uncommon in the first days or weeks, but easily fixed. Stay calm and ask for directions. Check your school map in your diary or keep a copy in your pocket.

Am I allowed to have a mobile telephone or iPod at school?
Check your school handbook or website, or speak with the year coordinator about your school’s rule on the use of electronic devices. If in doubt, leave them at home.

What do I do if I am absent or late?
If you are going to be away, get your parent or caregiver to contact the school as soon as possible. If you are late, check with the office, student services or your school handbook in case a late note is needed. Many schools ask parents to write in the school diary.

How do I order my lunch?
If you don’t know the school canteen procedures, consider taking a lunch and morning snack from home until you find out.

Where do I leave my bike when I get to school?
Find out where bikes can be left safely during the day. You may need a chain to lock your bike to a rack.

How will I know when each timetable session ends?
Check with the school and if a siren is not used, make sure you wear a watch.

Do I have a locker?
This varies so check your school handbook, website or speak with the school. If you have a locker, check if you need to bring a lock.

What do I do if I feel I need help for any reason?
Go straight to the year coordinator, student services, pastoral care teacher, reception or deputy principal and talk with one of the people who are there to help – no matter what the problem is. Find out where to go to reach these people/places.

What do I do if I need to leave school early?
Some schools ask parents to write a note in their child’s diary. Check with student services and fill in the required form.
Moving to secondary school – first day checklist for parents

You might find this checklist useful to make sure you have covered all the bases for a smooth first day:

☐ We have read and talked about all the information received from the school.

☐ My child is familiar with the layout of the school and has a map.

☐ My child has the correct school uniform – altered to fit if necessary.

☐ Transport to and from school is arranged.

☐ My child knows where to assemble on the first morning.

☐ My child knows where to meet friends.

☐ My child knows where to find the year coordinator and student services.

☐ My child has a healthy lunch and recess for the day.

☐ My child has the required books, file, paper, pens, etc.

☐ All belongings my child takes/wears to school are named.

☐ We have talked about how to meet new people.

☐ We have talked about what to do if my child gets lost.

☐ We have worked out a weekly timetable that includes study, sport/recreation and time with friends.