

Be School Ready

How to prepare for secondary or post-primary school

You probably have no idea where the time has gone, but suddenly you have a child who is starting their next school.

Your not-so-little-one may be becoming increasingly independent, but parents and those in a parenting role are still one of children's most important educators. You will always have a key part to play in your child's school life.

Expert advice!

"The effect of parental engagement over a student's school career is the equivalent of adding an extra two to three years to a student's education."

Research shows that children of all ages do better at school when parents and carers are involved and engaged in their education. Teachers tell us the top six benefits are:

1. Builds trust and improves relationships between parents and teachers
2. Improves academic achievement
3. Improves behaviour
4. Develops a shared school ethos and culture
5. Reduces absenteeism
6. Raises aspirations



*Supporting your child's learning is win-win. It shows them how much you value their education and helps you feel more involved in their studies and development. **Here's a broad range of practical advice to make this transition as smooth as possible for your whole family.***

Practical preparation – ready, set, school!

You probably still have vivid memories of your school days, but a lot has changed since then (coding homework, anyone?)

Read everything

You can expect a LOT of information to come your way, initially by post, then with your child, by email, or possibly apps. If you don't see a flurry of consent forms, it might be worth asking where they are. Be thorough, if you try skimming through for what's relevant to you and your child you might miss some key information.

Log on

Visit the school website to find out more information about the curriculum and arrangements such as lunch systems, and cash-free payments. Sign up to the school newsletter, apps and Facebook page.

Make sure that you are familiar with any online learning systems that school may use for homework. Keep usernames and passwords in a safe place.

All the gear

You'll need to buy books, stationery kit and a strong bag to carry it all. The school will tell you what equipment your child is expected to have when they start. Speak to a parent who has gone through this stage, if you're not sure what is 'essential'. Maybe arrange to go shopping with another year 7's adult to ease your mind.

Find out if the PTA is holding a second hand uniform sale before term starts. Children are still growing quickly at this age so you should be able to pick up nearly-new items at a fraction of the cost – it helps the environment too. Stock up on the bits you can buy on the high street early, there are generally lots of special offers around early in the summer.



When buying uniform, remember your child will grow over the summer. Buy early and do not label it until you have checked the fit again at the end of August – most suppliers will exchange if unworn.

Label everything.

Show your child where the labels are and make sure they are sewn or stuck somewhere that's easy for them to find.



Top tip!

Buy a key ring with stretchy chain to attach to your child's bag to avoid lost locker and door keys.

Getting to school

For many children the transition to secondary school will be their first time they make a regular daily journey by themselves and it can be daunting. The good news is that there is plenty you can do to help them feel more confident.

Stop 1

Practise the route with your child by whichever mode of transport they will use, including at least once at the relevant time of day, to help anticipate where the busy areas or difficult junctions may be.

Stop 2

If they are using public transport, talk to them about where the bus stop or railway station is and how they'll get there, which number bus they can get, or which platform to get the train from, what to do if they miss their bus/train, or it's cancelled or late. Chatting to a friend or older sibling about what to expect on the bus or train can be helpful – as long as they understand the need to be reassuring!

Stop 3

Try to find local children starting at the school who will be taking the same route and let them practise the journey together. Coordinating their travel will help both your child and you feel more confident once term starts.

Stop 4

Most schools will have held a taster day in the Summer term, so make sure your child finds out then which entrance they should use.

Stop 5

Entering a large school site rather than a familiar playground can be daunting to begin with. If your child isn't travelling in with other children, try to arrange a meeting place with a friend on the first day so that they can walk in together.



Schools are a great source of information, they'll tell you which bus routes stop close to the school, whether there are any dedicated services, and common walking and cycling routes. Find out about season tickets and make sure you apply in plenty of time for the start of term.

Top tip!

If you plan to drive your child to school, consider parking further away so that they can walk part way to boost independence and avoid congestion.

Stay safe

Talk about safety together and make sure they understand the dangers. Stress the need to concentrate. No distractions means no headphones, listening to music, talking and texting on mobiles when they're around traffic. Check out our tips on getting to and from school safely [here](#).

Mobile Technology

Age 11 is when most children get a mobile phone. Do your research and decide what's best for your family. Schools have differing policies about them though, so do check.

Consider downloading an app which allows you to track where they are, such as 'Find My Friends'. Keep emergency phone numbers in their bag, in case they lose their phone and need to contact you.

Whether your child has any allergies or not, it's a good idea to find out whether they will be attending a 'nut free school'.

Top tip!

Have you checked out your school's home/school agreement? This sets up responsibilities of both you in a parenting role and the school and what's expected of your child.

Emotional preparation

– how you can be supportive

Your child is about to become much more independent very quickly as well as have to deal with new routines and unfamiliar faces. Here are some ways you can start to help your child to feel excited about this new phase of their education:

Be positive

Children are like sponges, they soak up a huge amount from their family, friends and teachers. Whether you enjoyed school or not, talking positively about it can raise your child's aspirations. Focus on the positive experience you want for your child and all the exciting opportunities to come. Let them know that there are no limits to what they can do and who they can be.

Keep talking

You may find that your child is less inclined to talk to you when they come home from school each night. They may need some time when they first come home, to go upstairs to their room and chill out away from all the crowds for a while.

Keep an eye on your child and encourage them to talk about their feelings. They will be experiencing a huge range of emotions at this time such as being excited, nervous, happy and confused. They will need reassurance that these are all quite usual responses to being in a new situation. Family meals and downtime are great opportunities for keeping the communication going.

Good questions include:

What are the teachers like, what are the other children like, what are they enjoying or not enjoying so much, and why?

Do what you can to understand their world. Let them know you understand it's a challenge but reassure them. Make sure they know you're there for support and help when it's needed.

Tricky questions will come your way thick and fast when your child starts secondary or post-primary school, and probably much quicker than you expected or hoped. Expect to have your politics and world views challenged. But if you keep an open mind, you could find that you learn a lot too.

Build confidence

Being in a bigger school can be scary for some children, so make sure your child is ready to cope with new situations and is able to bounce back. Work on skills that help with resilience, to be positive and have a 'glass half full' approach to life, and build on their strengths.



Social preparation – get ready to mingle!

Who's who in the school?

Bigger schools mean more teachers and more teaching styles to adjust to. See if there's a list of teachers available that you can familiarise yourself with. Establishing a good relationship with teachers is a great way to find out how to support your child's learning.

Get to know the parents

Take any opportunity you get to get to know other parents, such as the induction day, coffee morning and any fundraising events. These aren't just for the children to get to know each other, they're an opportunity for you to meet other adults in your area and beyond.

If you can build a network of friends at the school, you will have alternative transport options if public transport breaks down or if things go wrong with your day. You may also hear about things that are going on at the school that your child has forgotten to tell you about, like a school trip, non-uniform day, or a requirement to bring cakes or charity money.

Top tip!

Ask if there's a social media group or email network you can sign up to.

Making new friends

Starting at a new and bigger school is a great opportunity to make new friends. Encourage your child to feel optimistic about the new friendships, even if some primary school friends are moving on elsewhere.

Remind your child that friendships take time to develop. Don't panic if they haven't made a friend immediately. Tell them to relax, take their time and choose their friends wisely.

If your child is nervous about fitting in, reassure them that everyone is in the same boat and suggest they join some clubs – that way they'll have something in common and it'll be easier to strike up a conversation. Talk to them about ways to initiate conversation if they find this difficult.

Student tip!

"Once I had started, I found that of the older students, most were really helpful. In fact, I joined the school drama club, where there were lots of older children. You didn't even notice that they were older as you all work together as a community when you're working on a show".

Fitting in

When they get to secondary school, your child is going to start paying much more attention to what their peers are doing, and sadly, less attention to you. You will probably find many more requests to do things that you have not permitted before, and you will find yourself making up the new rules as you go along.

The increase in confidence and independence that comes with secondary or post-primary school is wonderful to watch. You still have a lot of things you need to pay attention to, in order to steer them through, but it is nowhere near as hands-on. At the end of the day you have to sit back a bit and let them learn to fly.

Tell your child that bullying in any form is always wrong and that they can tell you or another adult if it happens to them. Children may find it hard to talk about bullying, but there are signs to look out for that may suggest there is a problem. You can visit Bullying UK to access further advice.

Academic preparation

– a steep learning curve

Your child isn't the only one who has a lot to learn next term! This is a new experience for everyone, but don't worry, we have some helpful tips to help you all adjust and thrive.

Brush up your knowledge

Your child may be studying subjects you struggled with at school, or that are completely new to you. While they'll be doing their homework independently, you may feel you want to understand a little more about what they're learning. Take a look through their text books. If there is anything you want to know more about maybe you can do some research online or take a short course. Check out the school website and chat to teachers for parent support and guides to learning, they may even have family learning sessions and projects taking place in the local community.

Expert tip!

Some pupils experience a 'transition dip' where the change in school environment leads to a drop in performance. This isn't unusual, but you can help by keeping up your own interest and involvement in their learning.

Get organised

A key factor in academic success is organisation. A little planning can save a lot of time and stress.

Your to-do list

- Ensure your child can read a timetable and a map or floorplan of their school to familiarise themselves with the layout.
- Suggest they copy out their timetable – school ones can appear to be in code – and put it on the wall at home.
- Get them to use different colours, noting the books and other equipment required each day such as sports kits and musical instruments.
- Many schools operate a two-week timetable. If so, get your child to label which week is which, to avoid confusion.



Student tip!

"When you are given your timetable, make at least three copies: one for your bag, one for your pocket and a spare for home".

Set a routine

You can expect homework right from the start, so it's worth agreeing on a routine up front. Draw up a homework timetable to get into a regular routine for completing homework so that it is handed in on time. When you make homework a priority, it shows that you think school work is important.

Use a family weekly planner to help your child keep on top of their routine. Help them add their activities to it including extra-curricular activities and social events. Remember to add in free time, children need time to wind down and enjoy their new friendships and family time.

Teach them how to create a to-do list with the pieces of homework needed soonest at the top. Whiteboards are great for this.

At this age, children start to want more privacy when they're getting ready. Consider organising a schedule for the bathroom in the mornings so no-one is made late by waiting.

Top tip!

Try and resist the temptation to do everything. Your child needs to learn to manage their time efficiently and they won't do it if you get everything ready for them.



A learning environment

Create a study space or a quiet area where your child can do their homework at the agreed time. If you've got space for a desk (and they want one) that's great, but a portable desk (aka a box with everything they need in it) and the kitchen table or living room floor might be where your child is most productive – as long as you can keep the area distraction free while they work. Try to be easily contactable if they have any questions.

Pupils are usually responsible for keeping (and remembering!) their own books, meaning storage is often needed at home. A set of plastic drawers with one for each day, or a 'to do' and 'finished' box can help with this and aid organisation.

What are children learning these days?

Typical curriculum subjects in the first years of secondary and post-primary school will include: English, maths, science, history, geography, modern foreign languages, design and technology, art and design, music, physical education, citizenship and computing.

If your child is due to attend an academy, free school or a private secondary school, the school won't have to follow the national curriculum. However, academies must teach a broad and balanced curriculum including English, maths and science. They must also teach religious education.

Top tip!

There are lots of ways to introduce learning into everyday life. For example, if you are planning a day out, why not visit somewhere that ties in with their studies.

Financial preparation – money management

The cost of kitting out your child for their new school can soon mount up.

Safe spending

A child having their own lunch money, perhaps for the first time, is a great opportunity to start talking about saving and having a responsible attitude to money. Make sure they carry a small amount of money and know what to do in an emergency.

Top tip!

Check out any safe spending apps or debit cards designed for children.

Budget wisely

Start budgeting now and spread the cost. Jumpers and blazers with a school logo are typically the most expensive uniform items, as well as money for lunch, drinks and snacks and any locker charges or any school trips or clubs. Ask whether there will be anything to pay for during the first term and year in addition to school uniform requirements so that you can plan ahead.

Savvy shopping

Find out which type of school bag most pupils at the school use. Carrying books means that flimsy choices won't last. Rucksacks tend to be better.

Your child may need more specialised equipment than they did in primary school such as a scientific calculator (remember sin, cos and tan?) Be sure to check what they will need with the school in advance.

Many schools set homework online or encourage pupils to complete work via secure document-sharing sites.

Although not essential, access to a computer and printer at home is definitely recommended. Parents can ask the school what support is available from their schools in terms of device provision. Many schools are now routinely issuing laptops and tablets.

As part of the digital inclusion agenda for students in Wales to access IT, there's a whole raft of resources available. This includes software downloadable directly from the Welsh Government site free of charge via HWB.

Join the PTA

Many people in a parenting role tell us that they want to do more to support their child's education, but don't always know how. They often say they feel less connected with the school as their children get older, so the PTA (or PTFA/ PA/ Friends or similar) is a great way to bridge that gap and get to know more about their world.

There are so many great reasons to actively support your PTA at secondary school. You may not have the same opportunities to socialise and get to know other parents and staff, but the PTA is a brilliant way to keep in touch and build supportive links.

Schools always need extra funds and the PTA committee decides how to spend any that are raised, which at secondary school might be supporting student-led projects. PTA events are a popular way to fundraise and bring the community together. Your whole family can get involved with online quizzes, virtual art shows, auctions, bake-offs, football tournaments, selfie competitions and even reindeer poo bingo! (Yes, that is really a thing!)

For more hints and tips on supporting your child's education, take a look at our:

Parents' Hub: a useful [resource](#) for anyone in a parenting role with children at school, containing practical advice, information and ideas from parents, teachers and other experts.

Parent eBulletin: get regular updates straight to your inbox with news, features and exciting events for parents. Sign up to the [Parent eBulletin](#)

PTA Hub: everything you need to support, join or run your own PTA.

Social Media: Follow Parentkind on [Facebook](#)

If you've got a tip to share with other parents, please drop us a line at parents@parentkind.org

