



A Parents' Guide To Supporting Transition To Secondary School

Guidance for Parents' and Carers



Washwood Heath
Academy

Primary, Secondary & Sixth Form

Helping your child manage the move from primary to secondary school

Talk about starting secondary school with your child

Moving from primary to secondary school is exciting – a rite of passage. But it can also be a daunting or anxious time. For children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or mental health difficulties, the change may be particularly challenging.

As a parent there is much you can do to help your child **manage the transition** and minimise anxiety, whatever their situation.

Chat about how they are feeling and how it will be different from primary – for instance a bigger site, new people, changing teachers and rooms for subjects, and more homework.

Reassure them that nerves about starting something new are normal, as is some sadness at leaving familiar things, and that these feelings usually subside.

But be careful not to impose your own worries. Focus on exciting opportunities too – new subjects, activities and friends. Celebrating the milestone of finishing primary school, and all the ways they have grown, can boost self-esteem and confidence.



Familiarise your child with their new school

Most secondary schools organise Year 6 transition days.

Meeting your teachers

These are a great opportunity to meet teachers, other starters and find out about the school layout and day. If possible print a school map to look at with your child too.

Reducing anxiety

Minimising unknowns for day one can reduce anxiety. Schools often provide extra familiarisation days for vulnerable children – a chance to meet the SENCO and support staff and look around in a quieter environment.



Preparing for secondary school

- The transition from primary to secondary school is exciting for children and marks a new phase in their lives. Children recognise it as part of growing up and are aware that their lives are about to change in an important way. Like any change, it can also bring uncertainty.
- Most children will manage the transition to secondary school successfully. However, there may be ups and downs. It's easy for children to slip from feeling happy and confident one minute, to feeling nervous or anxious and back again as they find their feet. As a parent or carer there is much you can do to help your child through the transition period with careful and sensitive preparation.



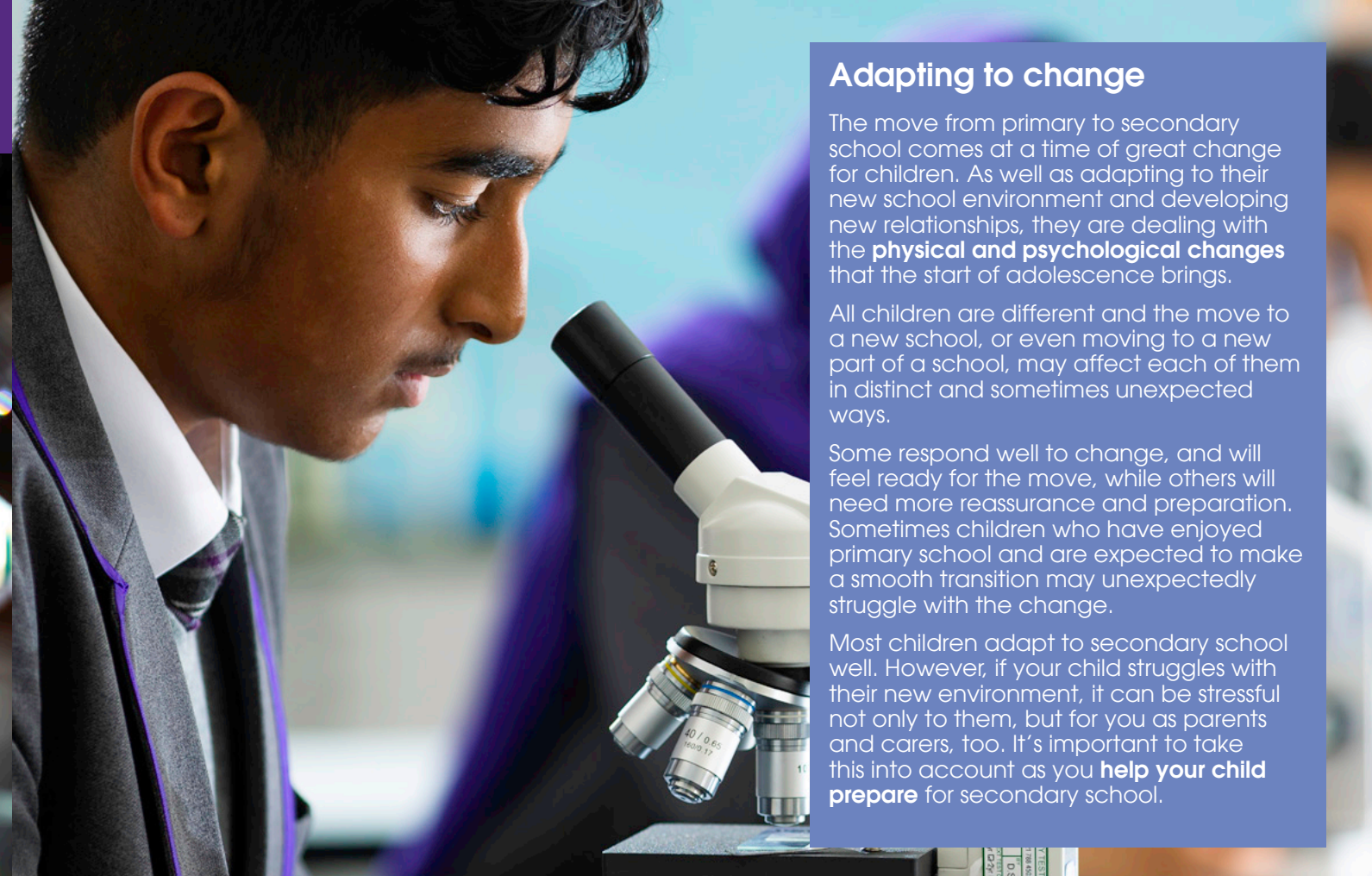
Adapting to change

The move from primary to secondary school comes at a time of great change for children. As well as adapting to their new school environment and developing new relationships, they are dealing with the **physical and psychological changes** that the start of adolescence brings.

All children are different and the move to a new school, or even moving to a new part of a school, may affect each of them in distinct and sometimes unexpected ways.

Some respond well to change, and will feel ready for the move, while others will need more reassurance and preparation. Sometimes children who have enjoyed primary school and are expected to make a smooth transition may unexpectedly struggle with the change.

Most children adapt to secondary school well. However, if your child struggles with their new environment, it can be stressful not only to them, but for you as parents and carers, too. It's important to take this into account as you **help your child prepare** for secondary school.



Why is transition difficult for some children and young people?

Transition can be challenging

Transition can be challenging for a number of reasons. For example, some children may worry about making new friends. Others may have concerns around organisation and understanding new systems – being in a larger environment, knowing that they have different lessons in different classrooms, or having more homework to do.

Multiple teachers

Children in primary school are generally used to having one teacher most of the time. Changing to having multiple teachers, who will have high expectations and additional classroom rules may feel daunting, especially if they have formed close bonds with their primary school teachers.

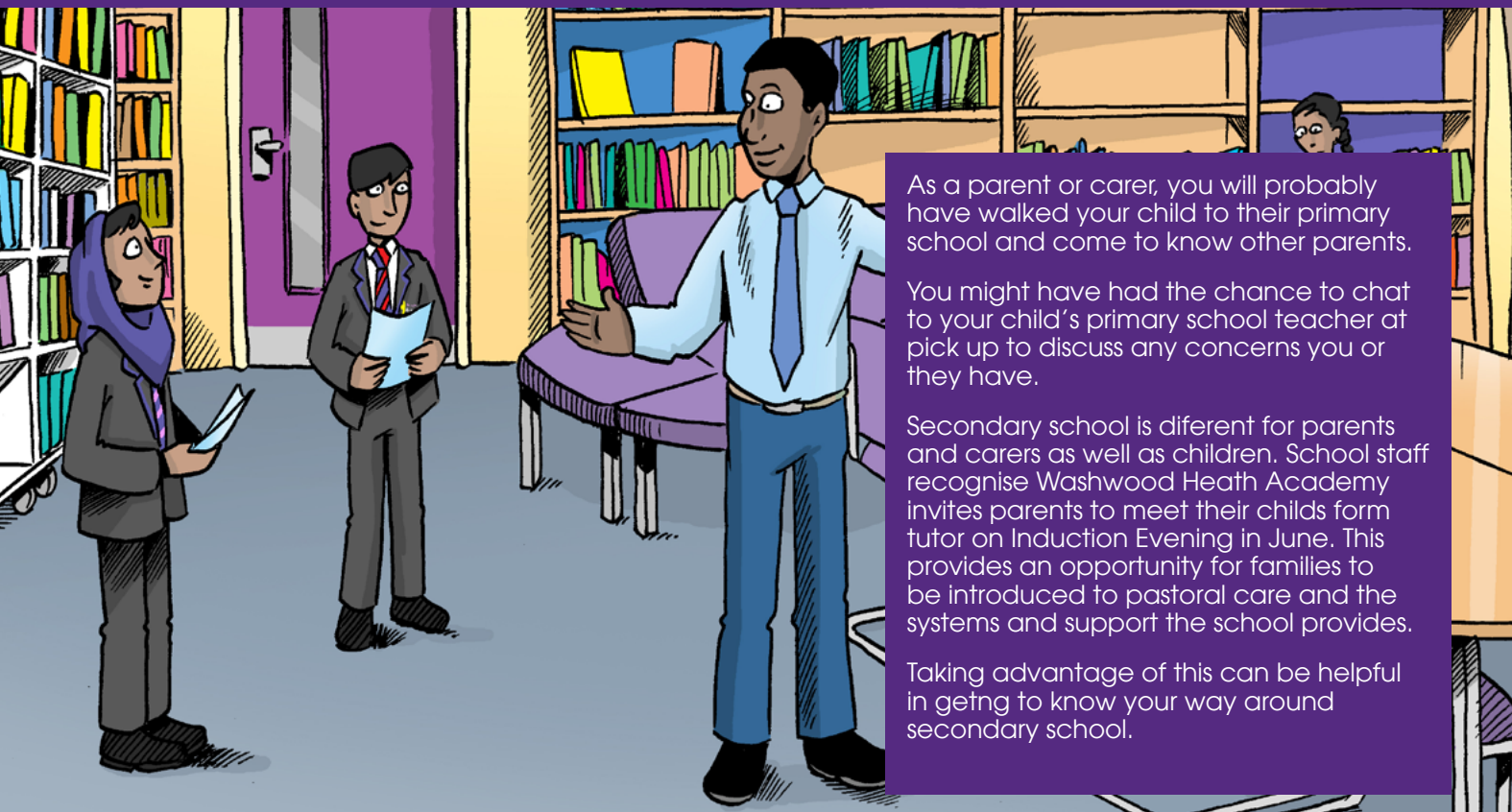


What does successful transition look like?

How can you tell whether your child is settling in well at secondary school? Research shows that the signs of a successful transition are as follows: developing new friendships and maintaining good self-esteem and confidence; showing an increasing interest in school and school work; getting used to their new routines and school organisation with ease; experiencing continuity in learning.



What can parents and carers do to support children and young people through transition?



As a parent or carer, you will probably have walked your child to their primary school and come to know other parents.

You might have had the chance to chat to your child's primary school teacher at pick up to discuss any concerns you or they have.

Secondary school is different for parents and carers as well as children. School staff recognise Washwood Heath Academy invites parents to meet their child's form tutor on Induction Evening in June. This provides an opportunity for families to be introduced to pastoral care and the systems and support the school provides.

Taking advantage of this can be helpful in getting to know your way around secondary school.

Helping your child through transition

We have summarised **four ways** to support your child through their transition to Washwood Heath Academy. They are:

- encouraging them to explore their feelings;
- helping them connect to their school;
- building friendships and relationships;
- empowering them by building their confidence and independence

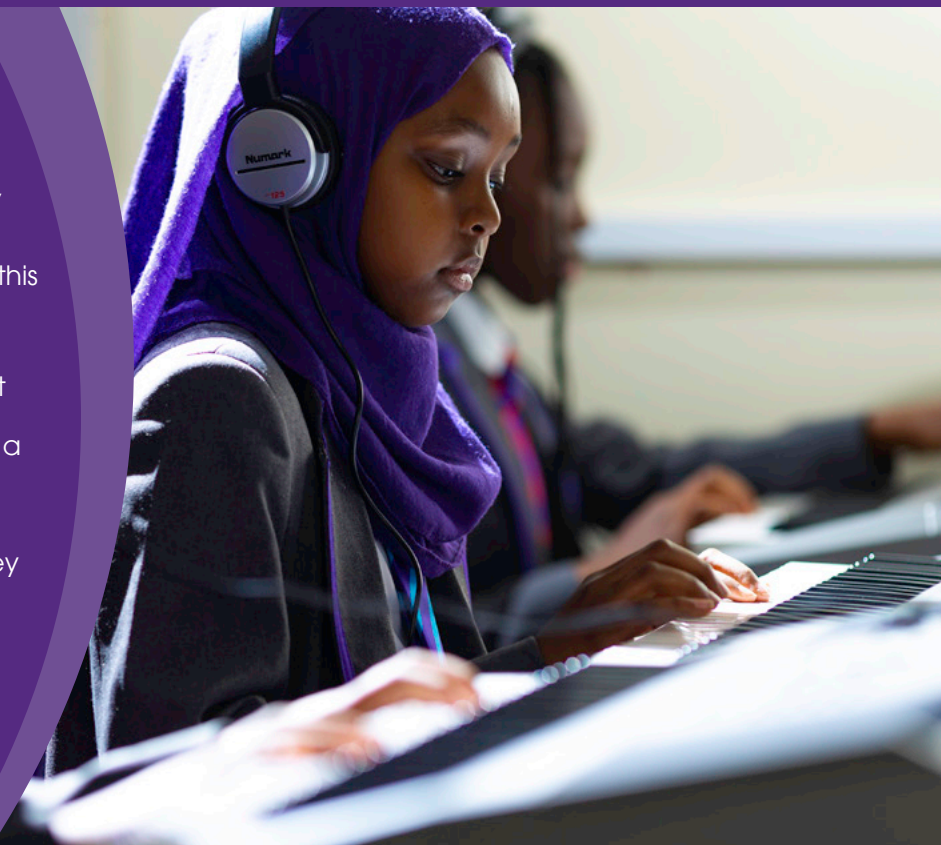


Connecting

Feeling connected with their new school is important and will help your child settle in. Help your child begin to connect with their new school. Look at the Washwood Heath school website with your child and take part in any induction events, in person or virtual. Many schools have recorded video content for year 6/7 pupils and it can be helpful for children to watch this to help them feel comfortable.

Take the opportunity to meet any key members of staff and get to know how best to communicate with the school. It may be beneficial for you and your child to identify a teacher or other trusted adult at the school (for example a Form Tutor or Head of Year), who can be a first point of contact for any worries. Help your child plan out their journey to school.

It may be their first time traveling to school alone and so practicing the journey can be an important part of preparing them. If your child is struggling with their new school (after a few weeks), get in touch with the school to discuss your concerns.



Exploring

- The most valuable thing you can do to **support your child** is encourage them to explore their thoughts and to know that they can talk openly about their feelings, both positive and negative.
- **Conversations** can help pave the way to talking about your child's emotions as they prepare for their new school. Make sure you mark the end of your child's primary school experience. Saying proper goodbyes to friends, teachers and other school staff is important.
- **Talk about any favourite memories** from primary school and recognise all the things they will miss. Keep talking openly to your child to ask any questions they might have, and explore any worries and/or possible misunderstandings about starting a new school.
- **Discuss** with your child what they are looking forward to, and whether they are worried about anything. It can be helpful to think about how you felt when you were preparing for secondary school and share this with your child - children always like to hear stories about their parents' or carers' childhood. Were you excited about meeting new people and learning new subjects?
- **How did you settle in?** Your experiences may give you clues about how your child is feeling. Find out what your child's primary school has been doing to support the transition with year 6's. Continue the conversation at home with your child or encourage conversations with older siblings, older cousins or anyone the child feels comfortable with.

Building friendships and relationships

Whether your child is going to a school where a lot of their friends are going, or they are going to a school where they do not know anyone, it's important to start talking about friendships. Help your child think about how to approach meeting new people and starting conversations.

Remind them that all children in their year are in the same situation. You might want to do some role plays to practice this at home.

It can be helpful to encourage children to join some extracurricular activities at their new school as another way of meeting like-minded young people.

If possible, plan activities over the summer holidays which allow your children to meet with others.



Empowering your child

- Building your child's independence and confidence will help them with the transition. Empower and support them to take steps towards **independence** however big or small, as well as taking on small responsibilities in the home to build up their **confidence and independence** in preparation for this new and exciting phase of their life.
- Give your child lots of praise where you can and notice the things that they are doing well. The greatest source of strength for any child going through change is knowing that they can fall back on the love and support of their parents and carers.
- Providing stability and security is what you do best, and this gives children the confidence to **explore** and test their new environment and seek out new experiences. It means that transition can be an exciting and positive experience and that if there are any wobbles on the way, they can come to you for reassurance and help.
- Remember, too, that you don't have to have all the answers and that you don't have to do this on your own. Your school is there to help and between you, school staff and your child you have all the skills and resources you need to help your child make a **successful transition**.

Here, some parents suggest ways to talk about school transition:

“We talked about him and we listened to his questions. Whatever they were, we answered them truthfully. If we needed help to find something out, we contacted Washwood Heath.”

“I shared my memories of going to secondary school and about my own fears and anxieties. This helped her to understand that worrying about a new school is normal. We talked about things we can do when we are worried and also looked at the Washwood Heath website.”

“The summer school and induction days were really helpful and were a chance for him to make some new friends before starting September.”

“If there was anything she wasn’t sure of, she visited the Washwood Heath Website and this really helped her to familiarise herself with the school.”

“My son went online to visit the website and do a virtual tour. This helped us all because we became familiar with the school and helped ease their nerves.”

“My daughter has SEND and has already formed very good friendships with staff and pupils. This has made us very happy as parents.”

“We reassured our son that it would take a while to settle in and supported him along the way. We have learned his routines and this has helped him get used to the new people and places in his school day.”

Letting your child know you are organised

Parents sharing key information with the Secondary

- This is really important for children with **SEND** or **worries**. Check your primary has shared paperwork and spoken with Washwood Heath school, so we are aware of your child's needs.
- Parents can also request a meeting with secondary staff, to discuss support, particularly if your child has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Familiarise yourself with the SEN policy on the school website, particularly if your child has a (EHC) Educational & Health care plan.



"Students' major concerns are getting lost or told off for being late. We expect that in the first few weeks. All staff will be looking out for the Year 7s. Reassure them it's not a problem."

Secondary school teacher



Prepare in advance

- Try to get organised over the summer rather than leaving it to the last minute, which can be stressful for parent and child.
- A trip to **buy uniform**, get a **haircut** or choose **new stationery** is an opportunity to spend time together, chat and boost confidence too.
- Secondary students often **travel** independently for the first time.
- Do some **trial runs** – with you, then perhaps alone or with a friend.
- Work out the first day plan in September. Your child may prefer to go with you to start, or to **meet a friend** on the way.

Help develop independence and organisation

- Secondary school demands are greater, so preparation should help build their own skills and confidence. This will help them settle quicker.
- Don't do it all for them. Could they arrange to meet friends, do shopping errands (good lunchtime practice) or organise their bag for a day out?
- Be guided by what feels manageable for your child though. It's fine if they need more support than some others.
- Once school starts, try developing independent organisation with post-it notes listing what's needed each day; boxes to store other books and worksheets; and an evening habit of checking their school planner and preparing uniform and bag.

Give it time – and keep some reassuring routines

- Trusted old friends and habits are comforting, particularly in the exhausting early weeks, if a child doesn't know anyone, or if they are finding it hard to settle. Seeing primary classmates or enjoying familiar activities may be a welcome relief from the effort of starting a new school.
- **Too much change at once** can feel overwhelming too. So while it's great if they throw themselves into everything, don't worry if they don't. They need to adjust and relax.
- **So resist the urge to quiz** them too heavily about their first day.
- Finally, give it time. Settling in may take longer than you expected and it may not be a linear process, particularly for children with additional needs. If you are concerned it is a good idea to check in with your child's form tutor or SENCO.

More information and advice contact:
Enquiry@washwood.academy

Mentally Healthy Schools

Our Mentally Healthy Schools site has compiled quality-assured resources aimed at supporting parents and carers with their child's transition.

Scan the QR code below

You can find these resources here.



Helping your child to enjoy school

