



## Moving on to secondary school: a handbook for parents/carers.

# C O N T E N T

1. Introduction.
2. Understanding what the move from primary to secondary education involves for our children.
3. What do children say about their worries?
4. What is exciting about secondary school.
5. What do children say they like most about being at secondary school?
6. What parents/carers can do to support children at secondary school.
7. What do children say about what they find difficult soon after their move to secondary school?
8. Support for children doing homework.
9. What do children say about how their parents could help them to settle in secondary school?
10. Some final thoughts.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks go to the parents' group from Springboard Family Centre in Carterton, to Rosemary Trace, and most of all, to the Year 7 children in Henry Box and the Marlborough schools who shared their experiences with us.

# MOVING ON

**A handbook for parents/carers whose children are transferring from primary to secondary school.**

## **1. Introduction**

---

When our children are very small, we chart their challenges and development in weeks and months. We all remember counting the weeks until that first magic smile or the months until they sit unaided or say their first words. In a child's early years, there are so many milestones and stages and we, as parents/carers, know we need to support our children to develop and learn new skills ourselves. As our children grow, the time between stages extends. The first day at school marks a huge step into the outside world for our children and for us. We prepare for it, discuss it and develop strategies to manage it for our children. It is clearly recognised as a challenge for children and their parents/carers. As our children develop physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially, becoming more independent, it can be the case that we underestimate the challenges presented for our child, by a move from primary to secondary school. This move is important educationally, but actually it affects many aspects of our lives: from what time the family gets up in the morning to fit in with what are often longer journey times; to what the children wear as uniform including PE kit, science overall, cookery apron; to the contact between home and school. This handbook has been written to give you insights and ideas for supporting your child as she/he moves on from primary to secondary school.

## 2. Understanding what the move from Primary to Secondary Education involves for our children

---

During a group for parents, one of the mothers talked about the difficulties her child was having in school in Year 7. We started to talk about what the move from primary to secondary means for children. What follows are our ideas which we hope contribute to increasing the understanding of parents about what the move means for children.

- There is a huge change in the size of school from primary to secondary school.
- When children move to secondary school, children go from being in the oldest group of the biggest children in a small school, to being the youngest and smallest children in a large school.
- The number of subjects that the children study increase, which is interesting and can be challenging.
- Students in secondary school have to be adaptable and meet very different teacher expectations in different subject lessons, for example drama makes different demands on children compared to the tight rules that are needed for chemistry in a laboratory.
- The different teachers for the different subjects will all have different personal styles and attitudes. The children need to understand these and adjust to them.
- A timetable of different subjects has the children moving round school for lessons. This can be confusing at first and also affects what children need to carry with them.
- The weight of school bags filled with books can be a health hazard for children who are still growing and developing.
- Transfer into secondary school usually means children have a greater distance to travel to school.
- Parents usually no longer walk with children to school so the parents lose touch with the school/teachers and the friends/classmates of their child.
- For children, moving school usually means getting split up from friends and being put in different tutor groups. Some children find the prospect of new friends exciting, while others worry about this a lot.
- Secondary school years are the time of adolescence which is a turbulent time for all young people.
- At this stage in children's development, there are huge peer pressures with regard to appearance, attitudes to work/teachers and friendships.

- There can be a culture which implies that it is 'naff' to accept awards and praise for work done. This can make it hard for children who want to work.
- Large schools need more rules. Some school rules can become the basis for conflict, for example how high are shoe heels, the colour/length of hair etc.
- Teenagers are much more aware of society pressures with regard to fashion, alcohol, smoking cigarettes, drugs, sex etc. Moving to secondary school opens children up to these pressures as they see some older children challenging boundaries.
- At secondary school the playgrounds/fields are often extensive. These can provide space for activities like football, but they are also harder to supervise.
- There can be stories in the community about bullying which make children nervous about going to secondary school. Stories such as being shoved in a locker or having your head put down the toilet.
- The way lunches are provided at secondary school is different from how they were provided at primary school. At primary school food is often served and the children closely supervised. In secondary school, lunches are usually served in a canteen style arrangement. Children need to learn to choose food, handle money, and choose where they sit. Some children find the numbers of children in the lunch hall and the queues difficult.
- The arrangement for children getting free lunches can be different too. Some children can feel stigmatised by arrangements and it is important that the parents of children who get free meals check out what the arrangements are for their child.
- The amount of homework increases.
- The levels of difficulties of homework also increase and it can be harder for the children to do and hard for the parents to help.
- There may be additional requirements of the school with regard to uniform and equipment/trips, which create pressures for parents financially.

*The Parents' Group, Springboard, Carterton*

### 3. What do children say about their worries?

---

One of the most important things you can do in the months before your child transfers to secondary school, is to talk to your child about the move, and **listen to what they have to say**. The class teacher in school will be talking about the move too. Most children have contact with staff from secondary school, perhaps a visit from their soon-to-be Head of Year and they have the opportunity to visit the school before the move. However, it is unlikely that your child will talk in school, in a class/group about the fears she/he might have. You can help your child by making time when you can talk about the move, uninterrupted and when you can give your undivided attention. It is a big move as we have already seen. There will be aspects of school that are eagerly anticipated, but there will also be fears. If you can encourage your child to talk about their worries, then you can get more information if it is needed, provide reassurance, and when necessary, ask for additional support from her/his class teacher and/or staff in the secondary school.

It is not always easy to begin a conversation with your child about her/his worries. In order to help you, we asked a group of children in two secondary schools just after they had joined the school, to write down the worries they had before hand. You can look with your child at the range of comments the children made, and this might be a basis for you to ask, "what worries do you have?" Altogether 90 children responded to a simple anonymous questionnaire. There were some common themes to their answers to the question "what were the things you worried about most, before you moved to secondary school?" The four most frequently mentioned worries were:-

- |    |                                                                        |              |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. | The size of the school and the problems of finding your way around it. | 41/90 (45%). |
| 2. | The problem of bullies/bullying.                                       | 34/90 (37%). |
| 3. | Losing old friends and worrying about making new friends.              | 27/90 (30%)  |
| 4. | Homework.                                                              | 26/90 (29%). |

What follows are the kinds of things the children said:-

What were the things you worried about most before you moved to secondary school?

- ❖ *I was worried about how I was going to get to school.*
- ❖ *Getting to school and lessons on time.*
- ❖ *That it will be a lot bigger.*
- ❖ *We were the highest in the school but now we're lowest.*
- ❖ *Being at the bottom of the school and in a massive school.*
- ❖ *Too many people.*
- ❖ *I thought I would get lost.*
- ❖ *Getting lost going from class to class.*
- ❖ *My friends finding new friends.*
- ❖ *Losing my old friends.*
- ❖ *Leaving my two best friends, one of which I knew from the first day of school.*
- ❖ *Friends because they go to different classes.*
- ❖ *Getting to know new people.*
- ❖ *Not making friends.*
- ❖ *I was worried about people picking on me.*
- ❖ *Being bullied by older people.*
- ❖ *What form I would be in.*
- ❖ *Bunsen burners in science.*
- ❖ *Teachers.*
- ❖ *Strict teachers.*
- ❖ *Too much homework.*
- ❖ *Forgetting books.*
- ❖ *I was worried about the homework and how organised you had to be, it is much more difficult than primary school.*

#### 4. What is exciting about secondary school?

---

1. The opportunity to study a wider range of subjects in more depth.
2. Specialist subject facilities such as a gymnasium, science laboratories, art and craft/design and technology facilities, the school library.
3. Being in a bigger school with more pupils means more opportunities to find friends with similar interests.
4. Greater opportunities for sport, competitive games, and after school activities.
5. More independence from home and from close supervision.
6. It is a clear marker of a stage in growing up, thinking about a job/further education and being an adult.

#### 5. What do children say they like most about being at secondary school?

---

As mentioned earlier, there are many aspects of secondary school that children eagerly anticipate. When talking about the move with your child, it would be helpful to talk about the positive opportunities and experiences that come with starting secondary school. Again, we learned so much from the children who responded to the questionnaire. You can see that some of their worries, such as about friendships, rapidly became aspects that they liked most about being in secondary school. So while so many worried about the size of the school and getting lost, those same children talked about the school being bigger and the space there is, as features they now liked most. The four most frequently mentioned aspects the children liked were:

- |                                                |              |
|------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. The different subject lessons/clubs.        | 43/90 (48%). |
| 2. Friendships, especially making new friends. | 33/90 (37%). |
| 3. Lunch arrangements/choices.                 | 19/90 (21%). |
| 4. The size of the school and its resources.   | 17/90 (19%). |



You can read with your child the kinds of things the children said.

What do you like most about being in secondary school?

- ❖ *All the different lessons.*
- ❖ *That you get to do better lessons and using new equipment.*
- ❖ *The classes and subjects are much better.*
- ❖ *You get different teachers for different subjects.*
- ❖ *Science because they have proper equipment.*
- ❖ *Lessons such as Art, Science and Maths.*
- ❖ *Most of the lessons like History.*
- ❖ *You get to learn French and German.*
- ❖ *P.E.*
- ❖ *The sports.*
- ❖ *When you go on the computers there are a lot more resources to use.*
- ❖ *Lighting the Bunsen burner.*
- ❖ *In primary school there was nothing good and I like woodwork and they did not do that.*
- ❖ *You do proper lessons.*
- ❖ *Moving around for each lesson.*
- ❖ *My form tutor.*
- ❖ *Brand new teachers, equipment, start.*
- ❖ *Having the library.*
- ❖ *So many new people.*
- ❖ *Getting to know more people that you never knew before.*
- ❖ *All my new friends.*
- ❖ *Break.*
- ❖ *Bring a football in because we could not before.*
- ❖ *The canteen is very nice.*
- ❖ *The food.*
- ❖ *Its bigger better lunch.*
- ❖ *You get to choose more freely what you want for lunch.*
- ❖ *You can eat outside.*
- ❖ *The space.*
- ❖ *Its very big you can get lost sometimes.*
- ❖ *It's a challenge.*
- ❖ *I like Wednesdays best, because you get to leave at 2.00pm.*
- ❖ *Lots more clubs like drama, hockey, juggling and trampolining.*
- ❖ *Lockers.*
- ❖ *Getting a bit more care.*
- ❖ *Getting more responsibility.*
- ❖ *Being big and grown-up.*

## 6. What parents/carers can do to support children at secondary school

---

Moving on to secondary school brings about changes in the way parents/carers are involved with their children with regard to school. There is less day-to-day contact between parents/carers and the school. It is a normal feature of adolescence that children want to be more independent and make their own choices. Despite this striving for adult status, children still need support and guidance at home. Sometimes, more so than when they are young. The expectations of them with regard to their work and the challenges of social pressures are greater, more complex and with the possibility of far reaching consequences of making mistakes. As one grandmother said "little children little problems, ... big children, big problems", so when our children transfer to secondary school and face different challenges, we as parents/carers need to adjust what we do to support them.

What follows are some ideas:

- **Maintain regular routines at home with regard to sleep, meals, and having enjoyable leisure activities.**

A move to secondary school can have an impact on family way of life in lots of ways. The fact that the school may be further away, may mean getting up earlier, having more things to organise and pack for the school day with different requirements on different days, allowing time for the journey, and coming home with homework. However much you want to support your child at secondary school, it's important to remember that the biggest thing you can do to support your child is to maintain your home and family as a predictable, warm and supportive place to be. As your child faces the demands of secondary school, it is all the more important that she/he is certain that home offers a welcome, care and support.

- **Learn the names of key members of staff for your child.**

One of the most obvious changes for your child will be the number of teachers that she/he has to deal with during each school day. From having one teacher all day, sometimes every day at primary school, your child will probably have a different teacher for each subject on the timetable. This may mean that she/he has to relate to up to six or even as many as eight different teachers in a day. Different teachers have their own styles and different subjects may call for different teaching styles; for example there will be a contrast between the discipline needed in a science laboratory and the freedom of expression in a drama studio. It is helpful to know the names of the members of staff who teach your child for all the different subjects. This demonstrates to your child your

interest, means you can listen to what they say about their day and be more clear about what has happened, and should you need to contact a teacher, you will be able to do so by name. It will be particularly helpful to know the name of your child's form tutor and head of year, both of whom may or may not teach your child.

- **Read the school's newsletters.**

Most, if not all schools, produce newsletters in which they provide information for parents/carers and for the pupils in the school. You could ask about these when you visit the school before your child transfers and then you can be on the lookout for them once your child starts at the school. It is probably the case that in the early months of starting at secondary school, your child will carefully bring these home to you. Do read them, as this again signals your interest in your child's experiences in school and they are useful source of information. As most parents of children at secondary school tell you, these are likely to lie crumpled and forgotten at the bottom of your child's school bag as he/she gets older.

- **Support the school rules.**

It will be the case either when you visited the school beforehand or when your child starts school, that you and your child have been provided with copies of the school rules. Schools are large organisations where rules are needed to ensure that the different needs of the pupils and staff are met, order is maintained, and the school is kept as a safe environment. It will help your child if you can show you know what the school rules are and you support them. If your child understands that you know the rules and support them, then if there are occasions when she/he feels that there has been an injustice, and you can talk this out at home, you are more likely to be listened to. If need be, you can then raise this with the teacher.

- **Try to meet, or at least learn the names of, your child's friends.**

There will be more children in the secondary school than was the case in primary school. This offers opportunities for your child to find a group of children who have similar interests. Often for many children, this is the beginning of establishing lasting friendships based on common interests. Your child will be making friends with children you have never met. If you can encourage them to bring their friends home and feel comfortable to do so, then this can help you stay in touch with your child's social world. At least, try to learn the names of their friends. Staying in touch with your child's social world is important as one way of you monitoring their well being. Changes in friendship groups or a sudden change in attitude to some named children may be a first signal of difficulties with regard to bullying or loneliness.

- **Keep a record of your child's timetable.**

Your child will be expected to bring equipment to school such as pens, pencils, a ruler, ingredients for cooking, an overall for technology and a PE kit. She/he needs to develop skills of personal organisation with regard to this equipment. This is not an easy task for any child and some children find it particularly difficult. Children, who have difficulties in personal organisation and/or have had experiences of being disruptive at home or where home routines are not clearly established, find this particularly difficult. You can help your child with this if you have a copy of the timetable. In addition, having a copy of the timetable means you can monitor how you feel your child is settling in school. If you have a copy of the timetable, then a particular reluctance to attend school on a certain day may be related to the lessons on that day. Certainly the timetable would be a starting point for the discussion about a reluctance to attend school.

- **Establish and maintain a daily time when you can offer your child your undivided attention.**

No matter how grown up and independent your child wants to be now she/he has started at secondary school, she/he still needs your attention, care and support. It's all too easy with your child's growing social independence, the demands of leisure activities, and homework, to find that days go by when you have both not found time to talk quietly to each other. This routine of having daily individual time is useful. On your part it signals the priority you place on hearing your child and taking an interest in what happens at school. It is a basis on which you can monitor your child's well being. For your child, it is a predictable point in a busy day, when she/he can count on you and your interest. As children grow and face more of life's challenges, they still need to know that they are special.

- **Review the day that has past and plan for the next day with your child.**

It is part of the process of growing up, that we all make mistakes and need support when things don't go well. Using the daily one-to-one time and/or a routine of sharing news at a mealtime or at bedtime can be a valuable way of helping your child. Checking out with your child that you want to hear each day about what has gone well and what has been difficult, signals your interest and your willingness to hear about the full range of their experiences. If you can establish with your child that you will listen to what has been difficult, try to see their point of view, and talk with them about a range of solutions and not tell them what to do, then this will be invaluable. Children learn as much, if not more, from making mistakes than they do from getting things right. What they need is non-judgemental support to share concerns and get support when they need it. It is no use waiting until there is a difficulty before trying to establish yourself as a parent who can listen and support. It is useful to have a routine of reviewing the day that has past and planning for the next day, established before difficulties arise.

- **When there are concerns, contact the teacher concerned and/or the form teacher as soon as you can.**

Difficulties will arise. These could include: a difficult lesson in which your child felt she/he didn't understand what was being taught, a problem with friends, lost books or equipment, bullying or difficult behaviour which has resulted in sanctions being applied. Your child needs to feel that she/he can tell you her/his point of view. While this is important, it is also important for you as a parent/carer to bear in mind that there may be other points of view to be considered. Contacting school and the right member of staff promptly will mean that you hear another point of view, have the opportunity to discuss what has happened, and be part of a positive solution to the difficulty. It is easier to deal with difficulties as they arise, as otherwise, what was a problem in one lesson with one teacher, can develop into a relationship problem for the teacher and the child or a dislike of that subject which then affects your child's learning. Teachers will always appreciate it if you contact them putting forward your understanding of what has been difficult, whilst signalling your willingness to hear another point of view and be part of a positive solution.

- **See yourself as a parent who nurtures if things go wrong.**

Your child will make mistakes and difficulties will arise. Schools can be demanding places and once at secondary school, parents/carers are less involved with school on a day-to-day basis. If you want to help your child face the challenges and difficulties that might arise, then you need to have signalled beforehand that when things go wrong, you can listen and you will nurture the child. Otherwise, your child will not tell you what happens at school and you will be less able to monitor her/his well being and offer the support you would want to offer.

- **Find out about the range of support services that serve the school.**

The Local Authority offers a range of support services to all schools. These are there to support the staff and the children, but they are also there to hear from you if you have particular concerns. Key services that you may need to contact are as follows:

- Behaviour Support Teacher  
..... Tel. No: .....
- Educational Social Worker  
..... Tel. No: .....
- School Nurse  
..... Tel. No: .....
- Educational Psychologist  
..... Tel. No: .....



- School Counsellor  
..... Tel. No: .....
- Parent Governor  
..... Tel. No: .....
- Local Authority Education Officer  
..... Tel. No: .....

For the children with special educational needs, there are additional specialist services and resources too numerous to list here. Check out with the school's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo), who will be able to tell you about more specialised help.

- **Help your child have a rewarding and restful time out of school.**

The children who do well in school are those which are supported at home and whose parents/carers are interested in their schooling. It is important that we as parents and carers nurture the self esteem and social confidence of our children. It is on this basis that they will cope with challenges, deal with difficulties, and stay in touch with us.

## **7. What do children say about what they find difficult soon after their move to secondary school?**

---

The move from primary to secondary school is a big one with many opportunities and challenges for your child. There will be difficulties. What matters is not the difficulties, but the way in which you and the staff in the school can help your child deal with these. After all, we can learn as much from things going wrong as we do when things go right. As your child matures and becomes more independent from you, learning to resolve difficulties is an essential skill. You can both read together what children say they find difficult with being in a secondary school. When your child has made the move, try reading this again, as a basis for talking about any difficulties she or he might be having, so you can help.

The four most frequently mentioned difficulties were:

- |                                                    |              |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. The homework.                                   | 35/90 (39%). |
| 2. Getting lost/being late to lessons.             | 23/90 (25%). |
| 3. Being organised with the right books/equipment. | 19/90 (21%). |
| 4. The amount of work and the different lessons.   | 12/90 (13%). |

What are you finding difficult with being in a secondary school?

- ❖ *Getting up much earlier in the morning.*
- ❖ *Getting everything ready for school.*
- ❖ *Remembering everything for each day.*
- ❖ *Remember all the books you need for lessons.*
- ❖ *Not to read your planner wrong.*
- ❖ *Trying to remember the register and when we have assemblies.*
- ❖ *Getting to lessons on time.*
- ❖ *Understanding lessons, getting to lessons.*
- ❖ *I am still not sure where to go for every lesson.*
- ❖ *Being late for class*
- ❖ *Finding places to go to.*
- ❖ *English.*
- ❖ *The literacy is a lot more harder.*
- ❖ *The maths work.*
- ❖ *Work.*
- ❖ *Hard work.*
- ❖ *Having to remember all the teachers' names.*
- ❖ *Keeping up with the teacher, where is a classroom and which teacher is which.*
- ❖ *Getting from place to place.*
- ❖ *Homework.*
- ❖ *Having homework every night.*
- ❖ *Coping with all the different homework we get given.*
- ❖ *Some homework is hard but try your hardest.*
- ❖ *Getting the homework in on time.*
- ❖ *Getting everything right.*
- ❖ *Being organised.*
- ❖ *Trying to remember everything and getting detentions.*
- ❖ *Some responsibility.*
- ❖ *Mixing with so many people in your year.*
- ❖ *Not much, just going from the oldest to the youngest in the school.*
- ❖ *Find it annoying when older students kick the football where we are sat down on the field and it hits us.*
- ❖ *Settling.*
- ❖ *Nothing its better than primary.*
- ❖ *Nothing !!!!!*

## **8. Support for children doing homework.**

---

### **Introduction**

When children are provided with homework by their school, it can be as much of a challenge to the parents as it is to the children. Homework is now a regular feature for all secondary schools and an increasing feature of work in primary schools. What is clear is that supporting children to do homework is not a simple process and many parents would benefit from advice and support about this. This is intended to provide some basic ideas for parents. If as a parent reading this, you have a need for more advice then do get in touch with staff in your child's school. If your child is in primary school then it is best in the first instance to talk to the class teacher. If your child is in secondary school then you could approach the subject teacher who has set the homework if the problem is specific, or the form tutor or the Head of Year.

Before making specific plans to support your child doing homework, it is useful if you begin by thinking about your own style of preparation and organization. The style that parents have in dealing with their preparations for their work/special events, is likely to be the most powerful influence on how their children prepare for their schoolwork/school day. At the risk of labouring the point, if getting up for work for you means getting up late, dashing around the house feverishly looking for your car keys and wondering where your work diary is, or if you don't work, getting the children up for school is a hasty, disorganized and hectic process as you try to find the PE kit for the day only to find it's muddy and unwashed in a corner, then you really do need to consider the messages you are giving your child/children about preparation and organization. If you want them to be successful at school and you want to support them with their homework, then it might be that you need to change too. If you are sharing the parenting of your child/children with a partner, then you might want to think together about the messages that your children are receiving about the way in which different genders approach the need for preparation and organization with regard to work and special events.

### **The Aim of Homework**

Homework will play an increasing part in your child's education as he/she grows older. It helps if you are clear about the aims of homework in your child's education. If you can discuss these aims with your child/children, they are more likely to be able to approach homework set for them by the school in a positive manner. The aims of homework are:



- It can extend the work that the children have done at school.
- It provides a basis for teachers to check if a child has understood the work that has been done at school and can demonstrate this in work without the support of the teacher and classmates.
- It is a means of showing children that they can achieve work done independently.
- It offers an opportunity for children to work at their own pace and for some children to demonstrate a particular interest in a subject.
- It is useful for you as parents to be able to see the work that your child is doing in school and it can be a basis for offering individual attention and praise to your child for achievements in school.
- Supporting your child with his/her homework is providing you with an opportunity to be an active partner in your child's learning, and maybe to learn something yourself.

### **Tools of the Trade**

Just like any job that's worth doing, you need the right "tools of the trade" for doing homework. As any teacher knows a major starting point for getting any work done is the battle to ensure that everyone has the things that they need to do the task being set. Once your child is doing homework, then that battle will rage in your house too. It's useful if you can organize for there to be a box or drawer in your house which has the resources which are usually needed for doing homework.

These resources can include:

- pens
- pencils
- colouring pencils/felt tips
- pencil sharpener
- rubber
- ruler
- glue
- scissors
- a compass
- correction fluid
- possibly a calculator
- access to a personal computer

## Setting the scene for homework

If the school your child attends is setting homework, then you can be assured that there will be a system to this. In order to help you understand the homework system you could:

- Ensure that you and your child know what the homework system is. Most secondary schools have set homework timetables for children.
- Make sure you have your own copy of the school planner/homework diary and a spare copy for when your child loses his/hers.
- It might be useful if you have a notice board in your kitchen to keep a copy of the homework timetable on that.
- The older children are working on projects which require extended work over days/weeks, it can help to have a long-term planner on which to enter, when projects are set and when they are due to be handed in.
- Most important of all, is to set aside time each evening when you and your child talk about the work that has been set by the school.

If you have the space for flexibility, then you may need to talk as a family, about arranging a setting in which your children can do their homework. It is important that any setting which your child is going to regularly use to do their homework, has the possibility of a work atmosphere. The setting needs to have the following features:

- A work surface for the child
- A chair on which to sit
- The possibility of quiet
- Away from the distractions of the television
- Some children are helped by background music, this will vary with the task set.

If you have more than one child with homework then setting the scene becomes more complicated. You will need to consider:

- Whether your children work together or separately.
- Whether the children work at the same time or different times.

## Offering help

It will be helpful if you begin by discussing with your child, the times when they will do homework. If your child feels that he/she has been involved in making decisions about when homework is done, then it's more likely that it will be done. Ideas for timing include:

- Most important of all, negotiate the time when homework will be done in relationship to the child's preferred activities. For example it's no use insisting that homework is done as soon as your child comes home from school if he/she is tired and hungry and plainly needs a break. Nor are you likely to be popular or get the homework done, if you insist it is done at the time of their favourite television programme, or at the moment they choose to go out with a friend. It needs to be said, that it is no use just leaving it to your child to make the decision. One of the essential features of being a child, and one of the joys, is to live in the present and not to want to think and plan for tomorrow. So negotiate a time which suits your child and your family.
- It can be helpful to discuss with your child the order in which pieces of work are done, if there is more than one piece of homework to complete in a given evening/weekend. It is rarely successful to leave a difficult and taxing piece of work to be the last piece of work to be completed when the child has become tired and it's getting late. It is often best to do the most difficult and complex work first, then when the child is more tired, less demanding pieces which might include drawing or copying or mounting work can be fitted in.
- It is supportive to your child if you are clear about how long children are expected to spend on their homework, schools usually have guidelines about this. You can then keep an eye on how much time they are spending on work, with a view to making sure that they don't work too hard or for too long. If it is the case that they are spending far more than is expected of them on the piece of work, then you can make a parent's decision about when they are too tired and if need be slip a note into their homework book explaining why they have stopped at the point that they have.
- For older children with more pieces of work to do, some of which may have extended deadlines, you may have to help your child prioritise which pieces of work need to be done when.
- Many schools encourage children to have a "study buddy," this is another child with whom they can check out when they are not sure what to do. It's a great help if they have the telephone number of someone in their class/subject group who they can telephone when they are not sure.

You need to consider how you will use your presence to support you child when he/she is doing the homework. Your decision about this will be influenced by your child's abilities/confidence about a piece of work, your child's temperament, your

child's wishes, and maybe your own abilities/confidence in the subject. Options for how you will use your presence can include:

- Being with them as they start their work
- Sitting with them as they do the work
- Being there when the work is finished to help them check and acknowledge the efforts they've made.

When starting to do a piece of work it's helpful if you can encourage your child to think about the work before he/she starts. Things to think about are:

- What is the piece of work that has been set?
- Why has this piece of work been requested?
- What is the teacher asking for in setting this piece of work?

Just before the child begins a piece of work, you can help with prompts such as:

- Reminding your child about the need for a date, title and margin for the work, and the need to lay out work in a way which does justice to it.
- Discuss the way that they are going to order their ideas.
- Encourage your child to use scrap paper to plan work where appropriate.
- If you feel confident discuss the content of the work.

When the homework involves learning for a test, these basic ideas might be useful:

- There is no substitute for working on your own in the quiet, reading and re-reading work you need to learn. A lot depends on the work that needs to be learned, but it may be possible for your child to read the work speaking into a tape recorder, making a tape of what they have to learn. They can then replay this in their bedrooms and/or on a walkman as they walk to school or play their tape in the car as they travel.
- Having a summary sheet of key points can sometimes be a useful aid to learning.
- It's a great help if children have to learn things for school, if parents can make time to offer to test them on what they have learned.

## Follow-up

The extent that you are able to follow-up on work that your children have done for homework is a further way that you can support them in school. They will be more encouraged if you express a clear interest in how the work was marked. It is really important not just to focus on the marks, but to be asking questions about what the teacher's comments were about the work and any ideas that the child/teacher had about how the work could be improved. Always remember to praise your child for the efforts that they made, and never judge your child against classmates or brothers and sisters. The only way to make judgements about how well a child has done, is to compare with work done previously and encourage children to do their personal best.

### Points to remember

1. Do make sure that your child has time every evening and at points during the weekend for fun and relaxation, and when you as a parent can nurture them. You will not help your child be happy and achieve at school if they don't have time off on a regular basis.
2. It will be helpful to you and your child if you can establish a pattern of positive contacts with the staff in your child's school, rather than developing a pattern of contact with the school in a crisis. It will help you if you can:
  - know the structure of your child's school
    - for primary schools this usually includes:
      - the Headteacher
      - the Class Teacher
      - the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
    - for secondary schools this includes:
      - the Form Tutor
      - the names of Subject Teachers
      - the name of the Head of Year
      - the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
      - Head of Lower/Middle School/Sixth Form
3. Many schools offer a homework club and it would be useful to find out what this entails and whether it is suitable for your child and the work that he/she needs to do.
4. Check out what library facilities the school has, the times when the library is open, and the extent to which you and your child can draw on these resources should the need arise for homework.
5. Check out with the school if they have a facility for buying stationery and second-hand books/CD-ROM's which might be useful for your child.

6. Check out with the school, if there are times after school, when your child can use the computer\word processor facilities. Ask if there will be support to use these.

Just as it was suggested earlier that you encourage your child to have a "study buddy," it can be helpful for you to be part of a network of parents with whom you can discuss homework in general, particular pieces of work, and get support for yourself in the very difficult task of supporting children to do homework.

Above all remember that your job as a parent/carer is to support your child and that you will do this most effectively by providing them with good examples of preparation and organisation yourself, involving them in the way you support them, being positive in the way you support them, and remembering that you are their parent and not their teacher.

(Notes on homework prepared by Anne Peake and Rosemary Trace)

## **9. What do children say about how their parents could help them to settle in secondary school?**

---

The children who responded to the questionnaire had a lot to say about what they like most and find difficult with being in a secondary school. The children like the different lessons, the opportunities to make new friends, having more choice and independence at lunchtime, and the size of the school and its resources. They worry about homework, getting lost, being late for lessons, being organised and the work. There are ideas in what they say for the staff such as:

- All staff wearing name badges for the first half term.
- Visits to secondary school before children move are important to help children begin to be familiar with the building, pointing out landmarks and the layout of the site can help.
- The 'Moving On' colouring book has work about finding your way round using a plan for the school, make sure everyone has a plan of the school.
- It would help to have rooms clearly numbered and signs for subject areas.
- Have an identified group of students with badges who are there to give directions, information, and help.
- Ask new students each year how the school could improve the support given to them to help them to settle in.
- Be clear with parents what they can do to help their child to settle in school.



The children were asked what they thought you as parents/carers can do to help them. Perhaps you will find ideas you can use.

What could your parents/carers do that would help you settle in to secondary school?

- ❖ *Tell you how they did at their first day.*
- ❖ *Tell you to get organised for the next day and tell you that it isn't as hard as it seems.*
- ❖ *Remind me to get organised the night before.*
- ❖ *Get our stuff ready so we can put it in our bag.*
- ❖ *Getting me up in time for school.*
- ❖ *Make my lunch because I don't have time in the mornings.*
- ❖ *Give you a snack for break.*
- ❖ *Check your bag with you and discuss it with you.*
- ❖ *Before school ask if we are all equipped.*
- ❖ *Comfort me at the beginning.*
- ❖ *Encourage you not to be scared at your new school.*
- ❖ *Help us be a bit more organised for the first week.*
- ❖ *Cooperate with the school.*
- ❖ *Pay more attention to what's going on.*
- ❖ *Encourage me.*
- ❖ *Encourage me and listen to me.*
- ❖ *Make sure I was okay.*
- ❖ *Calm me down.*
- ❖ *Calm me down and give me a break.*
- ❖ *Make sure that they ask you how your day went.*
- ❖ *Read through homework with you make it easier to understand.*
- ❖ *Help with homework.*
- ❖ *By persuading us to work harder in school.*
- ❖ *Sign my planner on time and have a look at the work I've been doing in the day.*
- ❖ *They could write some comments in my diary.*
- ❖ *Make sure they sign anything that needs signing and return any forms.*
- ❖ *Talk things through like worries.*
- ❖ *They could give us advice.*
- ❖ *Organise clubs for you to go to, to make more friends.*
- ❖ *Make sure I have my own space.*
- ❖ *Be kind, caring, encouraging and loving.*
- ❖ *Looking and being proud of their child's achievements.*

## 10. Some final thoughts.

---

Secondary schools are big and busy places. There will be times when your child or you as parents/carers encounter difficulties with procedures or events that have happened. Don't worry about these on your own and particularly don't end up blaming your child or yourself or the school, without getting the information you need to have the full picture.

- ❖ Be clear what your child says has happened or is happening.
- ❖ Check out with the school what they think, a phone call to your child's form tutor can often clear up the facts.
- ❖ If you are still concerned, ask for a meeting to talk it out.
- ❖ Talk to other parents or use the school's support services.

Remember it is a move which brings many challenges for your child and you, and it is a key stage towards independence for your child. You can do so much to help.

**ANNE PEAKE**  
**Educational Psychologist**  
**Oxfordshire County Council**







100% recycled paper  
Printed with vegetable based inks

Printed by: Oxfordshire County Council's Design & Print Unit  
Tel: (01865) 815672 • Fax: (01865) 204309

E255-02 (06/04)