**BIDDENHAM INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL**

**& SPORTS COLLEGE**

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**GOING TO SECONDARY SCHOOL**

**TIPS FOR PARENTS/CARERS**

**TO HELP WITH THE TRANSITION FROM PRIMARY TO SECONDARY**

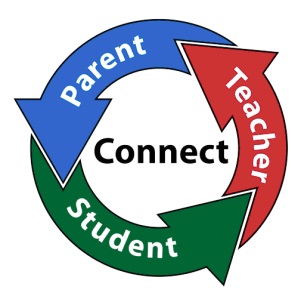
**Children’s top 10 worries about**

**starting secondary school**

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* Being bullied
* Not making friends
* Getting lost
* Homework
* Not being able to do the work
* Getting to school and back
* Not having the right books and equipment
* Not knowing what to do if there’s a problem
* Not getting on with the teachers
* Getting into trouble

**How can I help as a parent/carer?**

Moving from primary to secondary school is an exciting and significant event in the life of your child.

It is an important milestone which, for many parents/carers and teachers, marks a change in expectations regarding crucial life skills such as independent working and self-organisation.

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

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

The top two worries that year 6 children express (see the ‘Top 10’ worry list) are social concerns. Although common, most children report that they are no longer worried about these after just one or two weeks at school!

If your child expresses these worries, it is useful to tell them this, and to emphasise that everyone else will also be feeling anxious. As there will be many more children in year 7 than there were in year 6, everyone has a good choice of friends, and even children who move up with several children from their class tend to make new friends at secondary school. Talk to your child’s year 6 teacher if these worries become too great - they will be able to arrange for your child to meet some other students who will be starting (or who are already at the school) and perhaps arrange a ‘buddy’ for the first two or three weeks.

The remaining worries are nearly all to do with the new organisational demands that they know will be placed upon them. Luckily these are the areas in which we can help the most.

The aim of this booklet is to provide you with the information you need to help your child to achieve independence, while supporting them in getting there. Achieving the balance of doing too much or too little for your child is hard - a useful rule of thumb is:

***‘Never do anything regularly for your child that they are capable of doing for themselves.’***

This booklet clearly outlines exactly what your child needs to be able to do to succeed at secondary school (‘Key tasks for students’) and provides as many practical tips and ideas as we could cram in to help you to help them develop the skills for success (‘Tips for parents/carers’).

The suggestions in the booklet are practical, down to earth and have all been used by real parents/carers with busy lives. You do not need to be an ‘expert’ or devote your life to your child’s schooling to help your child to get it right.

Time spent early on establishing habits of work and independence is an investment that will save endless time, battles and heartache in the long run. The habits and routines that children develop in year 7 are those that will stay with them throughout their secondary schooling and often throughout their working lives. It’s worth the effort of getting it right to start with (so much easier than putting things right when they’ve gone wrong). If you can help your child to do this, you will really be making a difference.

**So what is different about**

**secondary school?**



* Children often have to travel further. Some will be making their way to and from school independently for the first time and many will be travelling by bus.
* They may have to wear a full school uniform for the first time, and they will have a whole list of new rules and regulations to remember.
* Instead of one teacher, who has often known them since their early years, they will be taught by nine or ten teachers and have to get to know a whole range of adults in different roles within the school.
* The site will be much bigger and children will have to find their way around, moving from classroom to classroom between lessons, often carrying their belongings with them.
* They will have to use and interpret a complex timetable (sometimes a two-weekly one) and often a school ‘planner’.
* For the first time children may be fully responsible for ensuring that they have the correct books and equipment for six or seven different lessons, their dinner money, bus fare, PE equipment, etc.
* Children will be given full responsibility for recording homework, completing it by the correct day and giving it in on time.
* There will be new lessons (such as modern foreign languages) and new variations on familiar ones (science in a laboratory for example).
* Teaching and learning styles may be very different. Children may be expected to write more frequently and for longer, and they may be expected to use the library independently.
* Break time and lunch time will be organised differently with less adult supervision and children will have a lot more independence in terms of getting back to lessons on time, buying their own snacks and lunches, etc.

In general, students are expected to be more independent, self-reliant and self-organised - a welcome development for many students but a challenge for most!

**Key Tasks for Students**

* Getting up on time.
  + Getting washed, dressed and ready to walk out of the door with everything you need.
  + Leaving the house to get to the bus stop or to school on time.
  + Being in the right place at the right time at the end of school.
  + Going straight home if they are not attending a club.
  + Knowing what to do if you are delayed for any reason.

**Tips for Parents/Carers**

**Before your child starts**

* Time the journey to school or bus stop.
* Be sure your child is clear about what time they are expected to be home and what to do if they are held up for any reason.
* Make sure they know/have your contact numbers.
* Buy an alarm clock and make sure your child knows how it works. Test it before the first day at school.
* Work out with your child what time they will need to get up to get to school on time. Work backwards from the time they need to be at school. Include all the things they will need to do. (Use the sample plan if this is helpful.)
* Agree a routine for the mornings and after school. Will they shower/bath in the morning or the evening? Will they get their school bag ready the night before or in the morning? Who will make the packed lunch? When?
* Agree a bedtime for school days with your child that will ensure they get enough sleep.
* Have a couple of practice runs - set your child the challenge of getting up at the correct time and getting ready.
* Does anything need changing?

**Tips for Parents/Carers**

**When they start**

* If possible, be around for your child for the first few days/ weeks and ‘supervise’. Praise and encourage independence but be ready to offer a helping hand.
* Keep to your side of the bargain - if you have arranged to leave dinner money on top of the fridge make sure it is there!
* Go through the routine regularly with your child if necessary provide a tick-list to help them (see sample page 34).
* Insist on the routine being kept to - it will save you hours in the long run!

**UNIFORM MATTERS**

**Key Tasks for Students**

* Knowing the school rules regarding uniform (including jewellery and make-up). This will be in the school planner and information booklet.
* Making sure everything is ready to put on the evening before (including shoes and underwear).
* Making sure a full PE kit is taken to school on the day it is needed. If your child struggles with organisation please alert the PE team and they will keep it for them.

**Tips for Parents/Carers**

**Before your child starts**

* Check the uniform requirements including rules regarding make-up and jewellery. Schools will normally send out a list of regulations regarding dress and where it can be obtained or have the information on the school website.
* Ring the school if you think you are/may be entitled to financial support for buying school uniform.
* Name everything, even shoes - you would not believe what children lose! A marker pen is as good as labels. Particularly when they get their chromebooks.
* Have spares of essentials at home if possible, it prevents panic when things get mislaid at 7.30am (and they will).
* If your child regularly loses or forgets essential items, give spares to the form tutor to keep at school.

**Tips for Parents/Carers**

**When they start**

* If your child is very disorganised check items one by one, or give a checklist at first. On the mirror is a great place for this.
* Encourage your child to put everything out (including shoes, socks or tights, and underwear!) the night before. There’s much more time in the evening for finding odd socks!
* Have a system for making sure that clothes are clean and ready - the earlier children start to take responsibility the better, but whoever does it, both parties need to know ‘the system’.
* If you have a timetable displayed for your child (a good idea) colour the days when your child has PE so they can see each day if they need to take their PE bag.

**THE NEW TIMETABLE:**

**BEING IN THE RIGHT PLACE**

**AT THE RIGHT TIME**

**Key Tasks for Students**

* Knowing what lessons take place on a particular day.
* Knowing where the classroom for each lesson is.
* Knowing who the teacher is.
* Understanding the timetable.
* Getting to lessons on time - especially after breaks.

**Tips for Parents/Carers**

**Before your child starts**

* Reassure your child that they will quickly get to know their way around (most have it mastered within a couple of weeks), and that they move around as a group to start with. Teachers are very understanding about children getting lost to begin with and usually help is at hand if it is needed.
* A plan of the school is given on transition day for your child if they are very worried and talk to them about getting from one place to another.
* Find a ‘sample timetable’ - these can look very complicated. Break it down and talk about ‘how it works’ if necessary (the room numbers/teacher initials etc). Talk about the timing of lessons and free time.
* Get a list of your child’s teachers as soon as you can. It helps to know who teaches what. This will be given out on the first day of school.

**Tips for Parents/Carers**

**When they start**

* Get a copy of your child’s timetable (it will usually be written in their planner in the first week). Keep this on display so that you and your child can refer to it.
* Encourage your child to learn what lessons they have on which days so that they can become independent.
* Make sure your child knows what to do if they are late or get lost.
* Get your child a watch. This is important as we do not have a school bell.



**ORGANISING BOOKS**

**AND**

**EQUIPMENT**

**Key Tasks for Students**

* Having a good system for keeping books and equipment.
* Knowing what lessons there are on a particular day.
* Knowing what equipment is needed for each lesson (e.g. ruler, compass, calculator for Maths).
* Using the planner to write down important notes and messages to refer to as a reminder. Homework Google Calendar is good for this too.
* Having a school bag packed with everything that is needed for that day.

**Tips for Parents/Carers**

**Before your child starts**

* Help your child organise their living space so that they have a place for everything to do with school. Try to make sure they have access to a desk, good light and storage space for their school books.
* Equip them with the tools they will need at home. It’s best to keep two sets of everything - one for school and one for home, so that losing a pen at school does not stop them doing their homework.
* A useful home ‘tool kit’ consists of:

Pencils, pens, rubber, sharpener, crayons, felt pens, whitener, ruler, maths equipment (protractor, compass, set-square and calculator), sellotape, glue stick, paper (lined and plain), spare files, plastic wallets, spare memory stick.

* Get a list of your child’s teachers as soon as you can. It helps to know who teaches what. This will be given out on the first day of school.
* A box file or stacking system is useful for students with organisational problems - each file can be labelled with the subject and all books, worksheets, etc can be kept ready to pull out and put in the school bag when required.
* A labelled A4 plastic or card folder to take to school for each subject is useful - students are given lots of worksheets which they are not used to organising. Folders can hold all work sheets, books etc.
* An office two-tier ‘in-tray’ is useful for ‘homework to be done’ and ‘homework completed’.
* An additional A4 plastic or card folder for finished homework is useful for children with poor memories - they can check it each lesson to see if there is homework to be given in.

**Tips for Parents/Carers**

**When they start**

* Check Google calendar for assignment deadlines.
* Teach a routine for ‘emptying the bag’. The subjects for which homework is required are placed in the ‘homework to be done’ in-tray. Do this with your child to begin with if necessary, then gradually let them take over. Even when your child has ‘got it’ do spot checks every so often.
* Encourage your child to glue any worksheet/odd bits of paper into their workbook if possible each night -otherwise the sheer volume of ‘bits of paper’ becomes impossible.
* Encourage your child to check their planner for any reminders/notes each night. It’s usually worth double checking to begin with as well as Google calendar.
* If you know your child has food technology (‘cooking’ to you and me) on a certain day, check at the beginning of the week whether they need ingredients - searching through cupboards on the morning ten minutes before the bus leaves is not to be recommended! Ingredients can be accessed via Google Classroom and if support is needed you must contact the Food Technology teacher [margaret.ward@mybiddenham.com](mailto:margaret.ward@mybiddenham.com) as soon as possible.

**HOMEWORK**

**Key Tasks for Students**

* Writing down your ‘homework timetable’ - what homework you get and on which days.
* Understanding how your planner works - make sure you use the correct week to record your homework.
* Writing down your homework in lessons (write exactly what you have to do). If none is set, write this down with the reason why, e.g. supply teacher.
* Recording the date on which it is due to be handed in.
* Asking for more details if you are not sure what the task means, and checking with the teacher if you are not sure what books you will need etc.
* Making sure you bring home everything you need to do the homework.
* When you get home, use your planner to remind you of what you have to do.
* Working on your own to complete tasks and spending the correct amount of time on each. Doing your best without someone standing over you.
* Asking for help if it is difficult, or you don’t understand something. Homework club runs every evening until 4.00 pm in R9 or in the Year 7 block.
* Ticking the ‘done’ column in your planner when something is completed.
* Taking your completed homework to school on the correct day.
* Remembering to give it in!
* Try to do homework on the night it is set - not the night before it is due in (you may get three other sets of homework on that night!).

**Tips for Parents/Carers**

**Before your child starts**

* Agree a routine for homework with your child. Life can become a constant ‘nag’ if you don’t start this from the beginning. Homework becomes an increasingly important part of the curriculum as your child goes through school - what he or she starts off doing is what they will do until they leave.
* It is a good idea to agree with your child from the beginning that TV, other activities, phone calls, etc will only be possible after homework is done.
* Many children will say that listening to music helps them concentrate and do their work. If your attention is on your favourite song, it can’t also be on your homework (and more so for television!) Agree whether this is allowed and stick to the agreement.
* Be prepared to invest time at first - for example be available for a set time each day to help with homework until the routine is established - it will be time well spent.
* Using the ideas in ‘organising books and equipment’ will help enormously - make sure you child has a comfortable place to work (with as few distractions as possible); set up a double ‘in-tray’ and label it ‘homework to be done’ and homework completed’. Provide a ‘finished homework’ folder for your child to take to school.
* Speak to the school about how long children are expected to spend on homework each night. Check also what to do if you child is having difficulty.

**Tips for Parents/Carers**

**When they start**

* Stick to your agreed routine whenever possible.
* Try to ensure that homework is done on the nigh it is set to prevent ‘build-up’.
* Spend time with your child in the first few weeks, establishing a routine.
* Encourage your child to unpack their bag in an organised way, placing homework to be done in their tray. Check the planner with your child for what homework needs to be done and when it is to be done by. Check they have everything they need to complete the task. Ask them to tell you what they will need to encourage independence.
* Recognise how hard it is to work unsupervised. Help your child structure their time and use it well - provide a clock or timer and agree the tasks that should be done in each, for example, half hour period. Try to be available to do ‘progress checks’ - have they completed the task in the set time? Otherwise leave them to it - don’t establish a pattern of always doing homework with them - it is unsustainable and they will not learn to work independently.
* Make sure your child always writes the date and title, and clearly labels it as homework (whether in their book, on a worksheet or when printed out).
* Point out the rewards of working in this way - homework doesn’t drag on all night, and it feels good to have completed tasks etc.
* If children are stuck - either because they do not understand the task they have written down, or because they cannot do it, offer support but do not do it for them.
* Encourage your child to check during the lesson if they haven’t understood what the task means - it is too late by the time they get home.
* Encourage them to write down exactly what the teacher says (not ‘finish stuff in book’ - they will have forgotten what ‘stuff’ means by the time they get home). If you and your child really cannot work out what has to be done, trying ringing a friend in the same group, or as a last resort, write a note to, or email the teacher asking for clarification and explaining that the homework will be done as soon as possible.
* If there is a problem with the level of work, it is important that the teacher knows this. If work is consistently too difficult or too easy, it is important to let the teacher know (see ‘contacting the school’).
* Check that your child has given homework in and, if they have not, check why (they may, for instance, have had a supply teacher) and encourage them to write in their planner when they will give it in.
* Take an interest in the marks and comments on the homework your child gets back - celebrate success and give the clear message that homework is valuable and important.
* Homework may not be automatically valued by the children in school. Many will never do it and appear to ‘get away with it’. Be very wary of excuses your child will use (see the list overleaf). They will accumulate many new ideas for excuses from their peers over the first few weeks and only some will be genuine!
* If an excuse is given, check it out with the school and ensure that your child still does the homework as soon as the problem is sorted out. If you do this the first few times, the ‘excuses’ will lessen but if they are successful in getting out of homework in this way to start with, they will carry on and it becomes very hard to re-establish good patterns later on when homework becomes crucial to examination grades.
* If your child is consistently not getting homework when they should (according to the homework timetable), do contact the school (see ‘contacting the school’ page 30).

**Excuses for not being able to do homework**

*“We didn’t get any”.*

*“I don’t need to do that, we did it in class”.*

*“We had a supply teacher”.*

*“It doesn’t have to be in for ages”.*

*“I left it at school”.*

*“My teacher’s got my book - they took it in”.*

*”My friend’s borrowing my book”.*

*“I did it on the computer and the computer wouldn’t print it out/and I forgot to save it/can’t remember what file I saved it in…".*

*“I’m going to do it with my friend on the bus/at break”.*

*“I need to do it in the library - I’ll do it lunchtime tomorrow”.*

*“I’ve lost my planner”.*

**THE ORGANISATION OF**

**SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

In a primary school, the roles and titles of staff are usually quite straightforward - you have a headteacher, a deputy head, several class teachers, some learning support assistants, a few ‘school meal supervisory assistants’ a receptionist or secretary and a caretaker. There is usually a lot of informal contact and you are likely to know exactly who to talk to when you need to and to have a close relationship with your child’s class teacher.

In comparison, the structure of a large secondary school and the many adults involved (some with rather mystifying titles such as headteacher, form teacher or head of department) can seem impossibly complex.

Although schools vary, there will be a headteacher, usually two or more deputies, and possibly a number of assistant heads, each with one or more areas of responsibility. All staff have responsibility for an academic area (such as English or Music) and most have, in addition, responsibilities for students’ wellbeing (their ‘pastoral’ role). The school will be divided into departments or ‘faculties’ such as Maths, Science or Humanities.

On the pastoral (welfare) side, you child will be placed in a ‘tutor group’ of other year 7 students, and the tutor has responsibility for your child’s overall wellbeing. They will generally know your child best. Students will usually register in their tutor group and learn with them in many classes (although for some subjects children may be placed in ‘sets’ according to their ability from the beginning).

There will also usually be a ‘Head of Year’ or ‘Progress Manager’, who has the responsibility for all of the tutor groups in that year. Sometimes the tutor stays with them until year 9 and the head of year stays with them until year 11.

Generally, the staff you will have most contact with will be your child’s tutor and head of year.

The other person that you may need to make contact with, if your child has special educational needs of any sort, will be the school’s ‘special needs co-ordinator’ (often abbreviated to ‘SENCO’). If you have concerns about your child’s learning, behaviour or emotional difficulties in school, this is the person to ask to talk to.

Many schools provide information through their prospectus, website, emails, texts and through open evenings but, if you feel confused, don’t be afraid to ask - teachers will welcome your interest.

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**Contacting the School - when and who?**

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

The job is made much easier if you keep talking to your child about how things are at school. You will have a good idea about how the work is going and your child’s general feelings about school if you are following some of the suggestions in this book, and this will give you a sound basis for deciding whether your intervention is required or not.

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

**Problems your child may experience and**

**what to do about them**

**Falling out with friends**

This is very common as children form new friendships and new ‘pecking orders’ are established. Give advice but don’t overreact - the tears and anger are normal and most friendship patterns sort themselves out without adults getting involved. Contact the school if your child becomes depressed or severely withdrawn over this for more than a couple of weeks, or if you suspect that what is happening may be bullying.

The hallmarks of bullying are intentionality (a deliberate attempt to make someone unhappy), persistence (i.e. an ongoing ‘campaign’, not isolated incidents or arguments about specific issues), and an imbalance of power (if the perpetrators are older, bigger, more powerful or if they are operating as a gang against an individual.

By law, the school must have an anti-bullying policy.

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

Try to find out what it is exactly that your child is worried about or why they dislike a certain teacher or subject. If it is because the work is too hard (or too easy), try to spend some time working with them on the subject. It does take time for new teachers to find out an individual’s strengths and weaknesses. Contact the school if your child continues to find the work too easy or too hard after half a term or so, or raise the issue at Parents’ Evening.

If it is because they feel ‘picked on’ it may be the teacher’s individual style which your child is taking personally. It is a life skill to learn that you wont’ get on with everyone you have to work with and a pragmatic approach is to be recommended. Advise them to smile a lot at this teacher and see if it makes a difference! Make sure homework is done well for this subject. Do try not to run down the teacher in front of your child - this invariably makes the problem worse.

Contact your child’s tutor if the problem continues. Ask to meet with the teacher concerned if necessary and talk to them about the problem. Many teachers are not even aware there is a problem. You do not have to let your child know you have done this - they are often amazed by how ‘nice’ the teacher has suddenly become…

**Losing belongings**

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

**Getting into trouble for not completing homework**

In many ways, homework makes the most demands on both year 7 students and their parents/carers. Follow the suggestions in the ‘homework’ chapter.

If your child is consistently not getting homework (over a period of five or six weeks), not able to do the homework set, or writing down tasks that are so general that neither you nor they can work out what has to be done, contact your child’s tutor and explain the problem. If nothing changes, ask for a meeting with the teacher concerned.

**SAMPLE DAY PLANNER**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Task** | **Mon** | **Tues** | **Wed** | **Thurs** | **Fri** |
| **Before School** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Breakfast |  |  |  |  |  |
| Bathroom |  |  |  |  |  |
| Dressing |  |  |  |  |  |
| Lunch (money/card) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Check timetable |  |  |  |  |  |
| Leave home(6.55am) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Catch bus (7.05am) |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **After School** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Change, hang up  school uniform |  |  |  |  |  |
| Snack/drink (15 mins) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Empty school bag |  |  |  |  |  |
| Check planner for  Homework/notes |  |  |  |  |  |
| Give parent/carer notes/messages |  |  |  |  |  |
| Do homework  1.  2.  3. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Show parent/carer |  |  |  |  |  |
| Other |  |  |  |  |  |

**SCHOOL DAY TIMINGS**

**Year 7 & 8**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Start** | **Finish** |
| Period 1 | 8.00 am | 9.10 am |
| Break | 9.10 am | 9.30 am |
| Skills | 9.30 am | 10.00 am |
| Transition | 10.00 am | 10.05 am |
| Period 2 | 10.05 am | 11.15 am |
| Break | 11.15 am | 11.25 am |
| Period 3 | 11.25 am | 12.25 pm |
| Lunch | 12.25 pm | 1.20 pm |
| Period 4 | 1.20 pm | 2.30 pm |
| Memo  Pencil Case  PE Kit | | |