



ST. DAMIAN'S R.C SCIENCE COLLEGE

Going to Secondary School Top Tips for Parents

1 CHILDREN'S TOP 10 WORRIES ABOUT STARTING SECONDARY SCHOOL

- ❖ Being bullied
- ❖ Not making friends
- ❖ Getting lost
- ❖ Homework
- ❖ Not being able to do the work
- ❖ Getting to school and back (especially if it involves a bus journey)
- ❖ Not having the right books and equipment
- ❖ Not knowing what to do if there's a problem
- ❖ Not getting on with the teachers
- ❖ Getting in to trouble

2 HOW CAN I HELP AS A PARENT?

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 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 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 Y6 children express are social concerns and 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 Y7 than there was in Y6, 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.

The remaining worries are nearly all to do with the new organisational demands that they know will be placed upon them.

The aim of this booklet is to provide you with the information you need to help your child to achieve independence, whilst supporting them in getting there.

To achieve 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 outlines exactly what your child needs to be able to do to succeed at secondary school and provides as many practical tips and ideas as we could cram in to help you to help them develop the skills for success.

Time spent early on in 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.**

3 SO WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT SECONDARY SCHOOL?

- ❖ Children often have to travel further (some making their way to and from school independently for the first time – some travelling by bus).
- ❖ They may have to wear a full school uniform for the first time, and 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 school 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 which is a two-weekly one and a school planner/journal.
- ❖ 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 (e.g. French) 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 select appropriate reference books from the library.
- ❖ Break-time and lunchtime will be organised differently with less adult supervision and children having a lot more independence in terms of getting back to lessons on time, buying their own snacks and lunches etc.

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

4 GETTING THERE AND BACK

KEY TASKS FOR PUPILS

- ❖ Getting up on time
- ❖ Getting dressed, washed 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.
- ❖ Knowing what to do if you are delayed for any reason.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- ❖ 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 run 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.
- ❖ Agree a routine for the mornings and after school. Will they shower/bath in the morning or in the evening? Will they get their school bag ready at night or in the morning? Who will make the pack 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?

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.
- ❖ Insist on the routing being kept to – it will save you hours in the long run.

5 UNIFORM MATTERS

KEY TASKS FOR PUPILS

- ❖ Knowing the school rules regarding uniform (including jewellery and make-up).
- ❖ 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 days it is needed.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- ❖ Check the uniform requirements including rules regarding make-up and jewellery.
- ❖ Ring the school if you may be entitled to financial support for buying school uniforms.
- ❖ Name everything, even shoes – you would not believe what children lose! A marker pen is as good as labels.
- ❖ Have spares of essentials at home if possible, it prevents panic when things get mislaid at 8.30am (and they do).

WHEN THEY START

- ❖ Encourage your child to hang up their uniform straight away after school.
- ❖ Decide on responsibilities – who irons the shirts, when/who puts them away? Etc.
- ❖ If your child is very disorganised check items one by one, or give a checklist at first.
- ❖ Encourage your child to put everything out (including shoes, socks or tights and underwear) the night before.
- ❖ 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 colour the days when your child has PE so they can see each day if they need to take their PE bag.

6 THE NEW TIMETABLE. BEING IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME.

KEY TASKS FOR PUPILS

- ❖ 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

- ❖ Get a copy of your child's timetable. 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 a list of your child's teachers as soon as you can. It helps to know who teaches what.
- ❖ Make sure your child knows what to do if they are late or lost.
- ❖ Get your child a watch.

7 ORGANISING BOOKS AND EQUIPMENT

KEY TASKS FOR PUPILS

- ❖ 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 Math's).
- ❖ Using the planner (to write down important notes and messages to refer to as a reminder).
- ❖ Having a bag packed with everything needed for that day.

TIPS FOR PARENTS 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, ruler, Math's equipment (protractor, compass, and calculator), sellotape, glue stick, paper (lined and plain) and plastic wallets.
- ❖ An office two-tier 'in-tray' is useful for 'homework to be done' and 'homework completed'.

TIPS FOR PARENTS WHEN YOUR CHILD STARTS

- ❖ Teach a routine for 'emptying the bag'. 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 in to their workbook if possible each night – otherwise the sheer volume of 'bits of paper' becomes impossible.
- ❖ When homework is completed supervise the 'packing of the bag'. This is best done the night before.
- ❖ The displayed timetable can be used as a checklist for books and equipment. Write the equipment needed at the top of each day.
- ❖ Encourage your child to check their planner for any reminders/notes each night. It's usually worth double checking.
- ❖ If you know your child has food technology on a certain day, check at the beginning of the week if they need ingredients – searching through cupboards on the morning ten minutes before the bus leaves is not to be recommended.

8 HOMEWORK

KEY TASKS FOR PUPILS

- ❖ Writing down your homework timetable – what homework you get 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 when it has been done.
- ❖ Asking 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, using your planner to remind you of what you have to do.
- ❖ Working by yourself to complete tasks, spending the correct amount of time. Doing your best without someone standing over you!
- ❖ Asking for help if it is difficult, or you don't understand something.
- ❖ Ticking the 'done' column in your planner when completed.
- ❖ Taking your completed homework to school on the correct day.
- ❖ Remembering to hand it in!

***Try to do homework on the night it is set –
not the night before it is due in.***

**TIPS FOR PARENTS
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!
- ❖ A good time for homework is after a short break when your child returns from school, get it out of the way early, leaving the rest of the evening free – who wants to start work at 7pm?
- ❖ Agree with your child 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. Agree whether this is allowed.
- ❖ 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.

**TIPS FOR PARENTS
WHEN YOUR CHILD STARTS**

- ❖ Stick to your agreed routine whenever possible.
- ❖ Try to ensure that homework is done on the night it is set to prevent 'build up'.
- ❖ Spend time with your child in the first few weeks, establishing the routine.
- ❖ Encourage your child to unpack their bag in an organised way. Check the planner with your child for what homework needs to be done, and when it is to be done for. Check they have everything they need to complete the tasks (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 usefully. Try to be available to do 'progress checks' – have they completed the task in the set time? (but otherwise leave them

to it – don't establish a pattern of always doing homework with them – it's unsustainable and they won't learn to work independently.)

- ❖ Make sure your child always writes the date and title, and clearly labels it as homework.
- ❖ Point out the rewards of working in this way – homework doesn't drag on all night; it feels good to have completed tasks etc.
- ❖ Don't let children struggle on for longer than the recommended time – if they have done half an hour and only answered half the questions, let them stop. (If they are worried about the consequences, write a note on the homework, confirming that the correct amount of time was spent on the task).
- ❖ If children are stuck – either because they don't understand the task they have written down, or because they 'can't do it', offer support but don't 'do it for them'.
- ❖ Encourage your child to check in the lesson if they haven't understood what the task means – it's too late by the time they get home.
- ❖ Encourage them to write down exactly what the teacher says (not 'finish stuff in book' – they'll have forgotten what 'stuff' by the time they get home). If you and your child really cannot work out what has to be done, try ringing a friend in the same group, or, as a last resort, write a note to 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 teachers know.
- ❖ 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 all the children in the school. Many will not do it and appear to 'get away with it'. Be very wary of excuses your child may use and try to ensure that if an excuse is given, you check it out and that your child still does the homework as soon as the problem is sorted. If you do this the first few times, the 'excuses' will lesson 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.

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 them 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 at lunchtime tomorrow.
- ❖ I've lost my planner.

9 CONTACTING THE SCHOOL – WHEN AND WHO?

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 booklet, this will give you a sound basis for deciding whether any 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.

10 PROBLEMS CHILDREN 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 but 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 intentionally (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).

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 it at parent's 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 won't 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!

Contact your child's form 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 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' Mr. X 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 form 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 pupils and their parents. 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, do contact your child's form tutor and explain the problem. If nothing changes, ask for a meeting with the teacher concerned.

11 A GUIDE TO PARENTS' EVENINGS

Because of the larger numbers of pupils, and the fact that your child now has several teachers, parents' evenings are organised rather differently in secondary schools.

You will be given the date of the Year 7 parents' evening well in advance.

A few days before the evening, your son or daughter will bring home a letter to invite you to parent's evening. Please confirm if you are able to attend. If you don't receive the letter (and some children have been known to hang on to important letters in the murky depths of their school bag for up to a year!), do check with the school if you should have had it.

Most appointments are for 5-10 minutes, and you will need to allow some time for finding and moving between teachers. Try to see as many teachers as possible, especially if there are issues you need to raise with them. It is always a good idea to see your child's form tutor and perhaps Head or Year as they will have the best 'overview' of how your child is settling in generally. Jot down any questions or concerns before the meeting.

Your appointments with the teacher will provide an opportunity for them to tell you how they feel your child is getting on in very general terms, and for you to ask any questions or raise any concerns you have. If you or they have major concerns, the teacher will probably suggest a further, longer meeting at another time.

On the day itself, teachers are usually sitting at tables with their names displayed in the school hall or somewhere similar. There will usually be someone in the reception area available to guide you to this place, and talk to you about the arrangements for the evening.

On the night, appointments are rarely running exactly to time, so be prepared for some waiting around. If you don't get to see who you were hoping to, you can always make an alternative appointment.

It's a good idea to take your child with you – one to hear what their teachers have to say, but also to guide you and find the teachers you have arranged to meet!

Finally, don't feel daunted – all new parents will feel exactly the same.