



Step up to Secondary School

The move to secondary school brings new opportunities but can also feel a bit daunting for parents and children. It is a big change, but there is plenty we can do to help it work out well.

Which secondary school?

Choosing the right school is the first step to a successful transition from primary to secondary. As parents, we don't always get a free choice but we do have a say. Read the Slough SENDAS factsheet "Checklist for school visit" for ideas about questions to ask and things to look for when you visit schools. But here are some top tips from other parents about what to do now:

Start early. Check deadlines. It can all seem a rush in the autumn of Year 6.

Visit all the possible schools in case the one you wouldn't have considered turns out to offer the best for your child. Think about going by yourself to the open days/evenings in Year 5 and again with your child in Year 6 when everyone else goes.

Go in and speak to the staff who would be involved with your child, if possible before the general open day/evening. That way you have a head start on everyone else. Speak to other parents. Speak to your existing school about your thoughts and concerns.

Make a list of questions and ask, even things that seem a bit trivial.

Make an appointment to meet the Senco of the school you think is your first choice and ask in detail about the support there will be for your child. Keep notes from any meetings.

Re-visit if you feel you need to, maybe more than once. Go during the school day too. Assess the attitude of staff to you and your child.

Trust your instincts about what will work for your child.

Get your child's views too. Tell them what you are doing and why. If you can go with their choice do - it will help them look at the transfer positively.

Gather evidence to support your school choice, like medical reports.
The admissions process

If your child has a EHC Plan / EHC plan you should look at their secondary options at the Year 5 annual review. This is the time to decide on the type of school they need. If you think they might need a place in a unit or a special school talk to your Senco and your local authority casework officer. You can call the SENDAS to talk it over too.



But most children will move on to a local mainstream secondary school. Either way you should be sent a proposed amended EHC Plan early in Year 6 and be able to name the school you prefer. You will also have to fill in the general schools admissions form, but your child is effectively guaranteed a place at the school named on their EHC Plan/ EHC plan .

If you want a local mainstream school you should get this, although there may be negotiations if your child needs a complex support package. Don't assume you will get transport if it is not your nearest school. The local authority has to send you the final amended EHC Plan by 15th February of Year 6.

This leaves time to arrange a good transfer or to appeal if you are unhappy with the school named.

If your child is on SEN Support you will be using the general secondary admissions process which starts in September of Year 6.

The Admissions Team produces a booklet each year that explains things and it is important to read it carefully. If you need help the Family Information Service (FIS) has an adviser who can help.

All secondary schools hold open days or evenings in September/October. Once you know your preferred schools, send the preference form back in time. The deadline is usually around the end of October. If there are strong medical or other reasons why your child should go to a particular school, you will need to send evidence with your preference form to prove it. You find out what school your child has been given on a fixed date, usually the beginning of March. If you are unhappy, there is an appeal process. You can talk to SENDAS for advice.

Think positive and be prepared

Be as positive as you can about your child's move to secondary school. If we are anxious it will rub off on them. Our fears can turn out to be myths and misunderstandings. People say things to us like "I can't see him coping in a big school..." but nearly all children cope and most flourish. Things may actually be better at secondary than primary for some children. Big schools bring new opportunities. More teachers and more subjects mean more chances to find someone or something you like. There will be more possible friends, more activities and clubs.

Your child may enjoy feeling more grown up and independent. And all local schools have experience of supporting a range of children with special needs. They may not always get it right but most things are fixable. Here are some ideas from other parents about being prepared:

Check what the usual arrangements are for moving on. Typically a teacher from the secondary school visits the primary to meet and find out about the children, some paperwork is sent on and the children make a visit or two. Will this be enough for your child? You could ask for extra visits for example.



Arrange to meet the special needs team. Write down what they should know about your child (strengths, interests, medical information, other professionals involved, what's worked for them in the past). Take a list of questions and check the arrangements for your child's support.

Find out more about the school. How does the timetable work? Learn the layout. Get names of the teachers. Find out the dinner menu. What clubs and activities do they normally run? Does anyone you know already have a child at the school? If so ask them for more information.

Make a list with your child of the things they are looking forward to about the new school.

Make sure some things in your child's life stay the same, like an activity or group they already enjoy and keeping in touch with old friends.

What do children worry about?

If you ask children what they worry about when they move to secondary school the same things usually come up. Find subtle ways of checking what (if anything) your child is worried about and try to deal with it beforehand. These are some typical worries that they may have:

There'll be lots of new people and will I make friends? Let your child know that everyone will feel like this. Try to meet up over the summer with at least one other child going to their school. Help them choose a club or activity they could join at the new school and make sure they do this. It is a good way to find children they have something in common with.

Will I get lost? Remind them that they will usually be going with a group and can follow others till they learn the way. If you know they will find it hard, arrange an extra walk around the school with them before the end of the summer term.

Pick out key landmarks. You could take some photos together - get permission first. Make sure they know where to go if they need help – often there will be a student services office where staff can point them in the right direction.

Will I be able to keep up with the work? Talk about how they have managed before. Point out that they will have new subjects but that doesn't mean the work will be any harder than in Year 6. Encourage them to ask for help appropriately.

Make sure they know who can help.

Will there be lots of homework? Plan where and when they will do their homework. A clear space and the right equipment will help. They will probably be given a homework diary so explain how it will work. You could plan to find someone else in their group they can ring to ask if they haven't managed to get it all written down.



Will I get bullied? Most children don't of course, but talk about what to do if it does happen. A local group called Aik Saath run courses to help children be assertive and avoid bullying.

Things you can do before term starts

There's lots you can do over the summer to make it easier for your child. Here are more suggestions from other parents:

Buy the uniform early. Get your child to try it on. Check for things that need practice like buttons or a tie. If your child has sensory issues they may be more comfortable if you wash it and sort out scratchy labels. Get their school shoes in time to wear them and get them comfortable.

Make sure they have all the gear they will need - a big enough bag, all the right PE kit , stationery and other equipment. Involve your child in this so they feel things are ready.

Casually mention things like how the day will be different at the new school. Give your child opportunities to talk or ask questions but don't force it. For some children it will help to look at pictures or rehearse how things will work. Maybe look at the school website together. Use the strategies that have helped in the past like visual timetables or social stories.

Practice the journey to school as often as you need to, including getting them to do it alone with you shadowing at a distance if they will be travelling independently. Make sure you and they know the system for school dinners and any other practicalities, like when they can use the loo.

Get into the right routine in plenty of time so they won't be overtired during their first week.

A transitional object - something they can carry around at school that is a link with home, helps some children. It's like taking a teddy when you sleep away from home, but needs to be something discreet that they can tuck in a pocket or bag.

Choose it together beforehand and talk about how they can use it.

The first few days

It is the start of term. How can you help now?

Be ready for your child to be tired, grumpy or emotional. They are coping with lots of new things and new people, so keep home safe and predictable. Make their favourite tea. Allow some childish or clingy behaviour.

Get a copy of their timetable before they lose it. Use it to work out with them what they need each day. Stick up a list in the kitchen or on the back of the front door. Help them get things ready the night before.

Help them get into a good homework routine from the start.



Time to unwind, sensible bed times and good food all help too. And for some children a chance to let off steam with physical activity.

Plan something nice with them, to do on the first weekend after they start.

Keep an eye on how they seem to be coping. Be available to talk. Ask interested questions but don't turn it into an interrogation. Listen at a time and place that suits them. If they do express anxieties try to help them problem solve, rather than jumping in with answers. They will know they are at big school now and may want a chance to sort things out without your help.

Further information:

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What about you?

Remember to look after yourself so you can support your child. It will help your peace of mind to be clear about factual information, your child's rights and so on. Get the contact arrangements with the new school clear as it will not be so easy to pop in as at primary school.

Email is often a good way to communicate with secondary school staff if you can use this.

Look for good sources of advice and support e.g. from parent groups, national websites for your child's disability and SENDASS.

And make sure you have someone you can talk to about your concerns. We all have worries and if we don't want them to rub off on our children it helps to talk them over with someone else.

School Admissions Team

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