

Moving on to secondary school – a survival guide for parents –

**“We act as though comfort and luxury
were the chief requirements of life,
when all we need to make us really happy
is something to be enthusiastic about.”**

Charles Kingsley, 1819 – 1875

For many parents of Year 6 pupils across the country this Summer term at school is likely to be one of the most challenging and potentially stressful times they have experienced.

After the stresses and worries of Key Stage 2 SATs testing, there is a period of relative calm in schools from an academic perspective, but this is more than outweighed by the demands of sports days, end of term concerts, parent consultation evenings and other social events. It is a difficult and demanding term for teachers, but particularly it is a demanding time for parents.

Here are a few pointers for surviving the Summer months and arriving at September with a happy child and a peaceful home.

Plan ahead.

Wherever possible, plan ahead and allow yourself time to complete all the necessary tasks over several months. Create a diary plan for your priorities through June, July, August and September and create a check-list of everything that you know needs to be done.

Ask your family or friends for advice

Call upon the help of any family friends or neighbours or relatives who have had children recently move on to secondary school. What advice or suggestions could they give? What advice have you been given by your child's school that you haven't yet acted upon?

File things and be organized

Read carefully all the important information about your chosen school and keep it safe so that you know where it is instantly and can refer to it whenever you need it, without wasting time searching through the house. If a check-list is provided, keep that to the front of your folder or some other prominent place so it becomes an instant reminder.

Shop ahead and give yourself time

Give yourself at least three shopping days over the Summer months that are purely school focused. You will be quite amazed at the number of items needed, quite apart from the basics of uniform, footwear, school equipment, sports clothing and stationery.

Don't expect too much of yourself, of your patience, energy and your time. Be realistic about what you can achieve at any one time, particularly if you have the needs of other children to consider.

Encourage your child's independence

Allow your child some control over minor decision-making with options so that, even when you may disagree, you aim to reach a win-win situation. You may have a choice of towns to shop for school essentials. You may have a choice of shopping mid-week or early at the weekend. Open your mind to the possibilities that both sets of needs can be met, at least some of the time.

Be sensitive

Consider your child's fluctuating emotional state over the Summer months, and accept mood swings as the order of the day. At times your child will be feeling elated, full of enthusiasm for what lies ahead, whilst at other times your child may show signs of anxiety, or sadness and nostalgia for everything that has gone before.

Don't make assumptions

Don't try to always know best, or make assumptions about what your child is feeling, but allow your child to come up with their own answers to why they are feeling a certain way. Not all of it will relate to the new school or to leaving their present school.

Be positive and be enthusiastic

Look ahead eagerly to all the exciting changes ahead and see them as challenges to be faced and as wonderful opportunities. Try to incorporate positive words in your conversation so that your child begins to catch your enthusiasm and is helped to see things in a different way, at a subconscious level.

See yourself as a successful parent

Consider all the skills and qualities you have fostered in your child and see your child's growing self confidence and independence as a sign of your success as a parent. When you argue, remind yourself that your child is developing skills in thinking and acting independently, in asserting their will and their ideas about how their life is going – they may not always express these ideas appropriately, but it is a learning process.

Anticipate the future will be exciting

Find time to look ahead with your child to all the activities the new school will offer, all the opportunities being at secondary school will create, and view them positively and with enthusiasm. If you haven't already read the details about clubs on offer, options that can be taken, forthcoming trips and events, check them out and list those that sound appealing. Knowledge of a day trip in October can be a good antidote to a bad day.

See difficulties as challenges

Consider all potential difficulties as challenges that you know your child can overcome – the loss of old friends who may not be going to the same school can be viewed against all the friends who are yet unknown; the worries about transport and early mornings can be viewed against the excitement of that first day. Every problem or worry can have a different side to it – look for the good side.

Do a dress rehearsal

If time and energy permits, do a dress rehearsal for the first day during the week before. Encourage your child to have an early night and lay out their uniform just as they might for the first day – and then time how long the morning takes to get ready. Take a photo or have some small reward ready to make it all worthwhile...

Have your camera ready

Take a picture of your child on their first day of the Autumn term – and if you remember, when they come home again at the end of the day. Collect up memories that may be treasured in years to come.

**“The greatest revolution of our generation
is the discovery that human beings,
by changing the inner attitudes of their minds,
can change the outer aspects of their lives.”**

William James (1842 – 1910) American Psychologist & Philosopher

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