

12 Tips for Transitioning to High School

Support for those with additional learning needs



Orientation around a new school may be difficult for any young person but especially so for those with additional learning needs. This may also be greater if they are moving from a smaller primary school to a much larger secondary school. The child will benefit from having as much information as possible and becoming as familiar as practicable with their new environment as early as they can.

Ideas to help

1. Take photos of the school and create a school map. This task could be undertaken by older pupils as a group project. Place the map in several prominent places around the school. A smaller version could be produced and given to all children before starting at the school.
2. Try to arrange for visits to the school on several occasions in the final two terms before the move and have a link person the young person can relate to. This could be an older pupil or the Special Needs Coordinator in the school.
3. Ask if digital photos can be taken of key teachers and photocopy these to give to new pupils so they have a chance of putting names to faces.



4. Ask the teacher if they can get children to wear stickers with their names on them for the first few weeks if possible, to aid memory of new pupils' names and increase the chances of making friends.
5. If a uniform is worn, then the child with additional learning needs may not be as streetwise as peers with regards to "how" to wear his uniform to blend in with the other children. Even in a school without a uniform there are still dress codes that are often unspoken in terms of wearing certain clothes in a certain way (e.g. shirt hanging out and laces undone!). If the child has an older sibling at the same school you could get them to create their own rule book to pass onto the child or ask the school if this could be done. Being aware of some of these unwritten and subtle rules may give the child a head start in the friendship stakes e.g. sometimes the type of way young people wear their shoes can be a trend, such as laces tucked in, also the type of bag used to carry books, and current hairstyles. All these subtleties can mark out the child as different from their peers. Some young people may not be as good at picking out these more subtle social cues as their peers.
6. If the child needs to use a locker, then make sure that you have spare locker keys or know the combination numbers, as the young person may lose keys and this can create tension and anxiety.
7. Check the uniform before the start of term and make sure the child can undo fastenings so they can change easily for drama, sport and going to the loo.
8. Talk through the process of break and lunchtimes with the child so they know what to expect, if there is a canteen, how they will pay, if there is queuing to be done, and what food choices may be available. This may feel strange and cause additional anxiety.
9. See if you can visit the school with the child so you know the layout of the school as well. Encourage parents to discuss concerns about their child and encourage a 'can do' attitude.
10. Talk to school if you are concerned socially for the child and discuss what will happen at break and lunchtime.
11. Ask the teacher in primary school for some names of children moving to the new school who live near you or ask the secondary school for this if you are new to the area – have some children around in the summer holidays so the child has familiar faces to meet on the first day of term.
12. Find out about potential extra-curricular activities to develop a sense of community and contribution, e.g. drama, hockey, choir.

