

Satchel Pulse

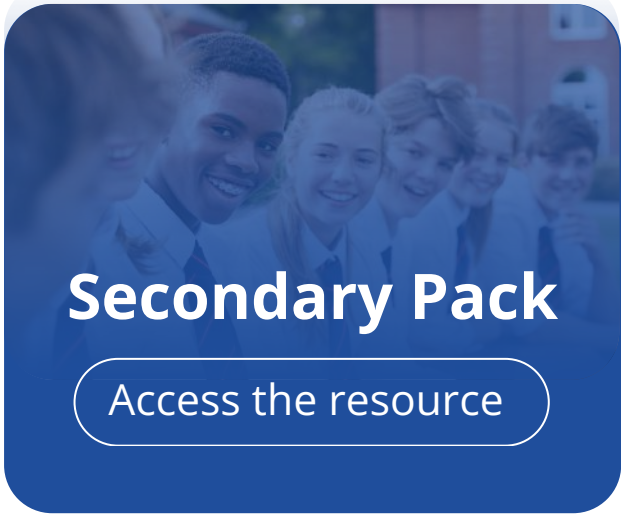
Different stages, different challenges but the same need to belong

Explore our Primary and Secondary Transition resource packs



Primary Pack

Access the resource



Secondary Pack

Access the resource

Developing Belonging Through Transition: Year 6 are imagining it, Year 7 are living it.



Belonging doesn't wait for a summer transition day. Year 6 started wondering where they will fit in the moment they ticked a box on an application form. For Year 7 it is being tested right now, as half term has passed.

Right now, two groups of students only a year apart are in very different places.

Year 6 have just chosen the secondary schools they hope to go to. Open evenings are fresh in their minds and secondary school suddenly feels real. Some are excited, some are anxious and many are both at once.

Year 7, meanwhile, have made it to their first half term. The new uniform is no longer new, the timetable makes sense and the welcome events are over. For most students, that settling is a good thing, for some, it is the moment they start to wonder whether they really fit.

Both moments are about belonging, both call for action this term, not next summer. Primary schools can start building the confidence and skills students will need to belong somewhere new, long before they walk through the gates. Secondary schools can make sure the warmth of September doesn't fade just as Year 7 need it most.

One journey, two ends

It is easy to think of these as two separate jobs. Primary schools prepare students to leave and secondary schools welcome them in. Each phase has its own priorities, its own pressures and its own moment in the calendar.
But from a student's point of view, it is one journey. The Year 6 student imagining their new school today is next year's Year 7 student, sitting in a tutor room after half term, working out whether they really fit. What happens at one end of the journey shapes how the other end feels.

A Year 6 student who leaves primary school knowing their strengths, able to make new friends and confident enough to ask for help arrives with a head start. A Year 7 student who is noticed, known and connected after the welcome fades can build on everything their primary school gave them. When either end is missing, students are more likely to fall through the gap in between.
This autumn, both ends of the journey are happening at once this makes it the perfect time for primary and secondary leaders to see their work as two halves of the same thing.

What belonging is built on

Belonging is not a single event, a welcome day or a transition visit, it is the everyday feeling that I am safe here, I am known, I am included and I matter and isn't created by one initiative. It grows from the culture of a school and the way people treat each other every day.

It also feeds everything else. Students who feel they belong want to be in school. Being in school means they can engage with learning and feeling secure gives them the confidence to ask for help and have a go. Their success then strengthens their sense of belonging and the cycle keeps going. High expectations are part of this too, because they tell students we believe in them.

Underneath it all sits feeling safe: physically and emotionally secure enough to make mistakes without being judged. On top of that, belonging is built from a handful of things students need wherever they are:

- **Being known** by adults who see their strengths and needs, and are glad they are there.
- **Friendship and connection,** part of a web of relationships with peers and staff.
- **Identity and strengths,** feeling safe to be themselves and having more than one way to succeed.
- **Student voice,** so their views matter and lead to visible change.
- **Families** who feel connected to the school and part of that web too.

These building blocks don't change between Year 6 and Year 7, what changes is the setting. Primary schools are often described by students as being like a family. In secondary school, that sense of identity more often comes from a wider community: a tutor group, a house, a team, part of the move is learning to swap one for the other. Primary schools can help students build these foundations so they start well. Secondary schools can make sure they are rebuilt quickly and kept strong once the novelty has worn off.
For each of the five, here is what primary and secondary leaders can do now and how the two connect.

1. Being known

Students feel they belong when the adults around them know them, notice them and are glad they are there. In Year 6, that means preparing students to build new relationships, in Year 7, it means making sure those relationships have actually formed.

Primary: what you can do now

- **Talk about the adults they will meet**. Explain the roles students will come across in secondary school, such as tutors, heads of year and pastoral staff, so these people feel familiar rather than intimidating.
- **Invite former students back**. Last year's Year 6 are now in Year 7. A visit, video call or recorded message from them about who helped them settle is far more powerful than anything an adult can say.
- **Practise asking for help**. Use role play and real situations to help students get comfortable approaching an adult they don't know well. It is a skill, and it can be taught.

Secondary: what you can do now

- **Check every student has a trusted adult.** Ask the students who they would go to if things became tricky in school, who is their trusted adult? Any blanks becomes a priority list.
- **Keep the small conversations going.** A greeting by name at the door and a two minute check-in matter just as much in November as they did in September.
- **Share the knowledge.** Make sure what tutors know about each student reaches subject teachers, so students feel known in every classroom, not just in tutor time.

The thread between them: **Year 6 who have practised reaching out to unfamiliar adults are far more likely to find their trusted adult in Year 7. Secondary schools can then make sure someone is there to be found.**

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2. Friendship and connection

Friendships are often the biggest worry before the move and the biggest factor in how students feel once they arrive. By the end of the first half term, friendship groups are starting to set and some students can find themselves on the edge.

Primary: what you can do now

- **Build friendship skills, not just friendships.** Teach students how to start a conversation, join a group and include others. These are the exact skills they will need in the first weeks of Year 7.
- **Mix things up.** Use mixed groupings across classes and activities so students get used to working with people outside their usual circle.
- **Talk openly about change.** Some students will be going to different schools from their friends. Acknowledge that this can feel hard, and help them see that new friendships are part of the adventure.

Secondary: what you can do now

- **Watch the edges.** Notice who is alone at break and lunch, who drifts between groups and who has gone quiet. These students need a gentle nudge towards connection now.
- **Refresh the groupings.** Seating plans and group work set in September can be changed. New combinations give students fresh chances to connect.
- **Bring in older students.** Peer mentors or buddies from Year 8 or 9 can offer a friendly face and show Year 7 that they are part of a wider school community.

The thread between them: The friendship skills taught in Year 6 are the ones students reach for when groups start to set after half term. Secondary schools can create the chances for those skills to be used.

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3. Identity and strengths

Students belong more easily when they can bring who they are with them. A student who knows what they are good at and what they love will find their place more quickly.

Primary: what you can do now

- **Help students name their strengths.** Create space for Year 6 to reflect on what they are good at, what they enjoy and what makes them proud.
- **Encourage them to keep their passions.** Talk about how the things students love now, whether that is football, music, drawing or coding, can help them find their people in secondary school.
- **Show there is more than one way to shine.** Celebrate students' cultures, identities and achievements beyond the academic, so every student knows they have something to bring before they become one of many in a much larger school.

Secondary: what you can do now

- **Help every student find a place.** Make sure each Year 7 student has at least one club, team, role or space where they feel part of something. Follow up personally with those who haven't joined anything yet.
- **Give Year 7 real roles.** Form reps, ambassadors and helpers give students a sense that they contribute, not just attend.
- **Spotlight strengths in tutor time.** Short activities where students share their interests help tutors and peers see each other as people, not just names on a register.
- **Make a big school feel small.** Tutor groups, houses and year group traditions give students a smaller community to belong to, so no one feels anonymous.

The thread between them: Students who leave primary knowing what they are good at and what they love can look for those things in their new school. Secondary schools need to keep reflecting that identity back to them, so being new never means starting again as nobody.

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4. Student voice

Belonging grows when students feel their views matter and see adults act on them. This applies just as much to a nervous ten year old as to a Year 7 student a few weeks in.

Primary: what you can do now

- **Explore worries and wonders.** Give students regular, safe opportunities to share what they are excited about and what they are nervous about and take those concerns seriously.

- **Let them shape their own transition.** Ask Year 6 what they want to know about secondary school and build sessions around their questions.
- **Keep the conversation going.** Transition is not one lesson in the summer term. Small, regular conversations from now on build confidence over time.

Secondary: what you can do now

- **Help every student find a place.** Make sure each Year 7 student has at least one club, team, role or space where they feel part of something. Follow up personally with those who haven't joined anything yet.
- **Give Year 7 real roles.** Form reps, ambassadors and helpers give students a sense that they contribute, not just attend.
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The thread between them: Students whose worries were heard in Year 6 expect to be heard in Year 7. Secondary schools that keep asking and keep acting, prove them right.

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5. Families

Families shape how students feel about the move and about their new school. Their confidence and connection matter too.

Primary: what you can do now

- **Support the conversations at home.** Share simple prompts families can use to talk about secondary school positively, including what to say if a student is anxious.
- **Prepare for mixed feelings.** Help families think ahead about how to support students, whatever school they end up at.
- **Keep families in the loop.** Let families know what you are doing in school to prepare students, so home and school are giving the same message.

Secondary: what you can do now

- **Keep in touch after the welcome.** Most family communication peaks in September. A positive call or message home after half term shows families their child is known and valued.

- **Invite families in.** An informal event in the autumn term helps families feel connected to the school, which strengthens their child's sense of belonging too.
- **Make it easy to raise concerns.** Remind families who to contact if their child is struggling to settle, so small worries are picked up early.

The thread between them: Families who felt confident and informed in Year 6 bring that confidence into Year 7. Secondary schools keeping that going once the start of the year is over is a foundation for trust and promoting belonging.

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Working together

Primary and secondary schools don't need to wait for a formal handover to start talking. A secondary school sharing good news about former students with their old primary teachers, or Year 7 visiting their primary to answer Year 6 questions, builds a bridge that benefits everyone. It reminds Year 6 that secondary school is a place where people like them thrive and it reminds Year 7 how far they have come.

Keeping the momentum

Belonging is not something that happens on transition day. It starts in Year 6, the moment students begin to imagine themselves somewhere new and it needs to be nurtured long after the welcome events are over.

It is also everyone's responsibility, not just the Year 6 teacher, the Head of Year 7 or the transition lead, but every adult who greets a student, notices when they are quiet and makes them feel they are in the right place. This also includes looking after staff, because adults can only model belonging if they feel it themselves.

It doesn't need a big new initiative either. Start small: choose a few of the ideas above that fit your school and do them consistently. The work primary and secondary schools do this term will shape how students feel about school for years to come.

Next steps

We have two practical packs to support this work:

For primary leaders:
helping Year 6 build a sense of belonging and prepare for secondary school now that school choices are being made.

Access the Primary Pack

For secondary leaders:
helping you keep up the momentum and promote belonging for Year 7 now that the newness of secondary school has worn off.

Access the Secondary Pack

Want to go further?

Satchel Pulse Perceptions surveys students, staff and families, so you can see how belonging really feels across your school, including for your Year 7 cohort, and track how it changes over time.

Belonging CPD helps your whole staff team turn belonging from a policy into everyday practice, in every classroom and corridor.

Choose either on its own, or combine them as part of the Developing Belonging package. Contact us at pulse-info@teamsatchel.com to find out more.

