



Moving On Well Award

OBJECTIVE 3: SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL

ACCREDITATION GUIDANCE

The transitions that pupils make as they transfer from Primary to Secondary school, in psychological terms, bring about both opportunity and threat. This can occur about the same things: making new friends or meeting new teachers are both exciting and worrying for many children in Year 5 and 6. For the majority of children Primary School holds many positive connotations: a safe space, a place where positive adults know you, a space where you have friends, a place where you understand the social boundaries and how problems will be dealt with. This is vitally important for our more vulnerable children and those who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences or Trauma. Secondary School can feel anxiety producing because there are so many unknowns and the lack of previous recallable experience can leave children feeling insecure. We know from the work of Hallinan and Hallinan¹ that children are different from adults, finding daily stresses more difficult to deal with than major life events.

Below is a table showing many of the differences that exist between the two settings, which some children would perceive as a difficulty.

Primary to Secondary Transition: Practical differences	
Daily Routine: Daily routines often change significantly due to different school start and finish times, as well as longer travel distances. Pupils are also more likely to travel to and from school independently. These journeys are typically longer and more complex, and for many pupils involve the use of public transport.	At Primary late pupils are generally welcomed into school with little to no sanction. At Secondary responsibility for punctuality shifts to pupils, and sanctions are applied for late arrivals
Uniform Expectations: In primary school, uniform expectations are generally more relaxed, often without ties or blazers, with the option of cheaper, unbranded alternatives and flexible footwear policies that allow black trainers and a range of shoe styles. These expectations change at secondary school, where uniforms are more formal, specific logoed items are required, and footwear policies are much stricter.	At Primary pupils are reminded to wear the correct uniform but generally not sanctioned for incorrect items of clothing. At Secondary , pupils are required to always wear the correct uniform, and sanctions are applied if the uniform policy is not followed. Pupils must also adapt to new rules regarding blazers, school jumpers, and the wearing of outdoor coats.

¹ Hallinan, P. and Hallinan, P. 1992. Seven into eight will go: Transition from primary to secondary school. *The Australian Educational and Developmental Psychologist* 9(2), pp. 30–38. doi: 10.1017/S0816512200026663.

Around School:

The secondary school environment is significantly larger than a primary setting and is often unfamiliar to new Year 7 pupils. One of the most common concerns expressed by Year 6 pupils is the fear of getting lost in their new school. On transition to secondary school, pupils experience a notable increase in responsibility and independence, alongside the need to understand and manage new rules, stricter expectations, and a different set of rewards and consequences.

In Primary school, pupils usually remain in the same classroom—and often the same seat—throughout the day. Movement around the school is typically in single file and supervised by a member of staff.

In Secondary school, pupils change classrooms for every lesson and move independently around the school. Corridors and stairwells are often crowded and noisy, and some pupils may feel intimidated by pupils in higher year groups.

In Primary school, pupils are either provided with a healthy snack and lunch or bring them from home each day.

In Secondary school, pupils experience greater choice in the canteen and are responsible for managing their own money, navigating large queues, and coping with shorter lunch periods. Year 7 pupils often find it challenging to eat lunch and use the toilet within the allocated time.

In Primary school, pupils are encouraged to use the toilet and access drinking water during break times but are frequently permitted to throughout the school day.

In Secondary school, pupils must get used to not using the toilets or drinking from water bottles during lesson time. Whilst adjusting to their new environment, Year 7 pupils tend to be overly anxious about being late to lessons and therefore apprehensive about using the facilities in between lessons.

In addition to these practical changes, pupils will also face a range of social and emotional adaptations they need to make to cope well in the new Secondary school environment. There is a direct link between emotional wellbeing and children’s academic functioning which makes the success of these adaptations key to children’s academic progress.² There are many ways in which the school environment can be primed for success in building resilient young people, as they negotiate this period.³

Primary to Secondary Transition: Social and Emotional challenges

Friendships in Primary:

Familiar friendship groups established over several years.

Friendships in Secondary:

New friendship groups with potentially no friends from Primary school.

Teachers and staff are aware of friendship dynamics, clashing personalities and any bullying situations

Unfamiliar peers – making friends and being bullied are within the top worries for pupils starting secondary school

² Bagnall CL, Stevenson E, Cookson D, Jones F and Garnett NJ (2024) A mixed-methods evaluation of a longitudinal primary–secondary school transitions support intervention. *Front. Psychol.* 15:1252851. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1252851

³ Vassilopoulos, SP; Diakogiorgi, K; Brouzos, A; Moberly, NJ; Chasioti, M (2018). A problem-oriented group approach to reduce children’s fears and concerns about the secondary school transition. University of Exeter. Journal contribution. <https://hdl.handle.net/10871/31412>

Pupils remain with the same cohort of children throughout the day	Pupils can be mixed up with unfamiliar peers for different lessons during the day
Emotional Wellbeing in Primary: For some disadvantaged or vulnerable pupils school can be the only safe constant in their lives	Emotional Wellbeing in Secondary: A new environment can initially feel unsafe and for some pupils they no longer have the haven they were used to at Primary school.
Vulnerable pupils can become emotionally attached to, and even dependent upon the adults at school that show them empathy	Secondary staff are yet to develop these kinds of relationships with the pupils
Staff are aware of triggers for individual pupils and are to develop strategies to avoid dysregulated behaviour	Subject teachers spend a limited amount of time with pupils and do not yet know the individual children well enough
Pupils know how to access and are familiar with the support resources within the school including counselling services and emotional wellbeing interventions	Pupils are unfamiliar with the support resources available in school
Over the course of a child's time at primary school, staff develop strong, trusting relationships with parents and carers. By Year 6, staff have established effective strategies to engage and support parents and carers who may be facing additional challenges.	Teacher-parent relationships are not yet fully established, and some vulnerable parents and carers can feel overwhelmed by their child's transition, which may limit their confidence in supporting them effectively.

Pupils' resilience is built throughout these changes by having knowledge, confidence and social connection in a hospitable environment.

A pupil in a **Bronze level** setting will have received information, alongside their parents, on the school choices available to them and how to make their choice. They will have been informed about the practical aspects of their new school, e.g. uniform, finance, behaviour policy. The induction day will have provided them with increased confidence on the new school environment and what will be expected of them. If they have an additional vulnerability (e.g. pupil with SEND, pupil from travelling community) then there will have been a bespoke aspect to this day. They will have received hospitality from their secondary school environment which enabled them to get used to their new school without sanction (e.g. using the toilet when needed, not receiving punishment for being late to a lesson) in the first two weeks of the school year. They have at least one friend from their Primary school setting who they have a good social connection with, in their Secondary form group, and they have met a member of staff in advance of their start in September who knows their name.

For parents of pupils in a **Silver level** setting, they are confident about the pastoral support that is on offer to their child at Secondary School and who to contact should they need to. They have received information about the differences their child will face when arriving at Secondary

school. Their child had induction days at Secondary schools in Year 6 and had a transition activity at a Secondary setting prior to Year 6. These days built on lessons to increase their child's confidence to adapt to the changes (how to make friends, how to tie a tie, how to navigate the school building). This will be extended by team building activities during Year 7. These parents have spoken to school staff at information evenings who have a strong understanding of the differences between the two settings and have a policy in place for the first half term of Year 7 to provide hospitality. This policy is clearly understood by all staff teaching Year 7 and reflects an adaptive approach to behaviour management, uniform, access to the canteen and toilets. Parents of pupils with more specific needs have had a conversation with an appropriate member of staff and provided information on their child which has been added to an individualised plan.

A pupil in a **Gold level** setting has had numerous opportunities to build their confidence in the Secondary School environment since Year 4. They have been invited to transition activities, celebration events, taster sessions, induction days and a summer school/holiday club prior to the September start. These have built their fluency, positive associations and self confidence in the new setting. They have established a positive social connection with at least one member of staff who attended their Primary setting and is involved in the activities at the Secondary setting. They have received lessons on adapting to the changes at Secondary School and are assigned a peer mentor when they arrive in Year 7 who is trained to support them in Year 7 and beyond. This person provides another established social connection. When they are in Year 7, they are supported in areas that could be perceived as stressful (e.g. forming new friendships) by activities in form time, and on a residential trip where the focus of staff is facilitating a hospitable environment. Knowledge, confidence and social connection are the primary outcomes of the residential trip. The pupil is confident of the hospitality of the school because Senior leaders, Year 7 teachers and tutors have received training on environmental differences and the hospitable adjustments which will be made in Year 7 are stated in a published policy. This policy includes adjustment to toilet access times/toilet passes and canteen access for Year 7s, behaviour management for Year 7s (additional warnings in a staggered approach throughout the year) and a staged increase in homework throughout Year 7. Pupils in these settings have been reminded from Year 5 onwards of the positive opportunities available to them through these transitions and have been encouraged to approach challenges with positive expectations and rose-tinted glasses⁴.

⁴ Hart, A., Blincow, D. and Thomas, H. (2007). *Resilient Therapy: Working with children and families*. London: Routledge.