

Transition from Primary School to Secondary School

Dear Parents/Guardians,

The purpose of this document is to give you some general information on the changes to expect when your son or daughter is moving from primary to secondary school. Included here is a general picture as to what the change will involve. In reality, there will be some differences, depending on what second level school your son or daughter transfers to. Each secondary school will deal with the specifics at various stages in their induction process. These will be communicated to you by the school concerned.

Sixth Class Graduation and School Closures

Given the current situation with school closures due to Covid 19, some of the usual end of year activities which schools organise for sixth class pupils have not been, or will not be, possible. We are, however, actively exploring creative ways in which we can mark this momentous occasion in a manner which will be fitting and memorable for your daughter/son. We will inform you of the finer details in due course.

Transition

The transition from Primary school to Secondary school is one of those life events that most people can recall in some way or other. It is an **exciting** stage in a young person's life and one that most pupils look forward to with great anticipation and expectation. In the main, it's a fairly manageable period and one that parents often get more emotional about than their children. However, for a sizeable number of students and their parents/guardians it can be **challenging** and perhaps a little overwhelming. We are very aware of the potential anxieties and concerns you may have around this transfer process. Knowing what to expect in advance may help to allay these concerns.

Induction

All secondary schools have an induction programme to smooth the process of **transferring** to second level. Induction is simply the term secondary schools use to describe the process of introducing students to the next stage in their education journey. Induction is usually completed in different stages.

1. A designated teacher from the post-primary school may **visit the primary school** to deliver information to sixth class pupils and discuss issues and around transitioning or changing to post-primary schools.
2. All schools, usually before Christmas, organise **open days/nights** for incoming students and their parents. Information about the school is given, tours around the school are organised, all facilities are open for viewing and staff are available for questions. At these open nights, students **may enrol** to start first year at the school, or they may do so at a later date.

3. Students who enrol, sit an **assessment exam**, usually on a Saturday in Spring. Most second level schools have **mixed ability groups** in first year. Assessment results, therefore, are not used to separate students into separate bands or streams based on academic ability. They are used primarily to identify students who may benefit from **learning support** in certain areas of study. This information, along with data forwarded from the primary school, helps in planning for differentiated learning.

4. Detailed **information meetings** are held, either in **May or late August**, for students who have enrolled and their parents. These meetings provide specific and **more detailed information**, including details of the physical layout of schools, teacher roles, timetables, lockers, school policies/procedures and extra-curricular activities. At this stage, (or at sometime early in the first term), a presentation is usually made to the students and their parents on the **Junior Cycle** curriculum, covering the subjects offered and the teaching, learning and assessment methodologies involved. **Subject-sampling**, if offered, will also be explained. Some of the **key issues** facing new first years are addressed, such as – making new friends, dealing with a more complicated timetable, increased homework levels, negotiating the school building and how to manage relationships with older students. These practices offer great support to all students, and especially those with special educational needs.

5. Specific induction activities are organised during an **initial induction day**, either in **May or late August**. They generally involve issues as outlined in item 4 above. These activities are facilitated usually by the **year head** in charge of First Year, the **first-year tutors** in charge of each class, the **guidance counsellor** and sometimes older **student mentors**. If held in May, some schools allow students to sample some of the practical subjects on offer.

6. During the **first few days of school in August**, students are welcomed by the **Principal and Deputy Principal**. In most schools, students take part in further induction activities which may involve teamwork exercises to help develop **positive relationships and bonding** with the other students in their class and year group. Time will be set aside to provide advice to students on **adjusting to the increased levels of homework** and the proper use of their **homework journal**. At this stage, some schools may introduce students to basic **Study Skills** or it may be dealt with later as part of the **Wellbeing Programme**. Some schools offer a period in the first term when students can **subject sample** to discover which option subjects would suit them best.

7. After a **short settling-in period**, schools will usually organise a **religious ceremony** and/or a **'meet and greet' session** where new students and their parents/guardians can meet with their **teachers and tutors informally** for the first time.

As already stated, the above is a **general guide** to the process of transfer from primary and induction to secondary school. Each school will vary to some degree in its approach. When parents and students have made a final decision, they will get more specific details from their chosen school. The following article includes some good tips and advice.

‘The Essential Parents’ Guide to the Secondary School Years’ by Brian Gilsenan, published by Primary ABC,

The purpose of this article is to outline the major issues involved in the transition from primary to secondary school so that the experience can be facilitated and undertaken with minimum stress - for the whole family!

Big fish to little fish

By the time a child reaches their final years in primary school, they will be totally familiar with their school environment. They’ll know their teacher very well, be comfortable with most if not all of the people in their class and will probably know most of the other faces in the school too. By sixth class, they are the most senior people in their school, they will be used to being given responsibility and they tend to be looked up to by the younger boys and girls in the school.

But within the space of two short months, these same students revert to being the most junior again in a brand new environment in a different location, with a different smell and atmosphere. Change can be a daunting task for any one of us but when you are 12 or 13 – with so many other ‘complications’ in your life - it is a change that takes quite a lot of adjusting to.

The important thing to constantly remind yourself is that children and teenagers are more resilient and adaptable than we are (or give them credit for). Remember too that within a few short weeks, their new surroundings become more familiar and they’ll be running from the PE Hall to the Science Lab and on to the Art room without the slightest stumble. The first couple of weeks can be traumatic though and this article offers both parent and child a survival plan to make the transition as smooth as possible.

Constant routine becomes constant change

The biggest change when entering the secondary school system is probably the constant change in the day-to-day routine. In primary school, they had one teacher all day in the one classroom. In Secondary school however, that routine changes utterly. There is a **subject change** every forty (or sixty) minutes approximately, and with this subject change there is a change of teacher. It is not unusual for a student to encounter eight or nine different teachers during a typical school day. A tip to help your child cope with this is to advise them to write down the name of each new teacher beside the name of the subject.

Some subject changes will involve a **change of classroom** too and the second big change that the new 1st years have to cope with is the constant movement between classrooms throughout the day. Depending on their subject choices, students will be moving all around

the school. Getting lost during the first few weeks will be inevitable for some. A good tip is to advise your child to always stay with at least one other person from the class...there is definitely safety and confidence in numbers!

All of this 'new-ness' is bound to have some effect on the student and in these early days of adjusting, parents should try to be supportive, understanding and encouraging, ensuring their child eats well and gets plenty of rest and 'down time'.

Number of Subjects

Another big adjustment is the number of specific subjects your child is covering. Depending on the school and the subject-choice structure, students in 1st year can cover anything up to 10 different subjects (some will only be by way of introduction, to help students to select the subjects they wish to take for the Junior Cert.). Many of these are new and unfamiliar. An example of a **typical timetable** is included here, to give you an idea of what a typical day might look like.

Sample first year timetable

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9:00	History	Maths	English	Geography	Religion
9:40	Irish	C.S.P.E.	S.P.H.E	Maths	Science
10:20	B	R	E	A	K
10:40	Music	Irish	History	Art	Geography
11:20	Business	Science	Maths	French	German
12:00	PE	Religion	Careers	English	Business
12:40	L	U	N	C	H
1:30	Maths	Business	Computers	Science	Maths
2:10	Art	Music	French	Irish	English
2:50	Geography	English	Art	Music	PE

C.S.P.E.: Civic, Social and Political Education

S.P.H.E.: Social, Personal and Health Education (Wellbeing)

Note*: the above is an example of a timetable where classes are of 40 minutes duration. Recently some schools have changed to 60 minute classes.

Note**: with a 40 minute timetable some subjects, especially practical subjects, will have double class periods, ie. 80 minutes.

As you can see from the diversity, it is therefore important at an early stage to help them to develop a **methodical approach to learning**. Discuss all the subjects at home. Getting your child to explain what they have learnt so far in a particular subject will have two beneficial effects. It will help you to better understand a subject. It also helps to get your child to summarise a subject and that exercise will help to highlight in their mind where they are at with it.

It is important to try to encourage a **balance between all subjects**. Everyone will have their own favourites and will excel at certain subjects. The problem is that neglecting a subject in the early stages – due to its perceived difficulty or maybe a personality clash with a teacher - may have an impact on subject choices in future years. Taking an early dislike to Science and dropping it after 1st year or the Junior Cert. might limit the career choices available come 6th year. Certain courses require at least one science subject, for example, so be careful in choosing to take or drop subjects. Be sure that you or your child (preferably both) talk to the career guidance counsellor / principal regarding subject selections.

The Schoolbag

Their timetable will take a lot of getting used to. Part of this new routine will involve the organisation of the schoolbag before each day. It's a new skill that some may struggle with and a little help in the early days will ensure they have the right books, and the right homework on the right day! Most schools operate a book rental scheme and a system where sets of books are available for use in each classroom. The student has a set of books which is kept at home. This has removed the need for students to carry heavy schoolbags too and from schools. As an alternative to using textbooks, some schools use ICT devices, eg., iPad, chromebook.

Homework

Homework time is obviously going to increase and with it comes several new adjustments to be dealt with from the Primary School homework routine. Not all subjects are covered every day and not all subjects involve homework. This may mean that your child has two hours homework on one night and maybe one hour the next night. One of the best skills you can help your child to learn is that of effective time management. Help your child to even out their homework pattern by encouraging them to develop a homework timetable.

Certain subjects get homework nightly (Maths), others on every other day, others still on a weekly basis (Irish essay). Help them to devise a method to spread out the workload over the 5 nights of the week. Don't under-estimate the importance of getting a **structure** and a sense of **organisation** at an early stage of their secondary school lives. Learning how to successfully manage their time is an invaluable life skill and will make the transition into their new environment a whole lot easier.

School Reports

A new experience that comes with secondary school is the regular reports that come home from the school. Aside from the exams reports, most schools have a regular report that must be signed by the parent. It will usually have a mark per subject and space for any comments by any of the teachers. It might include number of days absent or late and any general notes relating to your child's performance. Again, these should be monitored and taken seriously, particularly in first year.

It is important that your child sees you as an extension of the school system – if you're dismissive of feedback from the school, it allows a negative attitude to develop in your child which is not in anyone's interest. If you have an issue you would like to discuss with a teacher or the principal, it is best done without the involvement of your child in the initial instance anyway.

Extra-curricular activities:

Taking part in after-school activities is a great way of getting to know more students in the school. Whether it's in the drama circle, the computer club or on the playing field, each student should find activities which they enjoy. Taking part in such activities builds **confidence**, they get to **mix with other students** from other years and as a result, they settle into the school environment a lot quicker. Students should be encouraged, from both home and school, to try out new activities.

Even if they may have tried something before, or even if they don't know what the activity entails, students should be encouraged to try practically everything available through the school.

Support Network

As stated, most children take the transition from Primary School to Secondary school in their stride. Schools have generally recognised the potential difficulties and have a good support network in place for 1st years. Most schools operate the system of the 'year head' (a teacher who has specific responsibility for the entire year). Many schools also appoint class 'tutors', 'mentors' and 6th Year 'buddies' or 'prefects' who have the task of making the introduction to the school as pleasant and as painless as possible.

As parents, we can often feel a little helpless – our role is to be supportive, interested and encouraging. If you have any concerns about your child, the advice is to make contact with the school.

Take heart!

Finally, with all the ups and downs of the first few weeks, rest assured that by the time late August comes round again the following year, your child will enter the establishment as if

they've been there forever. They will laugh at the new 1st years for getting lost, again, and will boss them around with all the authority that only a 2nd year student can assume.