



Parent guide to starting secondary school



Introduction

Starting secondary school is an exciting milestone for every child and for their families. It marks the beginning of a new chapter filled with opportunities, challenges, growth, and discovery. As your child transitions into this important phase of their education, your support and guidance will play a crucial role in helping them feel confident, prepared, and happy at their new school.

This booklet has been written to give you information, tips, and insights that you might find useful to support your child's successful start at their new school, particularly if you have never had a child at secondary school before.

Inside this booklet, you'll find practical advice on a variety of topics including attendance, academic expectations, extra-curricular opportunities, wellbeing resources, and ways to get involved in the school community.

We understand that the move to secondary school can raise many questions and sometimes even a few nerves, both for the child and for their parents/carers. Our goal is to help ease concerns around transition—for both you and your child—by providing clear information and helpful strategies for the journey ahead.

We hope that you have a fantastic summer, we look forward to welcoming you to your child's new school in September and working with you in the future.



Understand the transition

Some will be different at your child's new school compared to the school they are leaving. The school will be bigger, there will be more people, and the systems and expectations will be different. Over time these things will become normal but for the first few weeks they can seem daunting for both you and your child.

What's new in secondary school:

- **A larger school environment:** Secondary schools are normally bigger buildings
- **Different expectations for learning:** Subjects go deeper, and pupils are expected to manage larger workloads.
- **Different lessons:** New subjects will appear on pupils' timetables e.g. food technology, computer science etc
- **Multiple class teachers:** In secondary school, pupils have different teachers for different subjects and normally have to move from class to class.
- **Increased independence:** Pupils are expected to self-manage homework, deadlines, and organise themselves.
- **Friendship changes:** New friendships will be formed, and some old friendships may change.

Parent tips

- **Normalise the nerves:** Let your child know it's okay to feel nervous and that this is normal. Everyone experiences this, even the pupils who seem very confident.
- **Share your own experiences** Talk about how you handled challenges when you started at secondary school.
- **Be positive:** Emphasise the good things about starting a new school - the new subjects, the new opportunities and the new friends.
- **Make time to talk:** Make sure you check in regularly with your child on how they're feeling and how things are going.
- **Visit the school:** Our schools offer open evenings, transition events and even personal tours if that would be helpful.
- **Be prepared:** Make sure you plan ahead for starting secondary. Think about how your child will travel to school and when you will buy their uniform and equipment. Involve your child in the planning.
- **Be patient:** It might take time for your child to adjust, and they might find things challenging at first.

Stay informed & involved

There is a clear link between parental support and pupils achieving well in secondary. This can be easier in primary schools as parents often talk to teachers on the school gate. Secondary schools often don't have the benefit of this regular contact. The more you can be involved with your child's new school the better their experience will be.

How to stay connected:

- **Know the key contacts for your child:** Add the school number to your phone, make a list of important contacts (your child's form tutor, head of year, pastoral link)
- **Check school communications:** Visit the school website regularly, make sure you are reading the school newsletters and check out the school social media sites so you know what is going on.
- **Attend key events:** Transition events, parent forums and parent-teacher evenings are all important opportunities to support your child.
- **Familiarise yourself with tools:** Learn how to navigate the portals and systems that are there for parents. Often schools will use an app (such as My Child at School) to communicate with parents. There will also be learning tools for homework and self-study.

Strategies

- **Check in regularly:** a casual, open-ended chat with your child can reveal challenges early. Ask "What's going well?" "What did you learn today/this week?" If there are problems, let the school know as soon as possible.
- **Support your child to access support:** Help your child to email a teacher respectfully if they need help or clarification. Role-play a conversation they may need to have to ask for help. Let them know you are there for them.
- **Create a shared calendar:** Use an electronic calendar or a whiteboard to track homework, upcoming assessments, and school events. Stick a timetable on the fridge so that they see it in the morning when getting breakfast. Take five minutes each weekend to look at the week ahead together.

Help with organisation

Time management, prioritising and planning are still developing in pupils when they transition to secondary school (and for several years after this too). Unfortunately, this is also the time when they have more things than ever to remember, plan for and manage. They will need help with this.

Tools & techniques:

- **Use a planner :** Some CAM schools provide one, but a small notebook or diary works just as well. Help your child use it daily to track homework, activities, and important dates. Check it together once a week.
- **Sunday planning:** Sit down each Sunday to go over the week ahead—homework, clubs, and time to relax. This helps avoid last-minute stress and keeps the week balanced.
- **Night-time routine:** Mornings go smoother when things are ready the night before—clothes laid out, bag packed, and PE kit or ingredients sorted if needed.
- **Weekly tidy-up:** Encourage your child to sort their school bag, folders, and digital files once a week. A little organisation can make a big difference in how they feel about school.

Habits to build:

- **Talk about homework:** Each day after school, ask what homework they've been set and when it's due. Write it in the planner together.
- **Don't wait until the last minute:** Try to get homework done the day it's set. It reduces stress and gives time to ask for help if needed.
- **No homework? No problem:** If there's nothing set, encourage 30 minutes of reviewing the day's lessons or reading. Both are great ways to keep learning.
- **Keep routines consistent:** Try to stick to regular wake-up, homework, and bedtime routines.
- **Use the 15-minute rule:** If they're stuck on something for more than 15 minutes, it's okay to ask for help.

Supporting learning

Success in secondary school comes from consistent effort as well as ability. It's normal for pupils to find the work more challenging than in primary school—that's a good thing. Learning often happens when we face difficulty and have to think deeply. Struggling with new material isn't a sign of failure; it's a natural and important part of the learning process. With persistence and effort, pupils can build confidence, grow their skills, and achieve their full potential.

Academic support strategies:

- **Monitor their progress**, but don't micromanage — encourage your child to take ownership of their learning and to be reflective about what they need to do to improve.
- **Set up a quiet, distraction-free study area.** Producing good work takes focus. Having a place to work (where you can see that they are doing their work too and not just sitting on their phone is a good idea) with a supply of pens, pencils and paper really helps make sure that homework is quality learning time.
- **Use the Pomodoro method:** (25 minutes work, 5 minutes break) to help with focus.
- **Encourage study groups:** Your child and their friends will probably all have the same homework and they may be more likely to do the work if they are doing it with others. They also get the chance to hang out when the work is done so it can make getting them to do their homework less of a chore.

When to contact the school for extra support:

- If your child falls behind with their work or seems consistently overwhelmed
- If you notice significant changes in motivation, mood, or engagement
- If you suspect your child might be experiencing bullying



Promote good school attendance

Good school attendance is directly linked to pupil achievement and well-being. Making sure that your child is in school every day is one of the best ways of helping them to be successful and feel like they are part of the school community.

How to promote good attendance

- **Importance of attendance:** Explain to your child the importance of regular attendance for their academic success and social development.
- **Promote resilience:** Encourage your child to try school on days when they don't feel 100%. Often children feel better when they see their friends and get involved in lessons.
- **Let the school know:** Tell your child that you will let the school know they aren't feeling well and ask that the pastoral team check in on them throughout the day. If things get worse the pastoral team can get in touch with you.
- **Morning routine:** Establish a consistent morning routine to ensure your child is ready and on time for school.
- **Be positive:** If you are positive about them going to school your child is more likely to be positive about it too.

Top tips:

- **Set expectations:** Clearly communicate your expectations regarding attendance and punctuality. On time, every day is a good expectation!
- **Set targets:** "Can you get 100% attendance this half term?", "Can you get 100% attendance this year?" as a minimum, children should be able to achieve 96% attendance for the year.
- **Monitor attendance:** Keep track of your child's attendance and address any issues promptly, contacting the school early if you need help.
- **Reward consistency:** Recognise and reward good attendance to reinforce the habit. School will do this through reward and recognition schemes and assemblies, but it helps if this happens at home too.
- **Contact school now, don't wait for September:** If you know your child has low attendance (below 95% this year), get in touch with the school now and ask for help. Attendance teams can help identify and break down barriers to attendance and offer support, so this is not an issue in the future.

Promote a healthy social life

Social belonging is a core need in adolescence — friendships can deeply affect self-esteem and school engagement. We want pupils at CAM Academy Trust schools to achieve well and be happy. This means striking a balance between working hard and enjoying time out of lessons and away from school too.

Encouraging healthy peer relationships:

- **Support extracurricular involvement:** Encourage trying at least one club, sport, or joining a pupil group during the first term. This is a great way to make new friends, to try new things and to feel a part of the new school.
- **Discuss friendships:** Ask open-ended questions like “Who do you sit with at lunch?” or “How are your classmates?”. If you pick up issues talk about them together and encourage your child let the school know if there is a problem that you think staff need to be aware of or need to deal with.
- **Teach digital responsibility:** Talk about appropriate social media use, online boundaries, and cyberbullying. Speak to the school if you have any concerns about these as soon as possible so that support can be provided.
- **Report any friendship issues now:** Occasionally pupils have had problems with others at primary school. If this might be something they are worried about schools can look at grouping and setting to make sure that this is managed before the start of the new school year.

Managing peer pressure:

- Role-play scenarios: “What would you do if...?”
- Reinforce values and confidence in saying no
- Provide alternatives: “If you don’t feel comfortable going to that club with those people, let’s make another fun plan.”

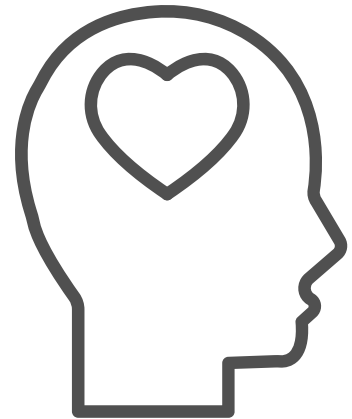


Foster emotional wellbeing

Mental health can face new pressures during secondary school due to academic demands, social factors, and a whole range of different things that can affect the way young people feel about themselves.

Warning signs to watch for:

- Withdrawal from friends or activities
- Changes in sleep or appetite
- Chronic stress or frequent emotional outbursts
- Drop in academic performance



Ways to support:

- **Build emotional vocabulary:** Encourage talking about feelings beyond “fine” or “stressed.”
- **Model stress management:** Share how you cope with pressure.
- **Encourage balance:** Prioritise downtime, exercise, healthy eating, and sleep (teens need 8–10 hours/night).
- **Stay connected:** Even if your child is pushing boundaries, they still need consistent love and support.
- **Maintain school attendance:** School can offer lots of support for mental health. It is tempting to keep your child at home if they are struggling but this only makes things more difficult in the long run.



Plan for the future

Secondary school is the time to plant seeds for post-secondary success, whether that means sixth form, college or vocational training. It's never too soon to start talking about this and even though they are just starting their secondary journey the time will fly by. Having goals and ambitions will be motivating and help children recognise the importance of their time at secondary school.

Future-planning tips:

- **Talk about interests early:** What subjects do they really enjoy? What careers sound exciting?
- **Explore options and extracurricular activities:** Encourage ones that match your child's passions but also support them to try new things because they may not know that it's a passion until they try it!
- **Use Year 7 and Year 8 to build a strong foundation:** Stress that Key Stage 3 is important and should be taken seriously, building good study habits and a strong foundation in a broad range of subjects before GCSEs
- **Keep the long game in mind:** Emphasise progress over perfection and remind them that it is good to find work hard because it means that they are learning.



Be a steady support

Above all, your child needs to know that you're there — unconditionally and without judgement. They will have wobbles. This is natural and expected. They need to know that you believe in them and that you will support them through the hard times and celebrate the successes.

Ways to show up:

- **Listen more than you speak:** Don't rush to "fix" everything. Sometimes they just want to be heard.
- **Avoid catastrophising:** One bad piece of feedback, or a detention for forgetting to do their homework isn't the end of the world. Help them learn from mistakes and develop a 'can do' attitude that helps them keep pushing forward.
- **Be curious, not critical:** Instead of "Why didn't you do your homework?" try, "What got in the way today?" or "How can we avoid that happening next week?"
- **Be positive for your child:** It can be frustrating when your child is struggling but letting them know this often makes things worse and can make them feel negatively about school. Try to be positive about school in front of them (even if you need to call the school and vent your frustrations to them privately- Schools would rather hear the problems so that they can deal with them, even if they have to hear some hard messages from you as parents too

Encouragement that works:

- Praise effort, not just results: "I'm proud of how hard you worked on that."
- Remind them that setbacks are part of growth
- Help them feel safe being imperfect



Making the most of the summer

The summer holiday will fly by quickly and the new school year will be upon us before we know it. It is important that children relax and recharge their batteries but make good use of the time during July and August. Planning ahead will help make the first days and weeks in September run more smoothly for you and your child.

Things to consider:

Uniform & equipment:

- **When are you going to buy uniform?** Check the uniform list carefully and work out where you need to get things from. Some items or sizes might sell out, so don't leave it until the last minute. Check uniform guidance carefully and ask the school if you're not sure about anything.
- **When are you going to buy new school equipment?** Schools will share a basic equipment list. Having everything they need, really helps pupils make a good start to the new school year.
- **Do you need a new school bag, lunch box or water bottle?** The ones your child used at primary school may still have life left in them, but as this is a new start at a new school, choosing something new can make pupils feel excited about their first day. Some schools have rules about bags and coats so check guidance carefully.
- **Have you marked everything with their name?** At primaries it's often fine to just have first names or first names and the initial of your surname but, with so many more pupils at secondary school we would always advise using the full name.
- **Check school rules about phones and digital devices.** Many schools won't allow phones to be used in school. If your child will be getting a phone for the first time talk to your child and privacy and on-line risks. Consider the parental controls you would like to use and explain these to your child.



Assignments and continued learning:

- **Plan time to do any set tasks:** Most schools will set an assignment for the summer holidays that will be referred to during the first few weeks. Spreading this out over the holidays not only helps spread the load but also creates lots of opportunities to talk about the new school and the new school year.
- **Maintain good learning habits:** Good learning habits can slip during the summer. Doing a little bit of work each week will mean that your child has good habits when they start secondary school.
- **Keep working on areas that need to be developed:** Reading, writing and maths are important foundations for the harder work that pupils will do at secondary school. It's particularly important to regularly read for pleasure over the summer. Libraries often have reading challenges and there are learning platforms out there to practise maths.

Building confidence & routines:

- **Practice the route to school together:** Whether your child will walk, ride their bike, be driven to school or catch a bus it is good to practise the route. Work out the timings (building in a buffer as it is likely to be quieter on the roads during the summer) and spot any challenges that you can plan for.
- **Get into routine early:** Use the week before the start of school to make sure your child is back in the habit of waking up early, showering, having breakfast and being ready to leave at the right time.
- **Build independence at home:** Give them age-appropriate responsibilities at home. Talk to them about responsibility and consequences.

