

PARENTS' GUIDE TO TRANSITION FOR YEAR 7

This guide has been produced to help you as a parent get the advice and information you need, to ensure that the step up from primary school is as easy and stress free as possible, for you and your child.

Moving from primary to secondary school is an exciting time but it can also have its problems – schools are working hard to make this transition an easy and fun process, for both students and parents.

All the schools at primary and secondary level have plans in place to ensure the process is smooth – you can help them, by consulting this guide, and understanding what you need to know and can do to help.



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THE TRANSFER PROCEDURE

Our transfer system in Northern Ireland is selective at the age of 11, so children in their final year of primary school may take transfer tests; results of these tests are used by grammar schools to select for admission. Non-grammar schools do not select on the basis of these tests.

Whether your child takes the test or not, you are required to complete an online transfer application. You should seek advice from your Primary School or contact the Education Authority Helpline if you are unsure how to complete your application.

Making your choices

There are lots of places you can get the information you need for individual schools – the Education Authority Northern Ireland website has information on every school in the Belfast Region, individual schools have websites, and a school prospectus is published annually and is available in each secondary school.

Your most important consideration may be how realistic is it that your child will get into the school of their choice. www.eani.org.uk/admissions

Things you must know:

- You need to list at least 4 different schools on the transfer application, in order of preference; however schools often have more applications than places, so it is wise to list all the schools your child can travel to and where they meet the criteria
- Each school has their own 'Criteria' for selecting their pupils: remember that getting a particular score in the transfer tests may not be enough to get into the grammar school sector
- The criteria are listed in order of importance: each school will be different and some schools will require you to name them as first preference on your application

- The online admissions process will open for applications in February. Between March and May schools will consider your transfer application against their admissions criteria
- Initially, your transfer application will be passed to the school named as first preference for consideration; if unsuccessful it is passed to your second preference and so on
- Children who are transferring on a statement of special educational needs have a separate transfer process; in these circumstances guidance will be provided as part of the Statement review

Do your research

- Read through the school prospectus on their website or get a free copy from the school
- Will your child require public transport to get to their chosen schools? - check if they are eligible for free school transport
- What are the admissions criteria for your chosen schools – and how well does your child meet the criteria?
- Be prepared – remember to include all the information requested and upload all supporting documents. Each school will have these set out

in their criteria – this can range from birth certificates to a utility bill with the applicant's address

- Consider how important it is for your child to be staying with friends and siblings when moving school
- Check how popular the school has been in recent years – have they had to reject many applicants?

WORTH REMEMBERING

You can appeal against an admission decision if you think the published criteria have not been applied.

The main steps and key dates for the transfer procedure are published annually on the EA website: www.eani.org.uk/admissions



GETTING THE BEST FROM THE 'OPEN DAY'

While written information is everywhere, only a visit to the school with your child will really give you a feel for it. All schools arrange 'Open Days' for prospective pupils – they usually take place from December to January each year.

Remember, this is an opportunity to showcase the school so you will be able to see the best they have to offer. It is a great opportunity to meet teachers and pupils and see the range of subjects and activities that make the school unique. It is often the best chance you will get to have your questions answered.

In advance

- Plan well ahead – keep evenings and Saturdays during 'open day season' free so that you can get to all the schools you want to see – they happen around the same time each year.
- Look on the school websites and on social media for open day dates - you can also ring the school for details
- Open days are very busy so it can be difficult to see everything – have an idea of what subjects your child might want to know most about/ be excited by and make sure you make that your first port of call
- Find out the strengths of the school – do they specialise in music, languages, ICT, sport?

On the day

- Try to engage the pupils who will show you around – get them to tell you the best things about their school
- Attend the principal's address to understand what is important to the school – how do they look after and nurture their pupils? It's not all about exam success
- The principal will normally explain how the school's admissions criteria operates
- Ask if you can call back to the school if you need to find out more about a subject/activity
- Remember it is about where you child will be happiest, so don't forget about him/her: talk to them throughout the visit – what do they think, what do they like . . .
- Don't forget to have a look at the school grounds too

WORTH REMEMBERING

Don't leave it too late – this is a very important decision. You don't have to wait until year 7 – visit a few schools that interest you when your child is in year 6.

If you can't attend the official open day don't panic – ask if you can make an appointment at an alternative time.



PREPARING FOR THE CHANGE

The primary school will have done some preparation for the transition to secondary school, so it is important that you know what form this has taken. Your child's new school will also have plans to help them adjust to the new routines, and the level and style of the work that is expected.

You probably start thinking about this change before your child; and have just as many concerns as they do. Your job as a parent is to help reduce any worries they might have by talking to them about what is ahead and listening to their concerns.

Make sure your child:

- Understands what is involved – ask them what are they looking forward to? What they think will be different? What they are concerned about?
- Knows about having different teachers, changing classrooms between lessons, behaviour and discipline – what is expected of them?
- Feels comfortable about making new friends. It is great to have their existing friends going to the new school, but they will be able to make new friends
- Isn't concerned about being bullied – all the schools have anti-bullying policies in place and are alert to this
- Isn't worried about travelling alone to school on the school bus – maybe they can meet up with a friend to go together?
- Knows that they can talk to you about their fears

Do your research: what do I need to know?

- What time does the school normally start and end?
- Where do students go on arrival at school?
- What about food? What do they need to bring? Are they allowed 'off-site' at lunchtime?
- What are the transport arrangements; especially if they are involved in after school activities?
- What equipment do they need and when is it needed? – 'get off on the right foot'
- Are there older siblings at schools, children of friends that can help alleviate fears or worries?
- Don't commit to transport arrangements that won't be suitable if your child gets involved in after school activities

Specific requirements

If you know that your child will have special requirements specific to him/her you should plan to deal with these at the earliest possible time.

These could involve; travel, finances, eating arrangements or educational needs.

Your child may have individual requirements the school has not experienced before – to avoid distress and anxiety share your thoughts with the school early.

WORTH REMEMBERING

The best thing you can do for your child is to help them have the 'right attitude' – not to be scared or worried but to enjoy their transition and be confident about their ability to cope.

Make the 'step up' a positive, enjoyable experience.



THE FIRST FEW WEEKS AND MONTHS

The first few weeks will be full of learning for you too. Children seem to grow up really suddenly in their first year at secondary school.

For many, the biggest change is that they have to take more responsibility and there are more opportunities for making decisions and choices.

Even travelling on the school bus can be a challenge: help them cope with the new demands by encouraging them to tell you what has been happening. You haven't had a lot of time to get to know the school. Once your child has moved you will have as many questions.

Remember

- Be alert to their experiences getting to and from school – this is how they can make new friends . . . or not! Ask how they are finding this?
- Not everything starts immediately – clubs and societies maybe take several weeks to get going and sports activities are seasonal
- Don't buy the summer uniform until later – some parents find, to their cost, that year 8 brings a growth spurt
- To keep talking, even when the novelty has worn off and they seem to have less to talk about
- Are they getting used to the new routines? What about new subjects – music, art, design and technology, drama – are these new opportunities for your child?
- Have they been talking to new classmates – making new friends?

Stay in touch with the school

- If you are worried about changes in your child's behaviour that you think may be related to their school experiences ask to meet with the school
- Each school will have a nominated teacher you can contact if a problem arises, usually a Head of Year or teacher in charge of pastoral care
- Year 8 is not just an 'in-between' year. The new school will be trying to sustain learning, helping your child to develop the attitudes, abilities and relationships that will make for educational success
- Know what the process is for taking any issues further – your first point of contact is the Head of Year
- You will be more worried if this is your first child at the school – the school will understand this and expect you to be more questioning

WORTH REMEMBERING

Settling in will take a while; getting used to new routines, managing homeworks, and after school activities etc.

Give it some extra attention at the start of their journey in the 'big school' and you will give them the confidence and ambition to make it a success.



YOU AND THE SCHOOL

Your relationship with the new school should last for up to 7 years, if your child stays on.

There are lots of important decisions you (and your child) will have to make in this time, to make sure he/she gets the most the secondary school can offer, before the adult world beckons.

Establishing a good relationship with the school as soon as you can will make a big difference to how supported they feel at home and school and how well they do.

Communication

- Find out how the school lets you know what is happening/ planned – text messages, school website etc.
- Make sure you have contact details for the key staff – the Head of Year and the Teacher in Charge of pastoral care:
- Remember the Principal is managing the whole school and has very limited availability at times
- Keep copies of any letters from the school, and your child's reports in a file and keep it somewhere safe
- Find out how you can get involved – there are obvious things such as the Parent Teachers Association or the Board of Governors who want to hear from you
- Most schools now have a variety of activities/events that they want to encourage parents to get involved in – go to everything you can; the Carol Service, Prize Day, Plays etc.
- Check if your school uses an e-payment system to pay for school trips and other activities using a secure website called **ParentPay**. This allows you to make payments online or through local stores, where you see the **PayPoint** logo

Dealing with a difficult situation

Most parents at one time or another will have to deal with a difficult situation.

This may be about a child's behaviour in school, problems with their peers or having to request extra support for your child. Below are some tips to help connect with your school at these times.

First things first

- If a situation arises, your first point of contact should be the Head of Year, or the Teacher in Charge of pastoral care to get all the information, and if needed, guidance
- Try to stay calm so that the situation doesn't escalate further
- Don't be tempted to express concerns through social media first – this can be very damaging and can't be undone
- If there have been several incidences, keep a written record
- Speak to the school on how to proceed
- If there has been no progress in dealing with the situation at the first stage – ask for guidance on the school's procedure for solving difficulties – is there a complaints policy available?

- Never feel that you cannot speak with the school staff
- Make sure the school has up to date contact details for you!

WORTH REMEMBERING

You and the school want to make sure your child gets the most the school can offer, before the adult world beckons.

If you have a positive relationship with the school then it is likely your child will have too.



OTHER THINGS

There are lots of other practical considerations that you will have that relate to your own personal circumstances - not least money.

Moving school can easily cost more than you can afford, so it is worth seeking advice on what is available to help offset the costs.

Full details of all the financial help you may be eligible for is available on the Education Authority website: www.eani.org.uk

School uniform - some useful tips

All secondary schools require children to wear school uniform. While most parents hope to be able to buy everything new at the outset; it can be unnecessary

- Don't invest in lots of sports equipment until you know it is needed – don't be afraid to ask the PE staff for advice
- Wait before you buy the summer uniform – some parents find, to their cost, that year 8 brings a growth spurt
- Some schools raise funds by selling 'second hand' or lost property items. Also look out for Recycled School Uniform schemes in your local community. This is a great way to pick up spare items and PE kit
- Name tags on clothing are worth the investment – your child will have a lot to remember and things are easily left behind
- The school's uniform policy will be on the website – not all items are essential so do check before you buy
- The schools will often have recommended stockists for uniform but for some basic items you may be able to shop around

- You could get between £20 and £80 towards uniform (including PE uniform) if you are in an eligible group – it is worth checking – see link overleaf

Transport assistance

The ongoing costs that parents face, is providing for transport costs, as in most cases the new school is further from home than the primary. Assistance with transport is only provided where you have sought and been unable to gain a place to any 'suitable' school within 'statutory walking distance' – this is defined as 3 miles measured by the nearest available walking route. Your order of preference of schools listed on the transfer form will be used to assess your eligibility for help with these costs.

www.eani.org.uk/checktransport

Lunchtime/school meals

Most of our schools prefer pupils to stay on the school site over the lunch period but all will have their own individual rules – it is worth knowing what these are.

Not all schools operate the same system for paying for school meals. The newly built schools normally use a fingerprint recognition system which enables parents to pre-pay for school meals and avoids sending cash to the school. This has the added advantage that it is not possible to identify children in receipt of free school meals.

Other schools hope to transfer to this system but in the meantime they are sensitive to the issue of free school meals and try to avoid making a noticeable distinction.

If you think you may be eligible for free school meals you can get an application form from the Education Authority, your child's school, your local Social Security Office or Citizens Advice Bureau.

You can get full details on eligibility for both free school meals and school uniform via this link:

www.education-support.org.uk/parents/meals-and-uniforms

WORTH REMEMBERING

Your child's school is given extra funding for children entitled to free school meals. It is not necessary for your child to take the meal: the school will still receive the additional funding if your application is successful.

It is therefore in the interest of the school that if you think you may be entitled to the allowance – you should apply for it.



BIG BRAIN CHANGES - TRANSITIONING OF THE BRAIN

This is the start of a period of big emotions, big changes and big challenges.

You may start to notice changes in behaviours around the same time as your child moves to big school but by understanding the adolescent brain as it develops you can help your child through this confusing time.

What's going on?

There are huge differences between the way that the fully mature adult brain and teenage brain work.

- Our brains are made up of lots of connections that we develop from birth
- Teenagers can lose up to fifteen to twenty per cent of the connections in some brain areas.
- While this may sound worrying, it's really not, because the brain is simply making room for a smarter, faster, more efficient adult brain

However, sometimes good stuff is lost too!

This means that you might notice:

- Forgetfulness and disorganisation
- Poor communication, including talking less, grunting or mumbling, and not being able to find the right words
- Negative thoughts and poor self-confidence
- Increased oppositional behaviour
- Increased tiredness and emotional vulnerability
- Emotional and behavioural dysregulation
- Poor choices

Don't worry! This is all a normal part brain 'pruning' and the process from childhood to adulthood

What can you do to help?

Forgetfulness & Disorganisation;

- Make sure your child knows it's not just them.
- Try to remember that your child is not doing it to annoy you!

Tiredness;

- Stick to a schedule and routine and don't encourage excessive lie in time at the weekend
- Encourage your child to wind down 30 minutes to 1 hour before bedtime

Communication;

- One word answers - 'Yep' 'Nope', 'Dunno' are very common
- Be patient. Your child may not even realise they are not communicating clearly.
- You should see a noticeable improvement in communication between the age of 15 and 16

Managing Big Emotions;

- Be the adult; you have the mature brain
- Be kind, compassionate, and loving; Check in, offer small treats, snacks, and physical care.

Decision Making;

- Avoid punishment, shaming and criticism.
- Avoid emotional rejection.
- Help them to understand the consequences of their actions

WORTH REMEMBERING

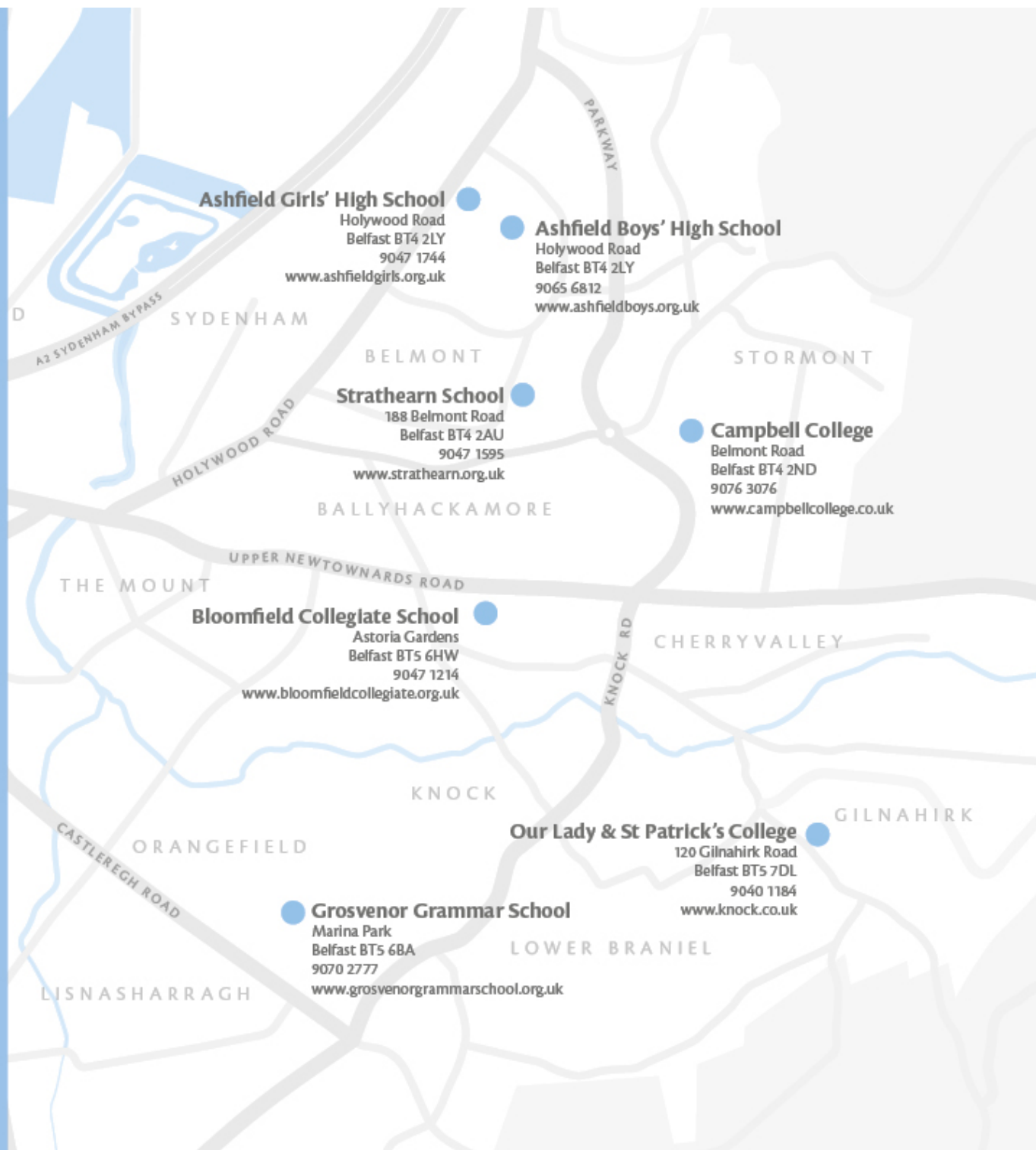
While this time may be challenging, it won't last forever.

There will be mistakes and difficult moments, but you can help your child navigate this bridge to adulthood with support, praise and positivity

8



EAST BELFAST POST PRIMARY SCHOOLS



SURROUNDING SCHOOLS COMMONLY CHOSEN . . .



Aquinas Grammar
Ravenhill Rd
Belfast, BT6 0BY
028 9064 3939
www.aquinasgrammar.com

Breda Academy
Newtownbreda Rd
Belfast, BT8 6PY
028 9064 5374
www.bredaacademy.org

Colaiste Feirste
Falls Road
Belfast, BT12 7PY
028 9032 0707
www.colaisfeirste.com

Dominican College Fortwilliam
Fortwilliam Park
Belfast, BT15 4AQ
028 9037 0298
www.dominicancollege.org.uk

St Dominic's Grammar School
Falls Road
Belfast, BT12 7PY
028 9032 0081
www.stdominics.org.uk

Dundonald High
Upper Newtownards Rd
Castlereagh, BT16 1TH
028 9048 4211
www.dundonaldhigh.co.uk

Hunterhouse College
Upper Lisburn Rd
Belfast, BT10 0LE
028 9061 2293
www.hunterhousecollege.org.uk

St Joseph's College
Ravenhill Rd
Belfast, BT6 0BY
028 9049 1474
www.saintjosephscollege.co.uk

Lagan College
Manse Rd
Belfast, BT8 6SA
028 9040 1810
www.lagancollege.com

St Louise's Comprehensive
Falls Road
Belfast, BT12 6EN
028 9032 5631
www.stlouises.org.uk

Methodist College
Malone Rd
Belfast, BT9 6BY
028 9020 5205
www.methody.org

Priory College
My Lady's Mile
Holywood, BT18 9ER
028 9042 3481
www.priorycollege.co.uk

Sullivan Upper
Belfast Rd
Holywood, BT18 9EP
028 9042 8780
www.sullivanupper.co.uk

Victoria College
Cranmore Park
Belfast, BT9 6JA
028 9066 1506
www.victoriacollege.org.uk

Wellington College
Carolán Rd
Belfast, BT7 3HE
028 9064 2539
www.wellingtoncollegebelfast.org