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Welcome to the very first edition of Pastoral News!

We hope you will find this full of useful tips and hints to support your child on their journey into the senior school.



Ms Shaw, Vice Principal (Pastoral).

The start of a new school year brings with it a number of opportunities for our pupils; from filling in details on the new school planner, all pristine and unused, to focusing on trying out new clubs and activities. For every pupil in the school it is also a time of movement and change, but the pupils for whom this period of transition possibly impacts most are those entering the senior schools for the first time as new Y7.

No amount of preparation can stop the nervousness that might be felt on the first day of "big school", but within a few weeks, and especially after their trip to Derwent Hill, most boys and girls start to find their feet, their confidence and their preferred peer group but for some pupils this can take longer.

Not everyone who starts Y7 will feel comfortable right away. If they come from very small primary schools or haven't had the chance to mix with their peers before the September start; if they are naturally cautious or shy; if they are academically unsure in some areas and feel that everyone around them "gets it" when they don't; if they are worried about getting into trouble even if they have no track record of being in trouble before! All of these feelings - and more -

can lead to it taking a bit longer to settle into Y7, and everyone of those feelings is valid.

So what do we do here at school to support the young people entering Y7?

The children are encouraged to visit the schools before they arrive. We have Jump In Week while they are in Y6 to allow them to experience being taught in the senior school and to meet some teachers. They also get to come to school for an induction day in September (before everyone else starts). They get to meet their form teachers, get their chromebooks and planners and have the chance to find their bearings around the school. We always say to the young people (and their parents) don't panic!

We tell them - you don't have to follow the same path as everyone else. Accept that if you do feel a bit uncertain - that's ok. We encourage all of them to get as involved as possible with co-curricular activities and clubs to expand the circle of people they know. There are regular "check ins" with

form teachers and Heads of Year as well as buddies in older years appointed to spend one on one time with those who need it. We talk to the young people about recognising that it's ok to find some aspects of school difficult, be that on the field or in the classroom, and that all we expect is for

them to do their best. We make it clear there is no shame in needing support or someone to talk to. We also make it known (as widely as possible!) that no child new to the school will receive an MML or demerit in the first half of the term, as they get used to the new systems and expectations of the seniors.



Heidi, the therapy dog, in The Snug.

For those who might need more specialist support we are able to refer to our counsellors and make use of Heidi the therapy dog!

As the adults in school, we as staff remind ourselves never to underestimate the huge change it is to come from any junior school to this large, exciting and thriving senior school. With almost 1000 pupils on site, some of whom must look like grown men and women to the new Y7, it is no surprise that things feel a tad daunting. They had one classroom at junior school and now have to move five times a day - and not necessarily to the same classroom for all of a particular subject's lessons. They have to manoeuvre around a lunch hall where they must choose from at least 10 options most days, and do that in a queue that needs

to move quickly, which merely adds to the pressure of making a speedy choice! They are expected to go from maths, to Latin to PE and turn their brain to very different tasks as soon as they arrive in that room.

And then there are the teachers... they have gone from having one main teacher to having at least 16 over the course of a fortnight and they won't like all of them (regardless of how good that teacher is!). They lose their afternoon break and their day ends later than it did. Not surprisingly they are exhausted!

For some, the aspects of starting a senior school that seem daunting in September might still be problematic for them in June - and that is fine! We know that the young people mature and adapt at different rates and we as a school manage that as best we can.

What can be done at home?

At home there is also much that can be done to support this transition.

The first is to be calm - even if you have an overwhelmed and upset child at the end of a busy week - and try to remember to keep positive and ask "what went well today?". The "tell me two good things one less good thing" rule is often a useful way for them to gain perspective and for parents to get a fuller understanding of the realities of the day.

Remember that the skills any senior school expects a new Y7 to have are not ones that appear overnight on leaving Y6! They are still very young and need support to realise these skills and also, to see when things are getting better.

Discuss with your children small achievable goals e.g. go through the co-curricular timetable and look together at clubs they might like to do; see if they can talk to the teacher about climbing club, even if they are not yet ready to join.

Have a look at the lunch menu and identify what meals they might choose on certain days; see if they can get at least one house point a week; see if they can put their hand up at least once a week/day/lesson.

Praise when these small things are achieved helps the children feel that they are making progress.

For those who might find adapting to senior school much more of a challenge we advocate for "active coping" rather than trying to avoid issues. For example, while the thought of getting an MML for forgetting to bring in one's PE kit might be terrifying, finding out it's actually not that bad is helpful. Expecting a parent to rush in with the PE kit to stop the MML

means that the young person has not necessarily learned to take responsibility for their own organisation and perhaps won't know that most worrisome things, even MMLs, aren't as bad as they might seem! It's more helpful for the child to learn to get a sense of perspective, and to ensure that the child knows to check their planner and pack their bag for the next day before they go to bed.

Going to bed at a reasonable time is an obvious and yet really helpful way of supporting your child as they settle into the new school. They will be tired - possibly shattered - and so need to know that there is a non-negotiable bed time. Routine really helps the move to senior school too.

Limit the amount of time they have on social media. If your child has yet to find their feet socially, negative perceptions of what they think is happening without them, perpetuated by photos and images on tik tok and snap chat, might reinforce any nagging sense of social isolation they have (real or imagined). Don't allow phones in the bedroom, encourage reading or listening to music or podcasts as a way to wind down.

Ensure that the children aren't spending disproportionate amounts of time on their homework. The planner tells them how long they should spend on individual subjects and if they work for the set amount of time, but still haven't finished, just sign their book to this effect. We do not want them working late into the night or stressing because tasks aren't complete.

Encourage your children to be as active as possible. That doesn't just mean thorough school sport, although that is an excellent way to settle into

senior school, but also via rowing, dance, John Muir, walking a dog, etc.

Remind the young people that any worries they have are shared by lots of other people in Y7, whether those people seem anxious or not, and that it is perfectly normal to be worried about settling in, even if it is taking a bit longer for them than for someone else. Some young people find keeping a diary can help to manage their feelings. They can read back and reflect on how they felt then versus how they feel now; others might find drawing or painting of similar use.

For those entering the school outside of Y7, all of the above applies to them as well. We often call the new Y12, "Y11 in suits". The skills required for negotiating the social politics of 6 Form, for independent study and the high levels of organisation that are a must when you have "study periods" don't just appear on day one. Settling into sixth form, being in a class with the opposite sex and realising that you will soon be making the transition to real adulthood can be as daunting for them as starting Y7 is for the 11 year olds. As with those in Year 7, those in Year 12 soon find their feet and a real enjoyment of their new position in the School.

You know your children, be they big or small, better than anyone, so if they seem off, even a little bit, let us know via the form teacher or tutor. We are here to help and we want all the young people to have the best possible experience during their time at Dame Allan's.

Advice from our Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist, Octavia Wilkinson



As Ms Shaw has described, the September transition can be an exciting yet turbulent time emotionally. Her article is packed with sensible advice about helping your child to cope. Feelings of worry and being overwhelmed can, however, come on at any time; your child might have been ok going into Year 7, but suddenly on the eve of Year 8 they are wracked with anxiety. Also, specific pressure points such as going into an exam year, or even starting the GCSE syllabus, can induce lots of feelings of worry. Don't forget, the experience of the pandemic means that their educational journeys to date have been characterised by unpredictability, and the aftermath of this experience will reverberate in different ways for different children.

The approach you take as parents can really shape how manageable the (routine, predictable yet still nerve wracking) experience of moving up a year group can feel to your child.

When they are flooded with anxiety, they might not be in "thinking" mode and may need your more mature adult brain to help them to slow down. If they seem to be "spinning out", simple validation that what they're feeling is understandable can be extremely reassuring.

Help them to identify what has helped them to cope in the past when going through a big change; is it spending time outside? Having plans to look forward to at the weekend? Or the opposite - knowing that they can hibernate when they get to Saturday?! Think with them about who is in their support network and encourage them to be in contact with friends or classmates (if they haven't been already) to ease them into feeling more connected with the world of school, which they have been out of for the long summer break.

Encourage them to think not only about the things that are changing in their lives but also the good things (friends, family, hobbies, sports teams) that will stay the same. If you can, it can be really powerful for parents to tell their children about their own memories of worries about

going back to school, what helped you and how it worked out.

You know your child best?

As has been written already, you know your child best. If you feel that their worry is not abating, don't be afraid to reach out to your child's Head of Year if you feel that they need additional support. There is a wide range of support available, from sixth form mentors to help with organisation and academics, to check-ins with a trusted teacher or sessions within the school counselling service. For students taking public exams, there is plenty of additional support around general wellbeing and specific issues to do with exam anxiety.

Encourage your young person to check out [kooth.com](https://www.kooth.com), the Young Minds and Childline websites for trusted advice and guidance.

Useful websites:

<https://www.kooth.com/>

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/>

<https://www.childline.org.uk/>



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