# SUPPORTING A POSITIVE TRANSITION TO SECONDARY SCHOOL IN 2024

Note to schools: This guidance should be read in conjunction with policy and guidance in the [Policy and Advisory Library](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/transition-year-6-7/guidance/student-data-transfer), including student data transfer and information sharing requirements.

Key Points:

* Supporting students transitioning to Year 7 is a key shared priority for primary and secondary schools.
* A positive secondary school transition is always important but due to the disruptions of recent years school should consider individual students’ learning experiences across the upper primary years and how they can effectively meet the needs of current Year 6 students and families as they transition to secondary school in 2024.

**Introduction**

This resource provides more detailed guidance on designing transition programs and implementing Orientation Day activities to effectively respond to the particular needs of the current cohort of Year 6 students, stemming from the potential impact of disruptions to their learning across their upper primary years.

Term 4 is a critical period for Year 6 students moving into Year 7 next year. Ensuring that this transition is as successful as possible is a shared priority of primary and secondary schools. A focus for Term 4 is for students to finish the year strong and with confidence to progress to the next year level.

The transition from primary to secondary school is a significant development milestone for students as it coincides with the transition from childhood to adolescence. This period of students’ lives can be turbulent, as they adjust to changes in their personal, social, and educational environments.

The current Year 6 students have experienced COVID-19 pandemic-related disruptions to their later years of primary school. Many students are likely to need additional support to adjust to the changes.

Effective practices and opportunities to improve and better support transition to secondary school, while always important, are now even more critical. The final primary school years, referred to as the preparation phase of transition, are important for development and building readiness for secondary school.

Good relationships, meaningful participation of students and families, and collaborative partnerships between primary and secondary schools are all key to positive transitions. Positive transitions occur when students feel prepared for their move and have a sense of belonging and familiarity in their new learning community.

This advice sits in the context of the collaborative work that primary and secondary schools have already been doing within their local networks, both to plan transition programs and to share effective transition processes and practices.

**TRANSITION PROGRAMS TO PREPARE FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL – For Primary and Secondary Schools**

The preparation phase of transition includes programs and activities designed to introduce and prepare primary school students and their families for their transition to secondary school. The more prepared students and their families are for the move, the more successful the transition is likely to be.

The current cohort of Year 6 students has experienced disruptions in their later years of primary school. It is reasonable to expect that some students may need more support in the transition to secondary school than would have been the case under normal circumstances. While it is always important to help students feel ready and be prepared to transition to secondary school, it is even more important for these students. Primary and secondary schools can prepare to support their Year 6/future Year 7 cohort and their families by:

* developing and communicating transitions programs to your school community to ensure students and families are aware of the planned transitions activities.
* sharing comprehensive student transition information across settings. Primary schools are strongly encouraged to include detailed information about each student’s engagement, wellbeing and achievement, and any support plans in place, including Individual Learning Plans in transition statements. See the [PAL guidance on student data transfer](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/transition-year-6-7/guidance/student-data-transfer) for associated requirements for the sharing of student information.
* planning for each student’s transition to support continuity of learning and wellbeing.
* providing differentiated transitions programs for students who may need additional support.

**Transition activities at primary schools**

The priority in the preparation phase of transition is to help students feel ready for secondary school. Moving to secondary school can make some students feel anxious when they do not know what to expect. Provide students with ample opportunity to become familiar with the expectations, experience, and environment of secondary school. This will minimise the unknown and can help students feel prepared.

The following are some suggestions of transition activities that primary schools can provide to help their Year 6 students feel ready and prepared for secondary school.

**Learning about secondary school**

Primary schools can help students learn about secondary school to minimise anxiety about the unknown. To achieve this, primary schools undertake the following activities:

* A student research project and presentation on their confirmed new school. They could identify classmates moving to the same school and other people they know who attend that school. They could plan school travel routes with classmates travelling the same route.
* Codesign pre- and post‑activities around the statewide Orientation Day. This could include student checklists of what they want to find out about their confirmed secondary school on the day.
* Attend local secondary school student music and theatre performances and art shows.
* Encourage student participation in any extra transition sessions offered by their confirmed secondary school.
* Invite local Year 7 or 8 students, with a teacher, to visit their former primary school to talk to Year 6 students about their secondary school and transition experiences, providing an opportunity for primary school student questions. This could also be done virtually.
* Invite local secondary school Year 7 or 8 teachers and/or leaders to talk to Year 6 students about what to expect in secondary school. This could also be done virtually.
* Host local secondary school student music performances and theatre productions in primary schools, where feasible.
* Share stories of former students who have moved to secondary school.
* Invite older secondary school siblings of Year 6 students to talk about their experience of moving to secondary school.

**Developing organisational skills**

Primary schools can build organisational skills by undertaking the following activities:

* Learning about and putting into practice organisational tools like digital and paper-based diaries and calendars, checklists, and other visual organisers; planning routines for the new school year including wake-up time, travel time, new school start time, new school finish time, after-school activities and commitments, home time etc.
* Anticipating what additional equipment students may need for their new school (for example, a sports uniform, container for Food Technology, calculator, textbooks, folders) and practising how to use visual organisers to develop skills to have the correct equipment when required.
* Practising reading a timetable and using it to know when it is time to move to different parts of the school for different classes, for example the art room, music room, sports field, library, computer lab, kitchen garden, hall, etc.

**Developing friendship skills**

Adolescent learners have a heightened need for connectedness and relationships during the transition period and they can experience challenges related to changing friendship dynamics. Research shows that students who develop strong peer friendships and connections have improved outcomes and resilience. Over recent years students have had less opportunity to develop their social and emotional skills through interacting with their peers and engaging in the social aspect of learning.

* [Student Transition and Resilience Training](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/transition/startresource.pdf) (START) resource for has a module on friendship skills, with six friendship activities developed to be delivered to Year 6 and 7 students.

**Year 6 rites of passage**

Providing students with Year 6 milestone, rites of passage and ritual opportunities contributes to their ongoing development and can support a sense of preparedness for secondary school. Acknowledging, celebrating and taking account of their life stage, as well as finding closure, is important to help students feel ready for the next stage of their lives. Primary schools can consider:

* hosting formal ceremonies such as graduations, presentations and performances to mark the end of primary school.
* arranging for adults (for example, parents, carers, teachers) to reflect on and share stories of the child’s primary school years and their growth and development over those years.
* having the school community, including teachers and younger students, say farewell to the Year 6 students.

providing an opportunity for the Year 6 students to formally say goodbye to their school and thank their teachers; this could be a goodbye letter, speech or recorded video.

**Transition activities at secondary schools**

Due to students’ learning experiences over recent years, it may take extra time to establish routines for schools, students and their families as new Year 7 students adjust to the changes. It is importantthat everyone involved is aware of and responsive to this. Planning for each student’s transition is vital to supporting continuity of learning and wellbeing for the following year.

**Engaging families**

Actively engaging families early and regularly during a student’s transition to secondary school can build their familiarity and confidence with the school setting, including ensuring parents and carers know how to contact the school and who to speak to should they need to discuss the needs of their child. This could include your school’s Year 7 leader, multicultural worker, wellbeing leader and inclusion leader.

It is important that families worried their child might not be ready for secondary school know that schools welcome and support students at different stages in their development. Despite any disruptions students may have experienced in their later primary school years, they will have developed a range of skills and abilities that form the basis for further learning and teaching.

Some families may need extra reassurance, especially first-time Year 7 families. Ways to support families with the transition might include:

* facilitating families meeting with secondary school leaders and teachers to learn more about the school and how the school will support their child’s transition and learning and wellbeing. This could be informally and through information sessions or school tours; a combination of approaches will make these activities more accessible and inviting to different families.
* inviting current Year 7 parents and carers to speak at information sessions. Hearing first-hand from current families about their experiences of partnering with the secondary school, supporting their Year 7 child’s learning at home and navigating adolescence, will help alleviate any concerns future parents or carers might have.

Consider ways to reach families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, some of whom may feel less confident attending information sessions in person. This could include:

* accessing [translation services](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/interpreting-and-translation-services/policy) and reaching out to families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
* [10 Tips for Starting Secondary School](https://www.vic.gov.au/tips-starting-school) is available to download in ten different languages.
* using a community liaison agency in your network, or parent/carer volunteers if suitable.

**Engaging students**

Leading up to the statewide Orientation Day, on Tuesday 12 December 2023, consider ways that your school could engage with incoming Year 7 students that will help prepare them for the day and to transition to secondary school. Suggestions include:

* be explicit about the school meeting point for Orientation Day to and providing a map can alleviate student uncertainty.
* survey the incoming students about what they wish to experience on their Orientation Day .and what they want to know about the school before the day or before they start Year 7.
* provide an avenue for anonymous student questions to be addressed during Orientation Day
* meet with students and their families to develop individual transition plans for students identified as requiring differentiated transitions support.
* arrange for Year 7 teachers to visit Year 6 students (accompanied by selected Year 7/8 students) at their primary school, to engage with and observe students in their familiar setting.

**Transitions support for current Year 7 and 8 students**

Current Year 7 and 8 students have also experienced disruption over recent years which may have impacted their transition experiences, including to their induction phase (Year 7) and consolidation phase (Year 8). These cohorts of students may need more support than usual to establish a sense of school belonging, navigate their friendships and build their social and emotional skills.

Schools should consider providing transition activities to prepare these students as they move into the next year level. In addition to student learning needs, decisions around class groupings should also take into account the social and emotional needs of students moving into Years 8 and 9.

**ORIENTATION DAY ACTIVITIES FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

Orientation Day is a major event during the Transfer Phase. Orientation Day activities may require more focus on the social and emotional needs of new students, acknowledging the unique challenges incoming Year 7 students have had to contend with over the past few years.

Following are some activities to consider for Orientation Day programs:

**Building peer connections and connectedness to school**

Secondary schools can help establish peer connections by undertaking the following activities on Orientation Day:

* Connect students with some of their primary school friends as well as with new classmates, potential new friends, and students from other year levels to ease the settling in process.
* Introduce members in the new Year 7 class groups and run ‘getting to know you’ activities (current Year 7 and 8 students may be able to assist with ideas and running activities).
* Small group activities to allow new Year 7 students to meet and get to know the team of Year 7 teachers, including introducing a dedicated trusted adult as a point of contact in school for each student.
* Peer support students designing and running ‘get to know you’ buddy sessions to enable new students to make connections with students from other year levels.

**Minimising anxiety by minimising the unknown**

Secondary schools can help minimise student anxiety by undertaking the following activities on Orientation Day:

* Student-led school tours, including:
  + a walk-through of key spaces in the school, referencing a school map
  + highlighting cultural aspects of the school
  + highlighting wellbeing aspects of the school
  + explaining room numbering systems
  + introducing key school staff
* Mini ‘taster’ experiences in specialist classes.
* Demonstrations of school-specific items such as uniforms, equipment and lockers.
* Explanation and how to read the timetable, and tips for being organised, including locker set up, and how to move between classes, and who to see or what to do if students get lost or forget an item from their locker.
* Treasure hunt using secondary school map to locate key school spaces, including classrooms, staff offices, outdoor spaces, canteen, library, and first aid.
* Presentations on school opportunities including sports, arts, excursions, camps and clubs, including clear instructions on how and when to get involved.
* Providing an avenue for anonymous student questions to be addressed during day.
* Meeting the student wellbeing team and learning about support and how to access it and other help-seeking strategies.

**Learning confidence and continuity**

Secondary schools can build learning confidence and establish learning continuity by undertaking the following activities on Orientation Day:

* Students creating Orientation Day passport including all of the activities for the day, to be submitted to the secondary school as a record of student engagement.
* Students could complete a written or verbal task introducing themselves to their teachers, including what they want their teachers to know about them as learners as well as what they are anticipating, looking forward to and/or are a bit anxious about secondary school
* Students have an opportunity to reflect on and share their experiences of their last years of primary school and the skills and knowledge they bring to secondary school.
* Students engaging in numeracy based practical activities. For fun, team-based numeracy problem-solving activities take inspiration from the [Middle Years Maths Challenges](https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/Pages/mymc)

**THE START OF YEAR 7**

The induction phase of transition commences on the first day of secondary school. As students learn best when they have good wellbeing, engagement and school connectedness, new students and the school community will benefit greatly by investing time and effort in transition programs early in the school year.

Research shows that students who develop strong peer friendships and connections have improved outcomes and resilience. As a result of the last few years, there may be some students who are likely to require additional support to develop the skills to navigate the ongoing fluidity of friendships, learning confidence and connectedness to their new learning community.

**Importance of monitoring attendance**

Students are more likely to experience a positive transition to secondary school when they regularly attend school, with attendance during the first month being a particularly important early indicator of future patterns. Research shows that the majority of students who miss four or more days of their first month of secondary school go on to become chronic absentees. Closely monitoring attendance for all new Year 7 students in the first 30 days of secondary school is key to identifying and responding to any early signs of disengagement.

Where concerning patterns of absence are identified, an early intervention approach can be implemented to avoid absences becoming chronic. Strong engagement with families is critical in such situations as is support for the student to establish relationships with peers and with a trusted adult. The [Schools Guide to Attendance](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/schools-guide-to-attendance.pdf) in the Attendance PAL pages includes information to assist schools to address attendance issues.

**Supporting Year 7 students**

Building on Orientation Day activities, following are some considerations and resources for induction phase transitions programs to build peer connections and connectedness to school as well as learning confidence and continuity:

*Building peer connections and connectedness to school*

Secondary schools can help build peer connections by undertaking the following activities at the start of Year 7:

* Provide opportunities for students and teachers to get to know each other to build positive and supportive relationships in the classroom and create a sense of belonging for students as they adapt to their new school environment.
* Enable regular contact for students with their allocated dedicated trusted adult through timetable and curriculum design e.g., homeroom or advisory teacher.
* Continue student-led peer support programs throughout term one and beyond to solidify connections with students in other year levels.
* Prioritise student voice, agency and leadership opportunities to develop and implement activities that new students would find helpful see [Amplify](https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/pages/amplify) or details.
* Consider the particular needs of students from migrant backgrounds, who may be relatively new to Australia, may speak English as an additional language, and may face additional barriers to building peer connections and connectedness to school.

The following resources will support this phase:

* The [Student Transition and Resilience Training](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/transition/startresource.pdf) ([[START](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/transition/startresource.pdf)](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/transition/startresource.pdf)) resource has a module on friendship skills, with six friendship activities developed to be delivered to Grade 6 and Year 7 students.
* The [Level 7 - 8 Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships](https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/Resource/LandingPage?ObjectId=2cb0472f-c903-4c2d-a053-a330df31eefe) learning materials have been designed for teachers to develop students' social, emotional and positive relationship skills.
* Using the Victorian Curriculum F – 10 [Personal and Social Capability](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/personal-and-social-capability/introduction/rationale-and-aims) to help students in their emotional and social development.

*Learning confidence and continuity*

Whilst it will be important for teachers to meet students at their point of learning need, and to do so may require implementing some assessment strategies, it will be equally important to find a balance between assessment and activities that will encourage students to settle in and develop their social and emotional capabilities.

Secondary schools can help build learning confidence and improve learning continuity by undertaking the following activities at the start of Year 7:

* Building in frequent “brain breaks” to reduce students becoming overwhelmed in their new learning environment.
* Using the Victorian Curriculum F – 10 [Personal and Social Capability](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/personal-and-social-capability/introduction/rationale-and-aims) to help students in their emotional and social development.
* Using the [Student Transition and Resilience Training](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/transition/startresource.pdf) (START) for a range of transitions and resilience-building activities.
* Discussing with your career practitioner the implementation of the [My Career Portfolio](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/careers/Pages/my-career-portfolio.aspx) at Year 7. Reflection and goal setting activities in the My Career Portfolio can help students prepare for secondary school with a sense of purpose and optimism. Studentscan participate in self-explorationactivities to understand more about themselves — their interests, strengths and aspirations — and the changing world of work.

**DIFFERENTIATED TRANSITIONS SUPPORT – For Primary and Secondary Schools**

The transition to secondary school can be especially challenging for students and families from disadvantaged backgrounds, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and for students with disability. These students may require additional support during transition.

Once students requiring additional support have been identified, consider:

* the options to best support them in the school’s local context,
* how primary and secondary schools can partner to support their shared students’ transition.
* holding joint transition student support group meetings and developing individual transitions plans.

An [Individual Education Plan](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/individual-education-plans-ieps/policy) (IEP) can assist in planning for differentiated teaching and continuity of learning. IEPs are required for students in statutory out-of-home care (OOHC), Koorie students and students receiving support through Disability Inclusion (DI) or the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD).

Equity funding can be pooled with network schools to further support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The funding can be used for social disadvantage, children with disability and for English as an Additional Language. For more information about equity funding, refer to [Student Resource Package - Equity Funding (Student Based Funding)](https://www.vic.gov.au/koorie-education-coordinator-contact-details)

**Supporting Student Wellbeing**

* The [Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolkit](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/mentalhealth/Pages/mentalhealthtoolkit.aspx) provides guidance and resources on mental health promotion. It draws from existing Department resources, guidance and programs and leverages expert external advice on promoting and supporting mental health in schools. It contains information for classroom teachers, parents/carers and students.

**Supporting Students with Disability**

* Students with disability may have support requirements to enable successful transition. For more information see: [Students with Disability: Policy | education.vic.gov.au](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/students-disability/policy)
* Under the, [Disability Standards for Education 2005](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2005L00767) schools are required to make reasonable adjustments for students with disability. For further information see: [Making reasonable adjustments (education.vic.gov.au)](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/learningneeds/Pages/reasonable-adjustments.aspx)

**Supporting Vulnerable Cohorts**

* The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) developed resource, [English as an additional language](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/support/diversity/eal/Pages/ealcurric.aspx) (EAL), supports EAL learners to learn English in mainstream schools.
* [Koorie Education Coordinators](https://www.vic.gov.au/koorie-education-coordinator-contact-details) can arrange for a Regional Koorie Engagement Support Officer to work with Koorie children and families.
* Refer to [Attendance](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/attendance/resources) for a range of resources to support student engagement and attendance.
* The [Navigator](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/behaviour/engagement/Pages/navigator.aspx) program supports disengaged young people return to education and learning.
* [LOOKOUT](https://www.vic.gov.au/lookout-education-support-centres) Education Support Centres are designed to boost the capacity of schools, carers, child protections practitioners and out-of-home care services to improve outcomes for children and young people living in out-of-home care. [Child Protection and Child Safe Standards (PROTECT)](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/childprotection/Pages/default.aspx) provides information and guidance on identifying and responding to child abuse.

**Curriculum Planning and Learning Support**

* Comprehensive and rich [Learning Sequences](https://learningsequences.educationapps.vic.gov.au/) have been developed in mathematics and English. These sequences exemplify how learning can be staged to support and enable optimal growth in student learning across Years 5 to 8. They are comprehensively mapped to the Victorian Curriculum and offer suggested learning intentions and success criteria. They can be used to develop shared learning programs between primary and secondary schools.
* The [Tutor Learning Initiative](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/tutor-learning-initiative/policy) provides additional support to students whose learning has been affected as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
* Using [High Impact Teaching Strategies](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/improve/Pages/hits.aspx) (HITS) can contribute to learning. There are ten instructional practices teachers can use, including one focused on differentiated teaching.
* The [Personal and Social Capability](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/personal-and-social-capability/introduction/rationale-and-aims) curriculum is essential in enabling students to understand themselves and others, and manage their relationships, lives, work and learning more effectively.
* [Middle Years Maths Challenges](https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/Pages/mymc) (MYMC) support student engagement in middle years mathematics.
* [Formative assessment strategies for teaching and learning (DOCX)](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/formative-assessment-strategies-for-teaching-and-learning.docx) describes 17 evidence-based strategies for effective formative assessment.
* The [High Ability Toolkit](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/high-ability-toolkit/Pages/high-ability-toolkit.aspx) supports teachers and schools to identify, meet the needs and support high ability students.

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