# SUPPORTING A POSITIVE TRANSITION TO SECONDARY SCHOOL IN 2022

Key Points:

* Supporting students transitioning to Year 7 in 2022 will be a key shared priority for primary and secondary schools.
* A positive school transition is always important but, due to the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools should consider individual students’ learning experiences over the last two years, and how they can meet the needs of their new students and families as they transition to secondary school in 2022.

As Victoria has reached vital COVID-19 vaccinations targets, and in line with the School Operations Guide effective from 1 November 2020, schools can plan for and run in-person events and activities, including transition activities, celebrations and graduations. These events will be conducted in line with [Victoria's Roadmap: Delivering the National Plan](https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/victorias-roadmap-delivering-national-plan), and are subject to public health advice, including, in some cases, public gathering limits and density requirements.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented change to Victoria’s education system. The last two years have been difficult for many students and their families. Despite the challenges, students have continued with their learning and gained new skills.

A focus for Term 4 is for students to finish the year strong and with the confidence to progress to the next year level in 2022. Term 4 is a critical period for Grade 6 students moving into Year 7 next year. Ensuring that this transition is as successful as possible should be a shared priority of primary and secondary schools.

The transition from primary to secondary school is a significant development milestone for students. Coinciding 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. Students are likely to need additional support to adjust to the changes, which may take longer, due to the COVID-19 pandemic-related disruptions.

Compared to this year’s Year 7 cohort, students transitioning to secondary school in 2022 may have an even greater range of diverse and acute needs. Current Grade 6 students have experienced disruptions to their two final years of primary school. Referred to as the transition preparation phase, these two years are important for development and building readiness for secondary school. Also, increased numbers of families are experiencing vulnerability. It is likely that challenges will be even greater for students and families from disadvantaged backgrounds, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and for students with diagnosed disabilities and additional needs.

Effective practices and opportunities to improve and better support transition to secondary school, while always important, are now even more critical.

This advice supports schools to prepare for and engage with effective transition to secondary school practices to support the needs of Year 7 students starting school in 2022.

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. This collaboration is particularly important as schools, students and families are working in a COVID-affected environment.   
Revising and building on the transition approaches and contingency plans that were developed last year will be essential for transition practice this year.

**EFFECTIVE TRANSITION PRACTICES AND SUPPORTING CONTINUITY OF LEARNING – For Primary and Secondary Schools**

Good relationships and the active participation of students, families, primary and secondary schools are 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 environment.

All people involved in the transition must work together in partnership to support positive student transition.

There are several effective transitions practices that support this, noting that they could be adapted to align with COVID-19 health and safety advice depending on the nature of the activity:

* **Early and open communication between Grade 6 and Year 7 teachers** to discuss:
  + strategies and practices that can be incorporated across settings to support continuity of learning
  + issues or concerns that are specific and possibly unique to the current situation and can be more effectively addressed collaboratively
  + strategies to further bolster the emotional, psychological and social preparedness of incoming Year 7 students for the challenges and dynamics of secondary school. This might include video conferencing or phone meetings in Term 4.
* **Sharing comprehensive student transition information across settings**. In addition to student information regularly requested by secondary schools, this year it will be important for primary schools to provide information specific to their experience of remote learning. Primary schools are strongly encouraged to include in transition statements detailed information about each student’s:
* engagement during remote learning
* wellbeing during remote learning
* achievement during remote learning
* family engagement during remote learning
* any support plans in place, including Individual Learning Plans.
* **Grade 6 students visiting their new school** to meet the Year 7 team and to become familiar with classrooms, school buildings and amenities. Preparing videos with students, where possible, to share across settings could be considered as an alternative.
* **Year 7 teachers** **visiting Grade 6 students** (potentially accompanied by selected Year 7/8 students) at their primary school or through virtual meetings.
* **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 development. This could be informally or through information sessions or school tours, ensuring alignment with public gathering limits and density requirements. Preparing ‘meet the principal’ or ‘meet the Year 7 team’ videos, video conference meetings and virtual school tours could be considered as alternatives or may supplement in-person opportunities.
* **Families receiving information about transition to secondary school** and how best to support their child. Schools can refer families to the department’s [tips for starting secondary school](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/going-to-school/Pages/tips-starting-school.aspx) and tips to support their child’s [wellbeing and mental health](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/learning/Pages/home-learning-screentime-wellbeing.aspx). Schools could consider engaging families through their website, social media, newsletters, emails or information packs.
* Schools providing **opportunities for families of new Year 7 students to connect with each other**, such as collecting and distributing contact details of consenting families, as well as gaining advice from parents/carers of current Year 7 or 8 students through video conferencing or a recorded presentation. ‘First-time Year 7’ families might find this especially helpful.
* Schools offering **buddy programs** to help improve student’s adjustment and engagement with secondary school.

**TRANSITON PROGRAMS TO PREPARE FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL IN 2022 – For Primary and Secondary Schools**

The preparation phase of transition includes 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.

Unique to this cohort of current Grade 6 students is the disruption to their two final years of primary school, some of whom may have had difficulty fully engaging in remote learning. It is reasonable to expect that some students will exhibit less readiness for 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.

Schools can prepare to support their Grade 6/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
* identifying transition coordinators, or other recognised staff, responsible for developing and managing transition programs
* planning for each student’s transition now, to support continuity of learning in 2022
* identifying and acknowledging any students who may have disengaged from education in 2021 and implementing strategies to support their re-engagement in 2022.

**Primary Schools**

Depending on the timing of transitions programs across Term 4, the following are some suggestions of transition activities that primary schools can provide to help their Grade 6 students feel ready and prepared for secondary school.

Learning about secondary school

* One way to help students feel less anxious about their new school is for them to learn about it, for example, doing a research project and presentation on their new school, identifying other classmates moving to the same school, and planning school travel routes and classmates travelling the same route.

Developing organisational skills

* 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

Research shows that students who develop strong peer friendships and connections have improved outcomes and resilience. Over the last two years students will have had less opportunity to develop their social and emotional skills through interacting with their peers and to engage in the social aspect of learning. Students are likely to require additional support to develop the skills to navigate the fluidity of friendships at this stage. The [Student Transition and Resilience Training](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/transition/startresource.pdf) (START) resource has a module on friendship skills, with six friendship activities developed to be delivered to Grade 6 and Year 7 students.

Providing Grade 6 rites of passage

Providing students with Grade 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 of the next stage of their lives. Consider how your school might provide one or more of the following opportunities, even if they may need to be adapted to align with COVID-19 health and safety advice. A scaled back version of a rite of passage event is preferable to no event at all. It is essential to acknowledge the conclusion of primary school for these students, even if it must be in a more limited capacity compared to usual.

* 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 Grade 6 students.
* Providing an opportunity for the Grade 6 students to formally say goodbye to their school and thank their teachers; this could be a goodbye letter, speech or recorded video.
* Providing Grade 6 students with experiences that can replace other opportunities that they may have missed out on (for example, camps). This could include some leadership responsibility with other year levels, like organising and leading grade or year level assemblies, or arts or sports events for other year levels, leading school tours, and/or contributing to prep transition days.

**Secondary Schools**

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 important that everyone involved is aware of and responsive to this. Planning for each student’s transition now will be vital to supporting continuity of learning in 2022.

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/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.

Having a student starting secondary school can make some families anxious and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic means it is likely that some families will need extra reassurance. Consider providing families with strategies to support their child’s secondary education at home.

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 and, no matter what experiences students have had in Grades 5 and 6, they will have developed a range of skills and abilities that form the basis for further learning and teaching.

As there may be less opportunity for face-to-face communication with families, schools should think about how they can reinforce this message to families. This could include:

* increasing your normal communications and providing FAQs, as well as increasing opportunities for remote engagement between school staff and families
* 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.education.vic.gov.au/parents/going-to-school/Pages/tips-starting-school.aspx) 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, which is scheduled for Tuesday 7 December 2021, consider ways that your school could engage with your incoming Year 7 students that will help prepare them for the day and to transition to secondary school. Even very simple things like being explicit about the school meeting point for Orientation Day can go a long way to alleviate student uncertainty and anxiety. Other suggestions include:

* surveying 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
* holding a student question and answer session, where Grade 6 students submit questions about secondary school and current Year 7 students or students from other year levels provide the answers (questions and answers are recorded)
* providing an avenue for anonymous student questions to be addressed during Orientation Day
* meeting with students and their families to develop individual transition plans for students identified as requiring differentiated transitions support.

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

Current Year 7 and 8 students have also experienced disruption to their experiences of transition, including to their orientation phase (Year 7) and consolidation phase (Year 8). Some students may have developed a greater appreciation of friendship due to their experience of remote learning. Others may feel disconnected and withdrawn from school and their friends and peers. 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 Year 8 and 9.

**ORIENTATION DAY ACTIVITIES – For Secondary Schools**

Orientation Day on Tuesday 7 December 2021 is planned to proceed in line with health and safety advice at the time. Therefore, depending on the nature of your usual Orientation Day activities, your program may look different to previous years.

Orientation Day activities may require more focus on the social and emotional needs of your new students, acknowledging the unique challenges incoming Year 7 students have had to contend with over the past two years.

The following are some activities to consider for your Orientation Day program. These could be undertaken onsite or adapted using video conferencing, pre-recorded videos, or printed material to supplement on-site experiences.

* Introducing members in the Year 7 class groups and ‘getting to know you’ activities. This might require more time and attention than previous years.
* Meeting the team of Year 7 teachers for 2022.
* 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 staff.
* Students completing a written task introducing themselves to their teachers, including their secondary school anticipations.
* Students having the opportunity to reflect on and share their experiences of remote learning with their teachers.
* Mini ‘taster’ classes.
* Meeting the student support team.
* Peer support students running ‘get to know you’ buddy sessions.
* Demonstrations of school specific uniforms, equipment and how to read the timetable.
* Tips for being organised and how to move between classes.
* Presentations on school opportunities including sports, arts, excursions, camps and clubs.
* Students planning their travel route to secondary school, including schedules, ticketing and costs, and identifying other classmates using the same travel route
* Orientation Day passport including of all the activities for the day, to be submitted to the secondary school as a record of student engagement.
* Treasure hunt using secondary school map to locate key school spaces, including classrooms, staff offices, outdoor spaces, canteen, library, and first aid.

**THE START OF YEAR 7 IN 2022 – For Secondary Schools**

The COVID-19 disruptions in 2020 and 2021 have seen families supporting their children with learning from home across grades 5 and 6. However, there will be some students in the 2022 Year 7 cohort who have not participated fully in their final years of primary school or who experienced some level of educational disengagement. Students will have had fewer opportunities for peer interaction which is important for ongoing social and emotional skill development and identity formation. Moreover, students from disadvantaged or culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may have experienced additional challenges to their remote learning. Students may not have had the opportunity to fully participate in transition activities provided by their primary school.

Schools should consider adopting a more flexible approach in the classroom to help their Year 7 cohorts ease into school. Some ideas and material to support this include:

* Providing more opportunities than usual 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.
* Whilst it will be important for teachers to meet students at their point of learning need, and to do so will require implementing 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.
* Research shows that students who develop strong peer friendships and connections have improved outcomes and resilience. Over the last two years students will have had less opportunity to develop their social and emotional skills through interacting with their peers and to engage in the social aspect of learning. Students may present as less resilient compared to previous Year 7 cohorts and are likely to continue to require additional support to develop the skills to navigate the fluidity of friendships at this stage. The [Student Transition and Resilience Training](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/Pages/production.aspx#/app/workspace) ([[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.
* [Respectful Relationships](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/respectfulrelationships.aspx) to help students build healthy relationships, resilience and confidence.
* Building in frequent brain breaks.
* 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 (START)](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/Pages/production.aspx#/app/workspace) for a range of transitions and resilience-building activities. For more information on the Grade 6 to Year 7 transition and how it can be used by teachers refer to, [Guidance on successful transitions - Year 6 to 7](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/transition-year-6-7/guidance) on the department’s website.
* 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 2022 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.
* Revisiting and refining school-wide approaches and strategies to recognising and supporting students displaying early signs of disengagement or attendance issues, recognising the importance of establishing strong attendance patterns early in the school year.

Drawing upon the expertise of Area and Regional teams early, for students who are experiencing additional difficulties transitioning to Year 7 or are at an increased risk of disengagement.

**TOOLS TO SUPPORT EFFECTIVE TRANSITION AND DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING – For Primary and Secondary Schools**

Family circumstances may have changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The family environment of students starting secondary school in 2022, and periods of remote learning over a two year period, requires schools to consider effective transition practices differently.

While it is likely the entire 2022 Year 7 cohort would benefit from an increased focus on social and emotional development, vulnerable students may require a differentiated learning approach.

To identify students experiencing vulnerability you can use the [Students at Risk Planning Tool](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/sites/i/Shared%20Documents/students-at-risk-planning-tool.docx&action=default) which helps you to assess, plan and provide for their needs. Regional Health and Wellbeing key contacts can support schools to use the tool.

Once you have identified the students requiring additional support, consider the options to best support them in your school’s local context. Depending on the needs of the student, you may consider developing an [Individual Education Plan](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/individual-education-plans-ieps/policy) (IEP) to assist you to plan for differentiated teaching and continuity of learning. IEPs are required for students in statutory out-of-home care (OOHC), Koorie students and students receiving funding through the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD).

Schools should consider using their equity funding to further support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Equity funding is one of the tools schools can use to respond to the needs of their vulnerable cohorts. The funding can be used for social disadvantage, children with disabilities and for English as an Additional Language.

Schools can also pool this funding with other schools in their network to strengthen their response and strategies to deliver effective transitions during more challenging circumstances.

For more information about equity funding, refer to [Student Resource Package - Equity funding (Student Based Funding)](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/finance/Pages/srpequityfunding.aspx) on the department’s website.

Supporting Students with Disabilities

* [Disability Inclusion Funding and Support](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/disability-inclusion-funding-support/policy) is the new approach to supporting children with disability in Victorian government schools
* Abilities Based Learning and Education Support ([ABLES](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/learningneeds/Pages/ables.aspx)) assists schools to appropriately plan for children with a disability or developmental delay in their new learning environment.
* Initial Student Support Group (SSG) meetings, for students supported by the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD), should focus on planning tailored transitions plans according to student need.
* The [Language and Learning Disabilities Support Program](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/student-resource-package-srp-core-student-learning-allocation-funding-student-based-funding-3-15?Redirect=1) provides schools with resources to support the delivery of teaching and learning programs for students with autism, dyslexia, language and other learning disabilities.

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.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/marrungregional.aspx) can arrange for a Regional Koorie Engagement Support Officer to work with Koorie children and families.
* [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.
* 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.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/lookout.aspx) 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.
* 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.
* School Community Liaison Officers.
* Homework Clubs.
* Council-run youth centres.

Curriculum planning

* 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.