# Supporting a positive start to secondary school in 2021

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| UPDATE (as of 25 November 2020) Year 7 transitions Small group primary to secondary school transition activities can resume onsite. This includes Grade 6 students and their teacher or parents meeting Year 7 educators face to face in the secondary school environment. Group sizes should not exceed gathering limits (20 people indoors and 50 outdoors).  Statewide Orientation Day on 8 December 2020  Orientation Day events can go ahead in an adapted form, with all arrangements in line with public health advice.   * Students must be allocated into a single class-size group for the day (maximum of 30 people, including two staff). * There are no limits to the total number of groups on site at each school. Groups may include students from more than one school. However, these groups must not mix. * All students attending Orientation Day are required to wear face masks (some [exceptions may apply](https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/face-masks-in-schools#exemptions)). This will be a new experience for Grade 6 students, who are not required to wear face masks in primary school. * Peer support or ‘buddy’ programs are permitted from the Last Step and students from other year levels may take part in Orientation Day programs. * Schools may hold transition activities in line with this advice on other days - in addition to, or instead of, the statewide Orientation Day, in line with public health advice.   Ensure to check the latest version of the Operations Guide: [Term 4 Operations Guide](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/Pages/school.aspx#/app/content/3336/support_and_service_(schools)%252Fcoronavirus_and_learning_from_home%252Fschool_operations%252Fschool_operations_guide) |

**KEY POINTS**

* Supporting students transitioning to Year 7 in 2021 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 coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, schools should consider individual students’ learning experiences in 2020 and how they can meet the needs of their new students and families as they transition to secondary school in 2021.

Transition programs may need to be adapted to align with coronavirus (COVID-19) health and safety advice.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has caused unprecedented change to Victoria’s education system. 2020 has been a challenging year, and this has been difficult for many students and their families. Despite the challenges, students have continued with their learning and gained new skills.

A key focus for Term 4 is for students to finish the year strong and with the confidence to progress to the next year level in 2021. 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 coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic-related disruptions.

Students transitioning to secondary school in 2021 may have a greater diversity and acuteness of needs because of disruptions to their final year of primary school and the increased number of families experiencing vulnerability. It is possible 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 2021.

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 the transition processes and to share effective transition processes and practices. This collaboration is particularly important as schools, students and families are working in a new COVID-affected environment and having to develop new approaches and contingency plans for how transitions can occur.

**EFFECTIVE TRANSITION PRACTICES AND SUPPORTING CONTINUITY OF LEARNING – 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 may need to be delivered virtually depending on coronavirus (COVID-19) health and safety advice:

* **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.
* **Students visiting their new school** to meet the Year 7 team and to become familiar with classrooms, school buildings and amenities, if the coronavirus (COVID-19) health and safety advice allows this. Preparing videos with students, where possible, to share across settings could be considered as an alternative – *refer to updated coronavirus (COVID-19) health and safety advice, above.*
* **Year 7 teachers** **visiting Grade 6 students** (potentially accompanied by selected Year 7/8 students) at their primary school or through virtual meetings, depending on coronavirus (COVID-19) health and safety advice.
* **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. 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 - *refer to updated coronavirus (COVID-19) health and safety advice above.*
* **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 via 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 gain advice from parents/carers of current Year 7 or 8 students via video conferencing or a recorded presentation. ‘First-time Year 7’ families might find this especially helpful.
* Schools offering **buddy programs** to help improve children’s adjustment and engagement with school.

In 2020, transition programs and activities will likely need to be adapted to align with current coronavirus (COVID-19) health and safety advice and the needs of the local community. While it will be reasonable for some transitions activities to be hosted virtually, schools should consider equitable access in preparing transition to school activities and, where possible, plan for supplementary face to face activities that could occur when restrictions have been lifted.

**TRANSITON PROGRAMS TO PREPARE FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL IN 2021 – Primary and Secondary Schools**

Schools will need to be prepared to adapt their transition programs in 2021. Students’ learning at primary school in 2020 will have looked different and some students 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. Further, secondary schools may not have as many opportunities as usual to build familiarity with students and their families transitioning to secondary school.

It may take extra time to establish routines for schools, students and their families as students adjust to the changes. It is important that everyone involved is aware of and responsive to this.

Schools can prepare to support their Year 7 cohort and their families by:

* Developing and communicating a community-level transitions program to support community awareness of planned activities.
* Identifying transition coordinators, or other recognised staff, responsible for developing and managing transition programs.
* Actively engaging families early and regularly during a student’s transition to secondary school to 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.
* Providing families with details of your school’s multicultural worker, if applicable.
* Planning for each student’s transition now, to support continuity of learning in 2021.
* Providing families with strategies to support their child’s secondary education.
* Recognising and acknowledging any students who may have disengaged from education in 2020 and implementing strategies to support their engagement in 2021.

Having a student starting secondary school can make some families anxious and the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic means it is likely that some families will need extra reassurance.

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 Grade 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 and reaching out to families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, see [Interpreting and translation services](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/interpreting-and-translation-services/policy).
* [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.

## ORIENTATION ACTIVITIES – Secondary Schools

Orientation Day is scheduled for Tuesday 8 December and is planned to proceed in line with health and safety advice at the time. Therefore, it is likely that your usual Orientation Day may look different to previous years.

Irrespective of whether Orientation Day occurs face-to-face or virtually, orientation 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.

The following are some activities to consider for your Orientation Day program, subject to the latest health and safety advice. These could be undertaken on-site or adapted for remote delivery using video conferencing, pre-recorded videos, or printed material.

* Introducing members in the Year 7 class groups and “getting to know you” activities.
* Meeting the team of 2021 Year 7 teachers.
* 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.
* Mini “taster” classes.
* Current Year 7 students sharing what they wish they had known when they first started secondary school.
* 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.
* Meeting the student support team.
* Presentations on school opportunities including sports, arts, excursions, camps and clubs.
* Students planning their travel route to secondary school, including schedules, ticketing and costs.
* Orientation Day passport including of all the activities for the day, to be submitted to the secondary school as a record of student engagement.
* Surveying students about what they wish to experience on their Orientation Day
* Student question and answer session (Grade 6 students to submit questions in November about secondary school life for current Year 7 students to answer – questions and answers are recorded).
* Treasure hunt using secondary school map to locate key school spaces, including classrooms, staff offices, outdoor spaces, canteen, library, and first aid.

The Department will issue further guidance on what will be able to occur on Orientation Day, subject to coronavirus (COVID-19) health and safety advice closer to the date.

## THE START OF YEAR 7 IN 2021 – Secondary Schools

The coronavirus (COVID-19) disruptions in 2020 have seen many families supporting their Grade 6 children with learning from home. However, there will be some students in the 2021 Year 7 cohort who have not participated fully in their final year 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. 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 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.
* 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.
* 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) to better support transitioning Year 7 students. More information on the Grade 6 to Year 7 transition and how it can be used by teachers is available on the Department’s [website](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/transition-year-6-7/guidance).
* 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 2021 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.
* Using [Respectful Relationships](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/respectfulrelationships.aspx) to help students build healthy relationships, resilience and confidence.
* 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 – Primary and Secondary Schools

Family circumstances may have changed as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The family environment of students starting secondary school in 2021, and periods of remote learning, requires schools to consider effective transition practices differently.

While it is likely the entire 2021 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.

Information is available on the Department’s Equity funding [website](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/finance/Pages/srpequityfunding.aspx).

Supporting vulnerable cohorts

* 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.
* The 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.
* School Community Liaison Officers.
* Homework Clubs.
* Council-run youth centres.

Curriculum planning

* Using high impact teaching strategies (HITS) can contribute to learning. There are ten instructional practices teachers can use, including one focused on differentiated teaching. The HITS guide is available on the Department’s High Impact Teaching Strategies [website](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/improve/Pages/hits.aspx).
* The Personal and Social Capability is essential in enabling students to understand themselves and others, and manage their relationships, lives, work and learning more effectively. The Personal and Social Capability is available on the VCAA [website](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/personal-and-social-capability/introduction/rationale-and-aims).