

Life in Secondary School

a guide for parents





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Introduction

Starting secondary school is a big change for parents and children. It is important that your child makes new friends and has more independence. It is important that they work hard and enjoy a range of activities that will help them to develop all the skills they will need to prepare for their future. They will need to start to take on some of the responsibilities for looking after themselves, and others that they have in their life. Secondary school will usually be further from home and will be much bigger than primary school. You may feel like you are not able to be part of your child's school life anymore. However, your involvement is more important than ever. This leaflet will guide you through how to support your child with secondary school and gradually help them to become more independent and make positive choices for their future.

What does school want from me?



Partnership – it is much better for your child if you and the school work together.

Schools want to work in partnership with parents. Some of this can be done at home and some needs contact with the school.

- **Support at home** - work with your child on practical skills such as organisation, time management, and study skills
- **Understand the school** - find out how the school operates so that you can work together on things like achievement and behaviour
- **Share problems** - tell the school if something has happened in your family, which may affect your child's mood
- **Stay in touch** - send notes, read newsletters, attend organised meetings and parent evenings, check and write in their homework diaries and read reports together
- **Support attendance** - send your child to school every day. If your child is not well, get in touch with school on the first day, before the school start time
- **Being part of the school community** - find out about the events and celebrations that school is putting on and attend if you can. Become involved by volunteering, joining the Parent Teacher Association or even the Governing Body.

How does school support my child to achieve?

Every child is important

All schools want the children in their school to do well and be happy. Teachers are well-trained to make sure every child can do their best.

How lessons work

Teachers are skilled in using a variety of methods in their classrooms to make sure everyone learns and achieves.

Learning styles

Everyone learns in different ways. Some learners get information through reading, others need to be told, while others need to do it. We call this visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning.

Differentiation

Teachers will know what learning styles to use for each child and how to use them in lessons. They will also know the child's abilities and give work or questions that allow every child to learn at their own pace.

In one class, there are lots of different needs and abilities, but teachers can think about them all at the same time. This means that, whichever class or year group your child is in, they should be able to do the work that is given to them and they are able to learn.

If your child finishes work quickly, they will be given extended tasks to stretch themselves.

Holistic learning

This means making links between lots of different subjects and all aspects of life. Teachers will often use examples from TV or school to help children to make links with their own lives. This helps them to learn and understand better.

Active learning

The classroom is rarely quiet. Children learn best when they are involved in the lesson. Teachers encourage them to ask questions, work with others, have their own ideas, be curious, develop skills and make things.

Questioning

This is one of the most important skills for a learner to have. If you cannot ask a question, you do not understand it. Teachers want children to have a go at asking and answering questions even if they get it wrong. Making mistakes and being curious can be a good thing as this is how we all learn.

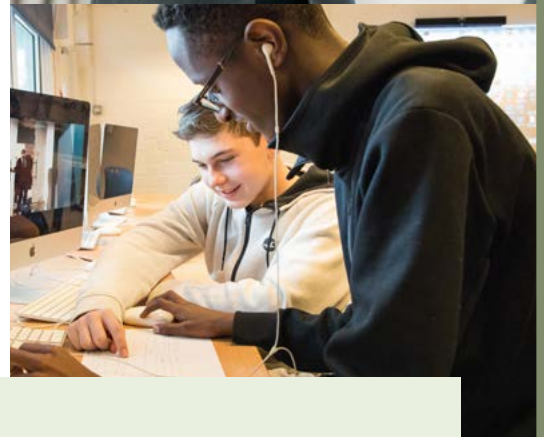
The curriculum

A curriculum is a course of study. The UK has a National Curriculum set by the government. It tells schools what they should aim to teach children and what standards children should reach. It is up to schools to plan the lessons and decide how they want to teach it. All children must study English, maths and some science throughout secondary school. The National Curriculum also includes subjects such as art and design, computing, citizenship, design technology, geography, history, languages, music and physical education. At the end of Year 9, children will choose their exam subjects and will study these subjects in Years 10 and 11. They will take GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11, but some pupils may take some GCSE exams in Year 10. These examinations will be important for any further learning, and for getting jobs and starting their career.

Schools follow a broad and balanced curriculum, including activities which support pupils with developing skills for the future and for employment but do not lead to exams.

At the end of Year 11, children can leave school if they are 16 by the end of the summer holidays. However, they must do one of the following until they are 18:

- stay in full-time education, for example at a college
- start an apprenticeship or traineeship
- spend 20 hours or more a week working or volunteering, while in part-time education or training.



Testing and exams

Teachers regularly assess how well every child is doing through questions in the lesson, looking at workbooks, testing and exams. This is how teachers know about your child's progress and what each child needs to learn next. You can also keep up to date with how well your child is doing in the same way.

Most schools will have end of year exams that help teachers to plan. Children will move to the next year group, no matter what marks they get in the exam.

Streaming and setting

Children are put into classes with different children for each subject. In many subjects, the school will group children by their level of learning and understanding to help the teacher focus on their needs. Children can move between classes if the teacher thinks it would help them.



How can I help my child with school?

If children live with or see both parents, it is always better when both parents are involved in their children's school lives. Here are some of the ways you can get involved.

English is not my first language

Schools are experienced in working with children and adults who do not have English as a first language and will find a way to understand what you need.

Many schools will have people available who can translate. By law, they must provide this for you at important meetings.

You can speak to the school and agree the information that is important and the best way to get it to you.

You can also get help from local community organisations.

Stay in touch with the school

The school will send information and requests to you in different ways – emails, text, newsletters or letters via your child. It is important to check regularly for these.

It is important to make sure the school has your up to date contact details, and who else in your family to contact if you are not available.

If you have told the school that there are times when it is easier for them to get hold of you, a note will be made on their records.

Check the school website regularly for general information.

People to stay in touch with

Form Tutor - Make sure you have their contact details and get to know them. They are the first person to contact if you have concerns or want to share good news.

Head of Year - Each year group has a head of year who is responsible for the wellbeing and learning of the children in that year group.

SENDCo - This person is responsible for provision for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) - If you are finding it difficult to make contact with the form tutor or another member of staff, or you feel you have not been heard or are not happy, you can take your concern to a more senior member of staff.

Parent Link / Family Liaison Workers - most schools will have staff whose job it is to keep in touch with parents. Ask at school reception who they are.

Parent Governor - This is a governor elected by parents, who will represent parents on the Governing Body.

If you cannot find the contact details you want from the school website, phone the school or go to school reception and ask. You can then call or, even better, send an email - even if it is just a simple request to phone you or arrange a meeting.

Get involved

Look for opportunities to become involved in the life of the school. Even a few hours a week can make a difference. For example:

- School events
- Parent Teacher Association (PTA) – a group of parents who support the school with events and fundraising
- Join the Governing Body
- Volunteer to help.

Attending parent meetings and workshops

Both parents and/or carers should attend whenever possible. It is a good way to stay informed and to get information directly from teachers.

The start of the school year is a great time to get to know your child's teachers.

Parent evenings are a chance to start or continue conversations with your child's teacher, and to discuss plans to help your child to do their best in class.

Meeting with the teacher also lets your child know that what goes on in school will be shared with you.

If your child has special educational needs, extra meetings are arranged with teachers and other school staff. At these meetings setting up or changing individual plans will be discussed.

If you cannot attend at the set time, talk to the school about a time that is good for you. Parents or carers can ask to meet with teachers, headteachers or other school staff any time during the school year. Arrange this by phone, email or go to school reception.



School website

Get to know the school website, where you will find important information and updates. For example, term dates, names of members of staff and contact details, school policies, examination results, Ofsted reports and up-to-date news. You will also find information on the curriculum, and out-of-school activities.

If you do not read English, ask someone to help. You may also get help from the school or a local community organisation.

School policies

Schools have all their policies on the school website.

These explain the school's expected standards and procedures. Examples include attendance, safeguarding, curriculum, complaints, special educational needs and behaviour.

Attendance – every day counts

It is very important that your child attends school on time and every day to get the most from their education.

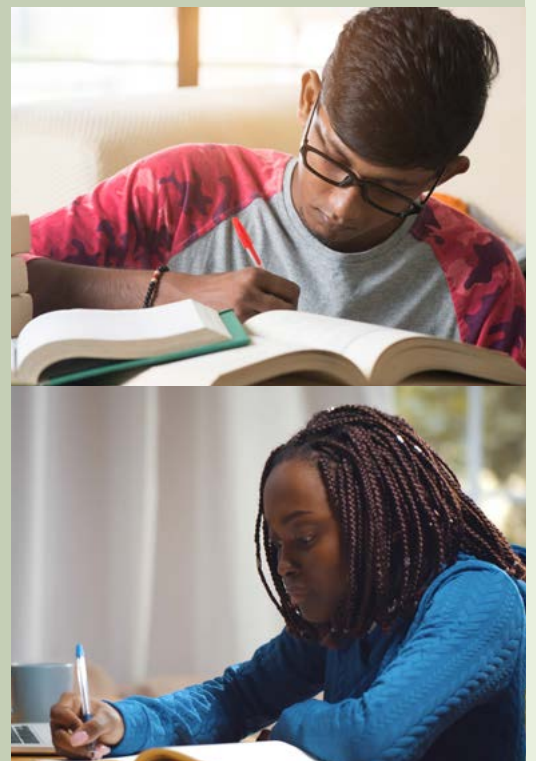
- You should let the school know the reason for absences and highlight any areas of concern you may have, so staff can investigate quickly
- If your child is missing a lot of school due to illness, check with the form teacher about any work that needs to be completed
- It is a good idea to know the school's attendance policy as this will avoid fines or legal action to enforce school attendance
- Sometimes a child will not want to go to school because of problems with classmates, homework or grades, or teachers. This can lead to real symptoms like headaches or stomach aches. If you think there is a problem at school, talk with your child and then perhaps with the teacher to find out more about what's causing the problems
- Schools will be concerned about attendance below 94%. An attendance of 90% means that child will be missing four weeks of school and learning, every year. This level of attendance is a concern for schools
- Children with high attendance (above 96%) usually achieve better at school.

How I can help my child to learn at home?

Homework

Homework is important! It supports classroom learning and helps children practice important study skills. It also helps develop a sense of responsibility and a work ethic that will benefit them for years to come. Try to:

- Create the right study environment - any well-lit, comfortable, and quiet space with the necessary supplies will do, and Wi-Fi access if possible
- Avoid distractions, like a TV in the background
- Set a start, finish and break time – this can reduce stress
- Don't worry if you don't understand your child's homework - you can still talk to them about it in general terms, for example: "Explain this to me" or "Tell me more about how you do that"
- Be available to help them understand instructions, to offer guidance and answer questions if you can
- Be interested - look at the completed work but do not be tempted to offer the correct answers or complete the work yourself.



Organisational and study skills

An organised child will find it easier to stay focused on a task instead of being distracted trying to find things. Study skills will build good habits for learning throughout life. For schoolwork it means:

- Having a diary, labelled subject books and folders to keep track of homework and projects
- Help with setting up 'to do' lists and prioritising tasks
- Talk to your child about keeping their school desk/box orderly so papers don't get lost. Teach your child how to use a calendar or personal planner to help stay organised
- During the first years of secondary school, it is a good idea to check your child's homework diary every school night so you are familiar with the homework set and can ensure your child does not fall behind
- Most secondary schools will have an online area which will allow you to see what homework your child has and when it needs to be returned. Ask the school if you are not sure about this
- Show your child how to break down tasks into smaller, manageable chunks so that preparing for a test isn't too overwhelming
- Taking a break after studying for 45 minutes is an important way to help your child process and remember information – this could mean watching TV or doing a physical activity.



How can I send my child to school ready to learn?

Breakfast

In general, children who eat breakfast have more energy and do better in school.

They are also less likely to miss school and will be able to concentrate better in class.

- Make sure your child is starting their day with a healthy breakfast
- Give your child a healthy snack to take with them
- Speak to the school if you want your child to attend breakfast club.

Sleep

Children need the right amount of sleep to be alert and ready to learn all day. Most secondary school age children need at least nine hours of sleep a night.

Lack of sleep can cause irritable or hyperactive behaviour and can make it hard for children to pay attention in class. A regular bedtime routine, especially on school night, is important.

- Establish a night-time routine, especially on school nights
- Leave enough time before bed to allow your child to relax before lights out
- Limit stimulating activities before bedtime, like TV, video games, internet access
- Make the bedroom a screen-free zone, with devices on charge in another room.

Teenage sleep tips from the NHS: [nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/sleep-tips-for-teenagers](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/sleep-tips-for-teenagers)



School uniform and bag

All schools have a uniform or expected standard of dress.

- Support your child to organise their clothes the night before. Help check their bag to make sure they have the correct equipment for the next day, including PE kit
- If you have financial worries that prevent you from buying uniform, please speak to the school. You may be able to get assistance with costs.

Talk about school

Make time to talk with your child every day about what goes on at school – it shows them it is important to you. When children know parents have an interest in what goes on at school, they will take school seriously as well.

The way you talk and listen to your child can influence how well your child listens and responds.

- Listen carefully
- Give your full attention
- Try not to be doing other things while you talk
- Ask questions that need more than a “yes” or “no” answer. For example, it is better to ask your child “Can you tell me about that?” or “Can you explain that to me?”

School clubs and activities

School clubs and activities usually take place after school or at lunchtime. They can help with your child’s development and learning in class. Taking part will help them to enjoy school, make friends, be healthy or make a difference.

- Encourage your child to get involved in activities outside of school
- If you are worried about your children coming home late or affordability, talk to the school, as they may have ideas about how to make it safer or more accessible.

How do schools help children to behave well?



Psychology of behaviour

Studies show that when children are praised, they feel good and work harder. When children are criticised, they may lose confidence and stop trying.

Therefore, schools will try to focus on praise, encourage good behaviour and to listen to them. If your child is being praised at school, it is important to reinforce this at home.

Parental involvement

School will contact you regularly to tell you that your child is doing well or if they are having difficulties. If you are not getting this information, contact the form tutor.

Schools want to work together with parents on their child's behaviour. They know that praise has more impact when shared between home and school. They also know that many difficulties can be solved by working together. They know that behaviour changes may be linked to a deeper issue and will want to help your child to overcome this.

Cultural sensitivity

Schools' approach to behaviour management should be culturally sensitive. If you think that your school has not understood something about your culture, you can discuss this with the form tutor.

Management

Teachers use methods that support children to behave well. They will think about where to sit children in the class and how to get children moving around the school in a respectful way. They will often prepare children by letting them know what they expect before they ask them to do something.

Language

Teachers are trained to understand the impact of their language on a child. When it comes to commenting on a child's behaviour, the words are chosen carefully so as not to label that child as bad and instead to help the child understand the impact of their behaviour and that the behaviour can change.

Behaviour policy

All schools have a behaviour policy and you can find it on the school website – this means everyone knows what to expect.

The policy sets out the behaviour expected in school. It encourages children to respect and take pride in the school and each other. It focuses on encouraging good behaviour but will also set out how difficulties are managed. The school will have a system of rewards and sanctions to praise positive behaviour and limit difficulties.

Possible rewards that encourage positive behaviour can include – becoming a prefect or monitor, certificates, prizes or points awarded to the child or their school year group or team.

Possible responses to poor behaviour could include a warning, detention, being on report (a card signed by the teacher at the end of each lesson), or time out in another space.

Schools will make sure that the response is proportionate and helps the child to behave well next time.

All schools must have an anti-bullying policy. It is helpful to know how the school will deal with bullying incidents and procedures for reporting bullying.

It is important for your child to know what is expected at school and that you'll support the actions that school takes, when standards aren't met.

It is easiest for children when school standards match the ones at home, so they see both environments as safe and caring places that work together as a team.

Exclusion, expulsion and suspension

Most unsuitable behaviour is dealt with straight away, skilfully and with the minimum of fuss. Some more serious or persistent behaviours may take longer to resolve.

Sometimes this may mean contact with parents/home. If poor behaviour continues, schools have the right to exclude, but this must be in line with the school's behaviour policy and government guidance.

Always:

- talk to the school and try to understand the issue
- work closely with the school to sort the problem together
- be consistent in reinforcing the behaviours you agreed with school
- understand the school's behaviour policy
- get advice from Camden's School Inclusion Team (see page 16 for contact details).

Most schools use an 'internal exclusion system'. This provides a separate learning space for a child, usually for no more than one day, without having to send them home. Other exclusions are temporary (suspensions), and children will not be able to attend school for a fixed time. Most children will have been through all the above sanctions before being excluded, and parents should be fully involved. School will still provide work and you should support this.

Permanent exclusion (expulsion) only happens when the school feels they are no longer the best place for the child. The child will still be educated elsewhere.



How does school keep my child safe?

Safeguarding, wellbeing and special educational needs

Schools have a legal duty to look after and protect children. This is called safeguarding.

Schools will look after and protect children through giving or getting children the right support when needed. Schools will also do all they can to prevent bullying and help children to have good mental health. Children with special educational needs will also be well cared for and will receive extra support.

Protecting children

Most children are safe and live in loving homes. Sadly, this is not true for all children. Schools recognise that danger may be at home, in the community, with friends or in the school. School staff have had extra training to notice things like a child's mood and very small things that might show something is wrong. Schools have a senior member of staff who is a **Designated Safeguarding Lead**. This person **must** follow safeguarding guidelines and will help to decide how to get the best help for the child. Schools want parents to be involved in these decisions. The only time a school will not contact the parents is when they are worried that this will put the child in danger.

Keeping Children Safe in Education is the government guidance which all schools follow.

Translated versions, including Somali and Bengali, can be found here: <https://national.lgfl.net/digisafe/kcsietranslate>

Bullying

Bullying is when one person or a group repeatedly intimidates, upsets, physically injures or excludes someone with the intention of being hurtful. It can include name-calling, hitting, saying things that are not true, threatening and making someone do things they do not want to do. Bullying can happen face-to-face and online.

Schools take bullying very seriously. It is harmful and hurtful. It can affect performance in school, confidence and children's chances in the whole of their life.

The school will have an anti-bullying policy. It will outline what they are doing to make sure that bullying does not happen in the first place by helping children to understand what it is and how they can get help if they see it happening.

It is very important that you talk about this with your child and, if you think they are being bullied, you work with the school to find a solution.

Online safety

Over recent years, online safety has become a big part of safeguarding and the curriculum.

There are many positives about being online, as well as risks, such as bullying and attracting children into crime (grooming), and the internet and social media has made things like bullying much easier.

In school, children will learn digital resilience. This means that they understand the dangers that there are online and know how to set up safety settings and get help if they are not comfortable about something that has happened online. It is very important that school and parents work in partnership on this. If school puts on an internet safety day, please go along. You can ask the school about how you can keep your children safe and talk to your child about what they do online so that if something does go wrong, they can trust you to help them.

Mental health

Good mental health is just as important as physical health. Poor mental health can range from slight feelings of anxiety through to suicidal thoughts or mental illnesses. Small amounts of stress can help us do better, in exams for example, but too much is harmful. Schools work hard to make sure every child is safe, happy and cared for. Children learn best and have better adult lives when they are happy and confident. This has become more and more important over recent years. Many schools will have a policy that says what they are doing to help children. This could include fun activities, ways that children can help each other and look out for their friends or staff available for children to talk to about their worries. Schools will want to work together with parents on mental health.


In addition, schools have access to specialist mental health support if necessary.

Some people feel ashamed to speak about mental health problems, but it is really important to ask for help.

Special educational needs

If your child has a special educational need, there is lots of support in place for them and you should be fully involved. All schools have a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENDCo) who will support you to work in partnership with the school to make sure that the best education and care is in place for your child.

If you think that your child has a need and may need more support, you should contact the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENDCo).



Where can I get more help?

Camden Early Help Team. Families can get help through [Early Help](#)

Phone: 020 7974 3317 (9am to 5pm - ask for Early Help)

Email: LBCMASHadmin@camden.gov.uk

Child safeguarding information for parents and carers: <https://www.camden.gov.uk/childrens-safeguarding-social-work>

Apps and games: Use [NSPCC Net Aware](#) to check the safety of apps, games and social media sites.

Crime: [Fearless](#) helps families to understand more about things like gangs, grooming and county lines. You can also give information about a crime anonymously.

Act Early – Gives specific information for parents about exploitation and radicalisation.

Information for children: [Camden Rise](#) has lots of information that will be of interest to young people and their parents.