IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

YEAR 7 REFLECTIONS ON TRANSITION

A look at what it's really like starting secondary. insights from students to strengthen transition support and inform practice.

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PRIMARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOL TRANSITION

At Redcar and Cleveland, we wanted to gain a deeper understanding of how students experience the move from primary to secondary school. To do this, Assistant Educational Psychologist's from the Educational Psychology Service conducted focus groups to hear directly from students about their transitions; what helped students settle in, what challenges they encountered, and what we can learn for the future.

We recognise that transition is more than a logistical change; it's a pivotal moment that shapes a student's sense of belonging, confidence, and readiness for learning. Redcar and Cleveland are committed to strengthening transition experiences, and we hope this research both highlights the good practice already in place and supports ongoing improvements for future cohorts.

THE PROJECT

Focus groups were held across three secondary schools in Redcar and Cleveland. The first round took place in Autumn 2024 (November), with the same group of students returning for a second round in Spring 2025 (March). In total, 18 Year 7 students took part (10 male and 8 female), representing eight different primary feeder schools. Participation was entirely voluntary and confidential, and any safeguarding concerns raised were followed up appropriately. Each session was transcribed and analysed, identifying 8 key themes.

THEMES

- Social belonging
- Navigating the school
- Support and staff relationships
- Behavioural systems and fairness
- Transition activities and preparation
- Learning and homework
- Emotional wellbeing and anxiety
- Communication and information gaps

Over the next few pages we will take you over each of these themes, what we learnt from the students and how this can impact future practice.

Social Belonging
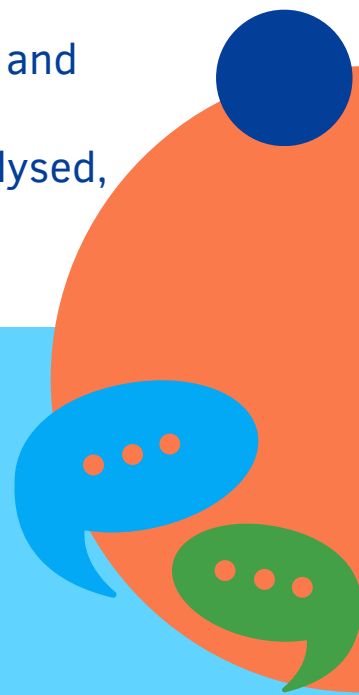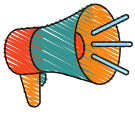
WHAT STUDENTS TOLD US:

Students described friendships as one of the most important parts of settling in. Many made new friends quickly, particularly during transition week or in their early lessons. For some, especially those coming from smaller primary schools or without familiar faces, the process was more difficult. A few students still felt disconnected from their tutor group or wished they had more opportunities to meet others outside their classes.

HOW THIS CHANGED OVER TIME:

By the spring term, most students felt more settled in their friendship groups and more confident socially. Some even joked about how nervous they had been at first. However, a small number continued to feel excluded or unsure how to connect with others, particularly if they hadn't formed friendships early on or felt mismatched with their class.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

"I made one [friend] in five minutes in transition."
"It would be better if there were more things to help make friends."
"Some people don't have anyone and just sit by themselves. That's sad."
"We all stuck together from our primary school at first, but now I talk to loads of people."
"At first you're scared but then you realise that most people are new too"

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Build in structured opportunities for students to mix across classes early in the term.
- Consider allowing students to nominate one friend for tutor or subject groups.
- Use clubs, paired tasks, or house activities to foster informal friendships.
- Identify students who may need additional support with social integration.

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLGY INSIGHT

Goodenow's (1993) **Sense of Belonging**, highlights the importance of feeling accepted, respected, valued, and included in the school community. When students feel they belong, they are more likely to be motivated, engaged and resilient. Similarly, **Social Identity Theory** (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) explains how students align themselves with peer groups to form a positive social identity, a process that was clearly underway as students formed new friendships and worked to "fit in" during their early weeks. Facilitating these early connections can play a protective role during the challenges of school transition.

Navigating the School
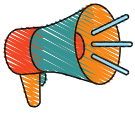
WHAT STUDENTS TOLD US:

Getting around school was a major challenge in the early days. Students talked about getting lost, following others and ending up in the wrong place, or feeling confused by maps and timetables. Some were frustrated when planners had mistakes and they couldn't check the timetables on their phones for help. Others found it difficult to adjust to shorter lunch breaks. They described feeling rushed and sometimes stressed about queuing, finding friends, and getting to their next lesson on time.

HOW THIS CHANGED OVER TIME:

By the spring term, most students reported feeling much more confident navigating their school environment. They knew their way around and were more familiar with how lessons and routines worked. That said, busy corridors and crowded spaces remained a challenge for some, especially at lunch or lesson changeovers. While some adapted to the shorter lunch breaks over time, others continued to feel that the break was too short.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

"The maps are proper confusing. I put mine in the bin."
"You lose the tour guide every corner and you're just kind of lost."
"In primary we had way longer breaks, here you queue for food and then it's time to go."
"I just follow the crowd and hope I'm in the right place."
"It's so big, and everyone's rushing. You don't get time to stop and check."

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Provide simple, visual maps and help students learn to interpret timetables.
- Offer a supported transition, gradually moving from guided tours to independent navigation.
- Ensure staff presence in corridors during the first few weeks.
- Consider bottlenecks and student flow when timetabling or structuring break times.
- Explore options like earlier lunch for Year 7s.

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLGY INSIGHT

Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988) helps explain why navigating a new and complex school environment can feel overwhelming. The demands of processing multiple sources of information, unfamiliar school layout, and new routines, can exceed students' working memory capacity. Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development supports the idea that with the right guidance (e.g. scaffolded tours, peer support), the gap between current competence and independent functioning can be bridged, so that students can successfully move from confusion to independent competence in their new setting.

Support and Staff Relationships
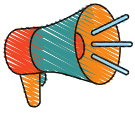
WHAT STUDENTS TOLD US:

Students valued staff who were calm, approachable and supportive. Pastoral staff and certain teachers were named repeatedly as trusted adults. Others said they didn't feel heard or treated fairly, especially if they were compared to older siblings. Some students struggled to find someone they could talk to, particularly if a key staff member left during the year.

HOW THIS CHANGED OVER TIME:

As students settled in, many developed stronger relationships with key staff. They felt more confident about who to approach with a problem and began to build trust. However, where a trusted adult had left or support felt inconsistent, students were still unsure about who to go to.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

"She checks in with me even if nothing's wrong, that helps a lot."
"I like it when they ask how you are, not just about work."
"I just feel like I have no one else to talk to now that [staff member] left."
"Some teachers act like they don't care if you're struggling."

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Ensure all students know multiple adults they can turn to for support, such as a named 'triad of support'.
- Be mindful of unconscious bias based on siblings or reputation.
- Use tutor time or pastoral sessions to build rapport and check in regularly.
- Maintain consistency in staffing where possible and plan handovers for key roles.

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLGY INSIGHT

Resilience Theory (Rutter, 1987; Masten, 2001) recognises that having at least one strong, supportive relationship with an adult can buffer the negative effects of stress and promote positive adjustment. The students' references to trusted staff, and their distress when those figures were absent, highlight how critical these relationships are during times of change and vulnerability.

Behaviour Systems and Fairness
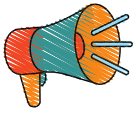
WHAT STUDENTS TOLD US:

Behaviour systems were seen as clear in principle, but not always consistent in practice. Students shared examples of being sanctioned for things they didn't understand or felt were beyond their control. There was concern about how rules were applied differently across staff and about being penalised early in the year before they had learned the systems.

HOW THIS CHANGED OVER TIME:

By the second round of focus groups, students were more vocal about perceived unfairness. They had clearer opinions about how systems worked and whether they felt respected by staff. While they accepted the need for rules, inconsistency in enforcement continued to be a concern.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

"Sometimes you don't even do anything and still get behaviour points."
"It's the teacher that's unfair, not the rules."
"You don't get a chance to explain, they just give you a sanction."
"You forget your pen and it's straight to a detention."
"The rules are clear. It's just that teachers don't use them properly."

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Emphasise fairness and transparency in how rules are introduced and enforced.
- Revisit expectations regularly with students, especially in the early months, to support understanding.
- Encourage consistent application of policies across staff teams.
- Emphasise use of praise and reward points.
- Offer grace periods or alternative responses for common Year 7 mistakes.

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLGY INSIGHT

Equity Theory (Adams, 1965) suggests that people assess fairness by comparing their own treatment to others'. Students' responses reflect this; they didn't object to having rules, but expressed frustration when they felt rules were applied inconsistently or when consequences were perceived as unfair. A sense of injustice affected their trust in the system and their emotional responses to discipline.

Transition Activities and Preparation
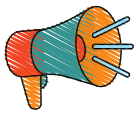
WHAT STUDENTS TOLD US:

Students' transition experiences varied greatly depending on the activities offered. Those who had a full transition week felt more prepared and confident, especially valuing time to meet staff, try lessons, and explore the school. In contrast, brief or superficial activities left some feeling unready. A few students said primary staff had "scared" them about stricter expectations at secondary, with comments like "you won't get away with that there." These warnings often raised anxiety; students said they would have preferred honest, practical advice and reassurance.

HOW THIS CHANGED OVER TIME:

Students' reflections on transition became more thoughtful over time. By the spring term, they were clearer about what had genuinely helped them feel prepared, and what they felt was missing or could have been done differently.

WHAT HELPED:

- Spending multiple days in school before September, especially doing real lessons
- Getting to meet other students and start forming friendships early
- Having the chance to walk around the school and explore without pressure
-

WHAT THEY WOULD CHANGE:

- Extend transition week to five full days for all students
- Include opportunities to meet more of their future teachers, not just form tutors
- Avoid scripted or overly formal presentations, students wanted it to feel 'real'
- Offer extra support or visits for students coming from non-feeder or small primary schools

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

"Five days [transition week]. Unanimous."
"I wish we could have met all the teachers before."
"We got to move around and do proper lessons, that helped."
"They said you won't get away with anything in secondary, that made me nervous."
"Our primary school made it sound scary, like we'd get shouted at all the time… it made me scared to come."

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Where possible, offer a full transition week with real lessons and routines.
- Include opportunities to meet a wide range of staff, not just form tutors.
- Design transition activities with student feedback in mind.
- Consider language used around transition ensuring messaging is positive and realistic.
- Support students who are moving to secondary without their existing friends with extra visits and/or opportunities to meet others in the same position.

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLGY INSIGHT

The Ecosocial Transition Framework (Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016), emphasises that transitions are not just about moving places or stages, but involve multiple, interconnected changes in a student's social, emotional, and academic worlds. The framework highlights how students' experiences are shaped not only by individual readiness, but by the wider school environment, relationships, and systems around them. Students described how transition activities that were hands-on, relational, and realistic helped them feel more confident, while limited or generic approaches left them feeling unprepared.
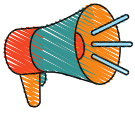
WHAT STUDENTS TOLD US:

Students had mixed experiences of learning in secondary school. Some enjoyed the variety and practical subjects, while others found the work too easy or too difficult. Homework was a source of stress - especially due to the number of platforms used, varying teacher expectations, and unclear instructions.

HOW THIS CHANGED OVER TIME:

In the first round, some students were still adjusting and hadn't received much homework yet. By spring, concerns about homework had grown. Many students described feeling overwhelmed or unsure how to manage tasks across different systems. There was more confidence in using digital tools, but frustration about fairness and support had also increased.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

"I've cried over [homework] lots of times."
"You have to download so many things, Duolingo, Seneca…"
"I showed him [my Duolingo streak], and he still gave me home learning concerns."
"Sometimes I don't understand the work and I'm too scared to say."
"You get different homework rules from different teachers."
"I don't get how to use the homework app. It's too many steps."

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Simplify and clearly communicate homework expectations for Year 7.
- Offer regular homework support sessions or clubs.
- Consider using one central platform and signposting deadlines clearly.
- Acknowledge individual needs and help students develop independent study habits gradually.

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLGY INSIGHT

Students' struggles with homework and learning reflect two frameworks: **Executive Function Development** (Anderson, 2002; Diamond, 2013), which acknowledges that skills like planning, organisation, and sustained attention are still developing in early adolescence; and **Cognitive Load Theory** (Sweller, 1988), which explains how juggling multiple digital platforms and unclear expectations can overload students' working memory, making learning and task completion harder.

Emotional Wellbeing and Anxiety
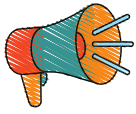
WHAT STUDENTS TOLD US:

Students shared a range of emotional experiences around transition. Some described feeling overwhelmed, particularly by homework or behaviour expectations. A few talked about crying at home, having panic attacks, or not feeling able to tell anyone when they were struggling.

HOW THIS CHANGED OVER TIME:

By spring, some students felt more emotionally secure, particularly if they had built relationships with staff or settled into friendship groups. Others still reported worries, especially around sanctions or the absence of a key adult. Emotional needs remained a background factor across many other themes.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

"It's overwhelming for me… sometimes I'm crying over it."
"My friend was having a panic attack and couldn't get to the support teacher."
"I just wanted to go home for the first two weeks."
"Even when I'm smiling, I'm still panicking inside."
"It's loud all the time. Sometimes you just need quiet."

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Make emotional wellbeing a core part of transition planning.
- Ensure visible, accessible staff support for students showing signs of stress.
- Ensure students know who to turn to and have easy access to pastoral or mental health support.
- Use tutor time, assemblies or PSHE to support emotional literacy and self-regulation.
- Create and signpost quieter spaces and flexibility in routines for students who need them.

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLGY INSIGHT

The **Protective Factors Framework** (Werner & Smith 1982; Masten, 2001) in resilience research, emphasises that emotional wellbeing is supported when students have access to trusted adults, safe environments, and emotional regulation strategies. Where these were missing, students described heightened anxiety, stress, or withdrawal, showing how crucial it is to build supportive conditions during periods of change.

Communication and Information Gaps
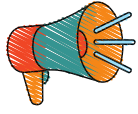
WHAT STUDENTS TOLD US:

Students often found it difficult to understand school systems, from reading timetables and room codes to knowing how to submit homework or who to ask for help. They appreciated when things were explained clearly, but sometimes felt information was rushed, missing, or only explained once.

HOW THIS CHANGED OVER TIME:

By the spring term, students had figured out many systems through trial and error, but this often came with stress and confusion. They had a clearer sense of which tools worked for them, but continued to call for clearer, more consistent communication.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

"You don't know what TE1 stands for... it's just codes."
"They don't let me on my phone, and my planner is wrong, so I can't check my timetable."
"It's hard to log into every single one every week to find your homework."
"They told us once and then never again."
"I didn't understand the reward system until halfway through the term."

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Communicate key expectations (rules, homework, timetables) clearly and repeatedly.
- Offer tutorials or step-by-step guides (video or paper) to help students and families use key platforms.
- Revisit common challenges in tutor time and reinforce using real-life examples.
- Avoid assuming knowledge, give students time to ask questions without judgment.

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLGY INSIGHT

Information Processing Theory (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968) helps explain how students absorb, store, and retrieve new information. In the context of secondary transition, unclear instructions, unfamiliar terminology, or too much information at once can hinder understanding. Students need repeated, well-structured communication to process expectations, especially in relation to timetables, homework, and rules.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

While this work draws on the experiences of a small group of Year 7 students across three schools, their voices offer meaningful insights into wider patterns and pressures. These findings are not exhaustive, but they reflect real and often overlooked aspects of the student experience.

This project has highlighted the complexity of transition from primary to secondary school, and the range of emotions, challenges and opportunities that students encounter during this time. Across the eight themes, several clear messages emerged:

- **Relationships matter** – with peers and adults – and are foundational to students' sense of belonging, confidence, and wellbeing.
- **Consistency and communication are crucial** – in behaviour expectations, homework systems, and practical routines like timetables and digital tools.
- **Transition doesn't end in September** – many students were still adjusting well into the spring term.
- **Small barriers can have a big impac**t, such as confusing maps, short lunch breaks, or unclear instructions – especially for students who feel less confident or connected.

Listening to students lived experiences adds a depth of understanding that cannot be captured through policy alone. Their reflections, honest, thoughtful and often surprisingly mature, show us not just what happened, but how it felt. It is clear that when students are given the space to speak openly, they offer valuable insights that can shape more responsive, inclusive and supportive school environments.

WIDER PRACTICE

The findings of this research strongly reinforce the six key themes set out in current Redcar and Cleveland guidance for building belonging during transition. Each theme was echoed in the voices of students and is reflected in the issues they raised and the improvements they suggested:

"I am known in my new school" – Students emphasised the importance of being understood as individuals, particularly in their relationships with staff. Where they felt recognised and supported, they settled more easily and were better able to manage challenges.

"I know my new school and what is expected of me" – Early confusion around maps, timetables, behaviour systems, and digital platforms highlighted the need for clear, repeated communication. Students called for more practical, real-world preparation in advance of starting school.

"I can build positive relationships" – Peer friendships and trusted adults were central to students' sense of belonging. Where opportunities to connect were limited, some students felt isolated well into the year.

"I can see that learning in my new school builds on what I've done before" – Some students experienced a disconnect between prior learning and current expectations, particularly around homework and digital systems. They highlighted the need for greater scaffolding and consistency to support academic adjustment.

"My parents/carers are ready for my new school" – While this research focused on students, many spoke about the challenges of communicating with parents, especially when they themselves were unsure. Clearer information for families could better equip them to support their children through the transition.
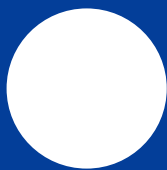
"There are effective, supportive systems and communications in place" – Across nearly every theme, students highlighted the impact of systems that were either working well or falling short, from timetables to support staff handovers. Their experiences suggest that joined-up, student-friendly systems are essential to a positive transition.

Together, the student voices captured here offer evidence that supports and deepens our understanding of these themes. They affirm the importance of practical preparation, strong relationships, clear communication, and ongoing support, not just at the point of transfer, but throughout the first year of secondary school.

NEXT STEPS...

Reflect: Share this report within school teams, using it to prompt discussion and reflection around existing transition practices.

Review: Consider where current systems (such as induction, homework platforms, or behaviour policies) may unintentionally disadvantage Year 7 students, and explore adaptations.

Respond: Where possible, co-develop small changes with students. For example, creating student-friendly maps, reviewing transition week formats, or gathering ideas for tutor time activities.

Sustain: Keep listening to student voice throughout the year, not just at the start, to identify ongoing needs and build a culture of openness and inclusion.

Continuing the conversation:
We encourage all schools and professionals to continue these conversations with their own students, using their voices to shape welcoming, fair, and emotionally safe transitions into secondary education.

Note:
The following pages include student and parent friendly advice leaflets, based on what students shared in the focus groups. These can be shared directly with Year 6 pupils and their families as part of transition work.
You'll also find a short reading guide for staff, with suggestions for further exploring some of the psychological ideas behind the themes in this report.

ADVICE FOR YEAR 6: FROM REAL YEAR 7S

We asked Year 7 students what it was really like starting secondary school and what tips they'd give to Year 6s. Here's what they said:

- ✅ **Don't worry too much** – it feels new at first, but it gets easier once you settle in.

- ✅ **Talk to new people** – try to say hello and make friends, even if it feels a bit scary. Everyone's in the same boat.

- ✅ **Ask for help** – if you're lost or unsure, just ask someone. Teachers and other students will help you.

- ✅ **Find a teacher you trust** – talking to someone can really help when you're feeling worried.

- ✅ **New subjects** – you'll get to do lessons you didn't have at primary school, like food tech or drama. It can be fun to try something different.

- ✅ **Join clubs** – it's a fun way to try something new and make more friends.

- ✅ **Get organised** – check your timetable and pack your bag the night before.

- ✅ **Learn your timetable** – try to remember where your rooms are. The codes get easier after a while.

- ✅ **Check your homework apps** – make sure you know which ones you need and look at them every day.

ADVICE FOR PARENTS AND CARERS: FROM YEAR 7 INSIGHTS

We asked Year 7 students what helped (and what didn't!) when they moved to secondary school. Here's what they want parents and carers to know:

✓ **Be positive about the move** – try not to scare them with warnings. Lots of Year 7s told us they were more nervous because of things they'd heard at primary school.

✓ **Help them learn their timetable** – it can be confusing at first, so practise reading it together and working out what they need each day.

✓ **Check in, but don't push too hard** – some children aren't ready to talk straight away. A calm check-in or quiet moment might be more helpful than lots of questions.

✓ **Support them to get organised** – help them pack their bag the night before and make sure they've got key items like a pen, planner and PE kit.

✓ **Talk through homework** – there might be several online platforms to learn. Helping them log in and build a routine really makes a difference.

✓ **Encourage asking for help** – remind them it's okay to speak to a teacher or staff member if they're stuck or worried.

✓ **Stick to calm routines at home** – early nights, organised mornings and reassurance go a long way.

✓ **Visit or talk about the new school** – if you can, visit before they start, or look at the school website together, it can help make things feel more familiar.

UNDERSTANDING TRANSITION: FURTHER READING FOR STAFF CPD

Deepening our understanding of the psychology behind student experience:
These selected readings link directly to the themes in this report. Each offers insight into why students may feel or respond the way they do and how staff can support them through the transition into secondary school.

BELONGING & FRIENDSHIPS

Why it matters: Feeling accepted and connected helps students settle, participate, and learn. A sense of belonging is closely tied to confidence, engagement, and emotional wellbeing.

Ask yourself: How do we help students feel seen and included in the first few weeks?

Read:

- Osterman, K. F. (2000). Students' need for belonging in the school community. Review of Educational Research, 70(3), 323–367. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1170786
- Palikara, O., Bonneville Roussy, A., & Allen, K.-A. (in press [2025]). Individual and contextual factors determining school belonging of adolescents in the UK: Evidence from PISA. School Mental Health. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-024-09725-y

NAVIGATING SCHOOL LIFE

Why it matters: Large buildings, coded timetables and fast-paced routines can be overwhelming, especially when students are trying to learn everything at once.

Ask yourself: Are we assuming too much prior knowledge when we give instructions or explain routines?

Read:

- NSW Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation. (2021). Cognitive Load Theory: Research that Teachers Really Need to Understand. https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/education-data-and-research/cese/publications/literature-reviews/cognitive-load-theory
- Pope, D. (2017, September 6). Cognitive Load Theory: A School-Wide Approach. Chartered College of Teaching. https://my.chartered.college/impact_article/cognitive-load-theory-a-school-wide-approach/

RELATIONSHIPS WITH STAFF

Why it matters: Trusted adults play a key role in students' wellbeing, motivation, and resilience, especially during periods of change and uncertainty.

Ask yourself: Which students might still be unsure about who they can talk to in school?

Read:

- Bogle, J. (2007). Building resilience during transition from primary to secondary school. Educational Psychology in Scotland, 9(1), 36–45. https://explore.bps.org.uk/content/bpsepis/9/1/36
- Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. American Psychologist, 56(3), 227–238. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/11315249/

BEHAVIOUR AND FAIRNESS

Why it matters: Students are highly sensitive to fairness and justice, especially when they're new and still working out how things work.

Ask yourself: Do students understand not just the rules, but why they're applied the way they are?

Read:

- Barker, B., Burton, A., Jarvis, K., & Rennison, J. (2023). Punitive behaviour management policies and practices in secondary schools: A systematic review of children and young people's perceptions and experiences. Pastoral Care in Education. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2023.2255403
- Caglar, C. (2013). The relationship between the perceptions of fairness of the learning environment and the level of alienation. Eurasian Journal of Educational Research, 50, 185–206. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1059929.pdf

TRANSITION ACTIVITIES AND PREPARATION

Why it matters: Well-planned transition activities can reduce anxiety, increase confidence and create smoother starts, if they match students' readiness for change.

Ask yourself: Are our transition activities responsive to different levels of need and confidence?

Read:

- Holt, A., Hardley, S., Gray, S., Dallos, R., & Glover, H. (2022). Facilitating a positive transition from primary to secondary school: The role of nurture groups and school connectedness. Pastoral Care in Education, 40(1), 25–42. https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2021.1997910
- Jindal-Snape, D., & Rienties, B. (2022). Editorial: Transitions Through Education. Frontiers in Education, 7. https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2022.830999/full

LEARNING AND HOMEWORK

Why it matters: Organising yourself, following multiple platforms, and remembering instructions all rely on executive functioning, which is still developing in Year 7.

Ask yourself: Do our expectations match what we know about how 11–12 year olds think and learn?

Read:

- Diamond, A. (2013). Executive functions. Annual Review of Psychology, 64, 135–168. https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-psych-113011-143750
- Centre on the Developing Child (Harvard University). Executive Function Resources. https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/

EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AND ANXIETY

Why it matters: Starting secondary school can feel overwhelming. Students need access to emotional support and trusted routines to help them cope.

Ask yourself: Are we spotting the signs of anxiety early — even when students seem to be coping?

Read:

- Gilligan, R. (2000). Adversity, resilience and young people: The protective value of positive school and spare time experiences. Children & Society, 14(1), 37–47. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1099-0860.2000.tb00149.x
- Lester, L., & Cross, D. (2015). The relationship between school climate and mental and emotional wellbeing over the transition from primary to secondary school. Psychology of Well-Being, 5, Article 7. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13612-015-0037-8

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

Why it matters: Students need clear, consistent information, repeated over time, to help them feel confident and in control.

Ask yourself: How do we know students (and parents) really understand the key information we give them?

Read:

- Hodgkin, K., Packer, R., & Place, C. (2025). Navigating the complexity of transition: Sharing the views of learners during the primary–secondary school transition in Wales. Education 3–13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2024.2447329
- SUNY Pressbooks. (n.d.). Information Processing Theories – Educational Psychology. Retrieved from https://edpsych.pressbooks.sunycreate.cloud/chapter/information-processing-theories/