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Moving schools - a Parents' Guide

The thought of changing school can be a daunting prospect for children and their parents. This guide provides practical advice for families moving schools.



Moving schools

Many children move school at some point in their life. It's natural for them to change school when they reach a certain age, whether that be going from Primary to Secondary or Secondary to Sixth Form. However, children may have to change schools at other points for a number of reasons – both emotional and practical. Whatever the reason, moving school can be a challenging time for children and it's important that the transition to a new school is handled correctly to minimise stress and disruption.

This guide is designed to share our experience of settling and supporting children of all ages who are joining a new school. It explores what to consider when moving schools as well as the potential pitfalls and how you can look after your child's well-being to ensure the move is a positive experience for everyone.



Why change school?

There are lots of different reasons for moving your child's school but they typically fall into two categories:

Family Life

- Relocating for a job or to be closer to family
- Relocating for a change of lifestyle
- Moving so your children can be at the same school or within the same area to make the commute easier
- Moving to be in the catchment of your chosen school
- Moving because you are in the Forces and have been deployed to a new area
- Your circumstances may have changed, and you may not be able to afford to send your child to their current school

School Life

- Your current school does not fulfil your child's needs – this may be due to a lack of extra-curricular activities or lack of support or stretch with learning
- Your child is no longer developing or progressing
- Friendship issues
- Safe-guarding issues
- Your child is generally unhappy

Things to consider

Whatever the reason you are moving, there are some important considerations you have to think about before making a decision.

Moving a child can be unsettling and while it may be unavoidable in some cases, it's important to think about how to minimise the worries your child or children may have.

You may want to consider:

- **Timing** - this may be out of your control, but if you are able to, plan the move at a good time for your family.
- **What your child is leaving behind** – friendships they have formed, clubs and activities they participate in both inside and outside of school.
- **The curriculum** - teaching styles and rules are likely to vary at a new school and your child may find it challenging to adapt.
- **Personality** - is your child introverted or extroverted? Their personality can have an impact on how long it takes them to form relationships with new peers and teachers.
- **The family** - children of different ages will react to changes differently. Will a move mean all your children have to change schools? How will a move affect your work-life balance?



What impact does moving schools have on children?

Children can exhibit a range of emotions when moving schools - both positive and negative. If your child has been at one school for some time, it's natural for them to feel like they're being taken out of a place of comfort and they may be anxious about making the switch. They might be excited, scared, happy or sad. It's important for them to know they are not alone. Most children move schools at some point in their life and there are always positive benefits such as:

- Forming new friendships and relationships
- Access to new opportunities and interests
- Gaining an important life skill by adapting to change
- Growing and developing as an individual
- Learning new ideas and attitudes
- Potentially better academic results and greater engagement

How to move schools successfully

Most importantly, **involve your children in the process**. Talk to them as early as possible so your child's opinions can be taken into consideration. Listen and address any concerns your child might have and involve them in visiting and shortlisting potential new schools. Highlight the positives of new opportunities to them. Be enthusiastic about the move yourself.

It's important to remind them that feelings can be mixed, they can be happy, sad, nervous and excited all at the same time! It's okay for their emotions to fluctuate and for them to feel different things at different times. You may want to encourage your child to make a list of the things they are looking forward to and a list of what they are worried about which you can talk through.

If you have family members or friends who have changed schools recently, encourage them to share their experiences with your child.



Choosing the right school

Finding the right school is key to making a positive move. There are lots of things to think about when choosing a school but you may want to consider:

- Location and transport options
- Academic results and value-added
- Available subjects - especially at GCSE and A Level
- Values and ethos
- Extra-curricular activities
- Teaching style
- Academic support - for able children as well as those with learning challenges
- Class sizes
- Pastoral care and well-being programmes
- Day or boarding?
- Single sex versus co-education?
- The school day and if there is Saturday school
- Wrap around care and holiday clubs
- Entrance criteria and assessments

Once you have decided what you want in your chosen school it is helpful to shortlist the schools you are interested in. Research suggests that most families investigate six schools and visit three before making their choice.

For more information about choosing a school and why an independent school might be a positive option for your family read our [**Why Choose an Independent School Guide.**](#)

When to move

There's no right time to move schools and all ages, even Sixth Formers, can be affected by change. If you have a choice, it's important to consider the timing of the move, aiming for natural transitions such as the start of a term or half term. It can be useful to move in the Summer Term, before the long holiday so that your children are starting the new academic year with some friendship groups already established.

Don't forget that moving your child in their GCSE years can be problematic as many schools start teaching the GCSE curriculum in Year 9 and the subjects your child wants to study are not always available at every school. In addition, the new school may follow a different examination board or have taught subject topics in a different order so speak to your new school right from the start.

How to move

The application process can vary depending on whether you opt for a maintained or independent school. If choosing an independent school, contact the Admissions Manager (sometimes called the Registrar) as the process will differ between schools. For state schools, application is classed as in-year admission. The process to change schools can vary between counties so it is best to check with your local council on the process. More information can be found on the UK Government website.



Helping your child settle

The first few days at a new school are always the most daunting so a few simple tips can help make it easier for everyone.

- Booking a Taster Day can help you get a feel for the new environment and meet with other pupils who will be familiar faces when they arrive. Alternatively there may be group events for your particular intake which would introduce your child to their peers.
- If your child is boarding ask for a taster night in the House they will be joining.
- Visiting the school a few days before starting can also help settle the nerves as can joining any holiday clubs that might be running before they join.
- If your child is starting during the academic year, talk to the Head of Year or teacher about academic support and settling. Find out the names of your child's teachers and other staff involved with them.
- Follow your new school on social media, most schools have active channels which can give you a flavour of what life is like and what activities your child can get involved with.
- Check the arrangements for the first day, both drop off and pick up, and how you will travel to school. You might like to do a trial run. This can help children feel calmer and more confident.
- Be aware of the mobile phone and uniform policy so your child knows what to do and wear.
- Find out what your child will need on their first day like pens, pencils and a calculator.
- Once they have started, encourage your child to talk about their day and be open about any worries and concerns they have.
- Encourage them to ask questions, teachers are there to help but the administrative staff, school nurse or other pupils can also support them.
- Talk regularly to their teacher or tutor about how they are settling in.
- Encourage your child to get involved with clubs and activities as these offer a good opportunity to make new friends.
- Ask for details of your Parent Rep or PTA so you can start building your own network of parent contacts.

It might be hard but as a parent it is important that you remain calm and cheerful. Your child will look to you for reassurance and will pick up on any anxiety you feel.

At Leweston every new pupil of any age is assigned a guardian from the same year group who will help them learn how the school works. We also have a buddy system in the Prep and a peer mentor scheme in the Senior School. Both see older pupils meet regularly with new pupils over their first term in school, many continue to be a trusted friend in the years to come.



Relocating

Moving your family to a new location can bring further considerations you may want to think about. If moving to an entirely new part of the country, your child is probably going to be leaving a lot more behind. Below are some suggestions to consider if you are not just going 'down the road'.

- Start a visual count-down, particularly for younger children. Make a countdown paperchain or calendar to see how many days are left until the move. The days can be ripped off to provide your child with an understanding of timescale.
- Visit your new home with your children to help them visualise where they will be.
- Have a day when you plan their new room together. Let them pick up colours, lights and new bedding.
- Read books about moving, this can help them emphasise with the characters and talk about anything on their minds.
- Make a contact list of friends so your child can stay in touch with them.
- Host a farewell party for your child's friends.
- Get to know the new area this may include finding out about clubs and activities or joining local social media groups.

In conclusion, by supporting your child in every way you can and choosing the right school, where new pupils are welcomed and supported you can ease the transition for the whole family.

This information has been brought to you by Leweston School. We are an independent school for children aged three months to 18 years old. Set in 46 acres of beautiful Dorset countryside the school offers day and boarding options, exceptional facilities, high levels of pastoral care and a wide range of activities. We are a busy, close knit community. If you would like to find out more about any aspect of our provision please visit www.leweston.co.uk or call our Registrar, Mrs June Smith, on 01963 211015.





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