

Be In The Know

40 questions about starting high school



Introduction

Be In The Know is a blog for young people focusing on a range of important topics such as education, employability, personal finance and technology.

We have created this guide which we hope will answer some of the most common questions that young people may have as they prepare to start high school.

If you would like to read more of our articles or get in touch you can find us online or on social media.

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Who's who in high school?

Just like in primary school there will be a head teacher and some depute head teachers who are responsible for running the school. There will also be class teachers who will teach specific subjects and also a principal teacher (sometimes called faculty head) who is the teacher responsible for each subject.

Other adults in the school will include the administrative staff who work in the school office, pupil support staff including classroom assistants, key workers and pastoral care teachers and other staff including janitors, cleaners and canteen staff.

Who can I go to to ask questions?

You can approach any member of staff in your school to ask questions. Remember, you will have a dedicated year head or pastoral care teacher who you can speak to about any aspect of your learning or school life.

You can also ask another teacher, older pupil or your parents/guardians.

If it is a question about a specific subject or assignment the best option would be to talk to your class teacher or the head of the department.

Remember there is no such thing as a silly question.

How many other pupils will there be?

Your high school will be much bigger than your primary school so there is likely to be more pupils than what you were used to in primary school. In the UK, the average high school has around 900 pupils although some will have more and some could have less.

Will there be a different uniform?

You will still need to wear smart trousers/skirts and a shirt and tie to high school. However, your high school will have its own tie to wear which will be different from the one you wore in primary school. Some high schools have different ties for different year groups or houses.

How will I find my way around the building?

Unlike primary school where you stay within one classroom all day, in high school you will move around different classrooms for each lesson.

Getting lost is a common worry amongst new pupils however you will soon find where everything is. Remember you will have visited the school beforehand so you will have seen what the building looks like and some of you may have even been taken on a tour.

Depending on your school there may be signs pointing you in the right direction or even maps available for new pupils. If you are unsure of where to go, ask a teacher or older pupil for directions.

Try to travel between classes in a group with other pupils (ideally with someone who knows where they are going) so you can help each other find the way.

Will I have a locker to use?

Most high schools have lockers available for pupils to use. You may need to pay to rent this for the year and you will be responsible for looking after it.

It is likely you will have a key to unlock it or will need to remember a number combination.

Having a locker gives you somewhere to store your jacket, lunch or any books you don't need straight away.

How will I travel there?

Most pupils either walk to school or receive a lift from parents/guardians or another trusted adult. Some may use public transport or a taxi.

Plan how you will travel to school before you start and how long it will take you. If you are unsure you could have a couple of practice journeys. Try to work out how long it will take you to get to school once you have left your house so know you know roughly what time you will need to leave at.

If your friends or any classmates live nearby or on the same route you could arrange to meet them and walk together.

What if I am late for school one morning?

Whilst you should try to be on time for school each day, unfortunately, there may be a genuine reason for turning up late. You will need to report to the school office when you arrive and they will update the school register to say that you have arrived. After that, you will go to class as normal.

Remember the school will likely notify your parents/guardians that you have turned up late and the school may also have sanctions for constant late coming.

What will I need to take with me?

As well as yourself, you should take a school bag containing pens, pencils and other stationery such as a ruler and a sharpener.

You may need to carry your own books and notepads so remember to take these on the days you need them. Remember to take your PE kit on the days when you have PE.

You should also take a bottle of water/juice and something to eat for lunch/break (unless you are buying it from the canteen).

Will I have to change my shoes when I arrive?

Most primary schools have pupils change into indoor shoes (or plimsolls) when they arrive however in high school you wear the same shoes all day. These should still be smart comfortable shoes and remember most schools have rules about what shoes you can wear.

Although for PE lessons you will be asked to bring along trainers or other suitable sports shoes.

Can I take my mobile phone to school?

Your school will have their own rules about taking mobile phones however most do allow you to bring them (at your risk).

Remember you will need to keep it safe and switched off in your bag when in school. Your phone may be confiscated if you break the rules or use it during class. Some schools may allow you to use them at break times as long as you use them sensibly.

How many pupils will be in my class?

Your year group will be divided into smaller classes of around 20-30 pupils (maybe more depending on the size of your school).

Your class will follow the same timetable and you will have your lessons together.

For practical classes such as music, art, drama or technical you may be split into smaller classes.

How long is the school day?

In high school, the school day will be slightly different to primary school although you will still have a morning break time and lunchtime. The school day will begin at usually around 9AM although some schools start at 8:50AM.

However, high schools have long days and short days during the week. On a long day, you will have 7 lessons and on a short day you will have 6 lessons and finish 50 minutes earlier on those days.

What new facilities will there be?

High schools are generally much bigger than primary schools so will have more facilities available for you to use. These may be subject specific such as laboratories for your science lessons, computer labs for ICT lessons, workshops for technical class and a games hall/gym for PE.

Most high schools also have a library, theatre, study rooms for pupils to use, outdoor sports pitches and pupil social areas.

Will I have to follow a timetable?

Yes, your day will be split into different lessons each usually lasting around 50 minutes (you will have a morning break and lunchtime as well) and you will need to move around different classrooms for each subject. In high school, each 50 minute lesson is referred to as a period. You will be allocated a timetable which will stay the same every week. Below is an example timetable for a Monday:

	1	2	Break	3	4	5	Lunch	6	7
Monday	English	Maths		Music	French	History		PE	Art

What if I am absent one day?

If you are unwell or have to miss school for another reason, your parents/guardians should contact the school by phone or email to let them know you will not be attending that day. The school will let your class teachers know that you will not be at your lessons.

When you return to school you should ask if you have missed anything important and what you can do to catch up on your work.

What if I need to leave school during the day for an appointment?

Whilst you should try to schedule appointments for outside of school hours, it is understandable that sometimes this may not be possible.

Every school will have their own policy on this but generally, if you have a medical/dental or another appointment which means you need to leave school, you will be asked to let the school know beforehand either by handing in a letter from your parents/guardians or your appointment letter. You should also let the school know if you will be getting picked up or if you need to travel yourself and what time you will be leaving.

Will I get to experience new subjects?

One of the biggest differences between high school and primary school is you will get to learn new subjects. For example, you may get to experience science in an actual science lab, new languages, computing, business management and art. Each subject will have its own area in the school with dedicated teachers and classrooms.

How will the lessons be different from primary school?

In high school, you will have different teachers who will teach you different subjects whereas in primary school you may have been used to having one teacher who taught you all the time.

Lessons will involve a range of activities such as working from textbooks, taking part in practical activities such as playing musical instruments in music class or drawing in art class, watching/taking part in experiments in science class, working at a computer in ICT and taking part in sports during PE lessons.

Will I still have PE?

Most primary school pupils have PE (or gym) twice a week. You will still have PE in high school although, depending on your high school, you may have PE lessons 3 times a week.

Like primary school, you will need to bring along your PE kit and before the class, you will need to change. Don't worry, there will be changing rooms available for you and you will be told where to keep your belongings during the class.

However, in high school, PE is its own department with lots of different equipment and facilities. For example, the PE department may have a games hall, outdoor sports pitch, fitness gym and lots of sports equipment.

Will there still be assemblies?

You may be used to having weekly (or sometimes even twice weekly) assemblies in primary school where the whole school comes together to share news, hear about other class's work, sing songs or perhaps talk about a specific subject.

In high school, you will still have assemblies however they may not take place every week. Some high schools host assemblies only every fortnight or on a monthly basis. Instead of the entire school attending, it may just be your year group or two year groups together.

What if I don't make any new friends?

Remember you will still be able to see your friends and classmates from primary school even if you are not in the same class in high school. There is nothing to stop you spending time with them at break times.

You will also meet other pupils who went to a different primary school. Get to know each other and spend time with each other outside of school.

There are lots of opportunities to meet new people in high school. Perhaps join one of the clubs or take part in other extracurricular activities.

Will older pupils play pranks on me?

Do not worry about older pupils playing pranks on you. Yes, you may have heard daft stories about 1st years having their heads flushed down the loo, being given directions to the non-existent school swimming pool or having their lunch money stolen. Trust me, that's not going to happen.

What happens at break time?

Whilst in primary school you may have spent break times in the playground or in a classroom if it was raining, in high school you may have more options about where to spend break time. There may be a dedicated social area with tables and chairs, the school cafeteria, library or outdoor space.

At lunchtime, you can bring along your own lunch, visit the school cafeteria or even visit local shops if your school will let you. Some schools only let older pupils go to the local shops for lunch.

What if I don't like one of my new subjects?

Everyone is different and it's only natural for people to have their own likes and dislikes. Some pupils may enjoy all of their new subjects however some of you may have one or two you dislike. There is nothing wrong with that.

The best thing to do is try to understand why it is you don't like it. Is it because you are not interested in it or you struggle to understand it? Do you not get along with your classmates? Perhaps you may not like the teacher or their methods of teaching.

Remember in future years you may have a different teacher or a different class, the lesson content may be slightly different or you may be able to drop the subject altogether.

In the meantime, try to apply yourself as much as possible. Find something you do enjoy about the subject and focus on that. You could also spend some time reading or learning about the subject in your spare time which may help you get to know it a bit better.

Will I get to choose my subjects?

For your first two years in high school, your subjects will be allocated for you. It is likely you will have a chance to experience all of the subjects the school has over the 2 years. As you begin to move into your 3rd year and the senior school you can decide which subjects you would like to study and eventually sit exams in.

Use your time in 1st and 2nd year to decide which subjects you really enjoy and which will be beneficial for your future career.

What if I struggle with one of my new subjects?

It is perfectly normal if you find you are better at some subjects than others. Sometimes it can take time to grasp the concept of something new and everyone learns at different paces. However, if you feel you are particularly struggling with one of your subjects do not be afraid to ask for help.

Talk to your class teacher, year head or pastoral care teacher and explain that you are struggling with this particular subject. They can then suggest some ways of helping you for example by providing some extra learning material for you to work on at home or suggest some different learning tools.

You could also take a bit of time at home to do some of your own learning on the subject.

Will I have lots of homework?

You will be used to having some homework tasks during primary school however in high school the tasks may be slightly different. It is likely that each subject will set you a homework task at least once per week. Remember each subject will have a separate day of the week for handing in homework so you will not need to hand it all in at once.

Try not to leave homework tasks to the night before it is due in. Ideally, you should try to complete it (or at least start it) on the day it is set.

Keep a homework diary and set up a study plan which will help you decide which homework to do on which day. You can also decide whether you will do your homework as soon as you arrive home from school or later in the evening.

What if I'm struggling with the homework?

If you are stuck on a particular homework task, try phoning a friend who is in the same class or ask a parent, older sibling or other family members for help. As long as you can show your teacher that you attempted the task and spent time working on it, they will understand that you put the effort in.

If you are struggling with your homework in general i.e the amount set or the difficulty of the questions, you should talk to someone about it. Speak to your class teacher, head of year or pupil support teacher if you feel you are struggling. It may be worthwhile asking your parents/guardians to talk to the school as well.

What if I don't like one of my teachers?

It is natural that not everyone will get along with each other. After all, we are only human. Remember, your teachers are only human as well. Treat your teachers with courtesy, even if you are tempted not to. Displaying a poor or even rude attitude will not do you any favours.

Try to keep an open mind and don't focus on your feelings of dislike. Instead, focus on the subject and the learning. If you begin to enjoy the subject, you may start to like the teacher better.

Do not let your feelings impact your performance in the subject. Allowing yourself to perform badly in class is not a good idea.

Who can I speak to if I'm worried about something?

If you are worried about something or have a problem that you need help with, there are lots of people you can talk to such as your parents/guardians, siblings, friends, older pupils, another trusted adult or one of your teachers.

You will be allocated a pastoral care teacher (they may also be called a guidance or pupil support teacher) who is responsible for your welfare whilst at school. Also, a member of the school's senior leadership i.e a depute head teacher will also be responsible for your year group. You can approach either of those teachers or any other teacher in the school.

Will there be clubs I can join?

Every school will have various clubs for pupils to join which may take place after school or at lunchtime. These may range from sports teams, games such as chess or table tennis or subject specific such as science club, computer club or music club.

Some clubs may be for specific year groups so you will be with people your own age.

During your first week, you will be told about the clubs available to you and some schools even have a fresher's fair (like university/college) where you can see all the clubs on offer and sign up to any you like.

Will there be a pupil council?

You may remember taking part in elections in primary school to decide who will represent your class on the pupil council. This is a group of pupils who meet with the head teacher or another senior teacher to discuss the views of pupils and talk about new ideas for the school. Class representatives are usually decided by a class vote.

As you move up the school into senior years you may have the opportunity to become a school prefect, house captain, pupil leader or head boy/girl/pupil.

Will I have an opportunity to have say in my own learning?

Your school will want to hear about your thoughts on your own learning and school life in general. There will be lots of opportunities for you to offer your views either through pupil surveys/questionnaires, focus groups, assemblies or even through conversations with your teachers.

Almost every school will have a pupil council who will meet regularly with the head teacher or another senior member of staff. Each class will have a representative on the pupil council who will take note of the ideas from their classmates and present these at the meeting.

Will my parents/guardians be involved in my learning?

Your school will regularly keep in touch with parents/guardians through letters, email or even social media updates on school events and important information.

As well as a pupil council, the school will have a parent council where a group of parents will meet a representative from the school (usually the head teacher) to discuss the views of parents.

Will there still be a parent's night?

Yes, just like in primary school your parents will still be invited to meet your teachers at parent's night. Although this time instead of meeting just one teacher they will have several teachers to meet. You may also be able to go along to the meeting as well and hear what is being said.

Will there be social events outside of school I can go along to?

All high schools will have events taking place outside of school hours such as school concerts, shows, awards ceremonies or social events such as quizzes, discos or talent contests. Some of these may be part of school fundraising.

You can go along yourself or in a group with your friends. If you like you can take your family along as well.

Will there be school prefects?

Your primary school may have had a selection of senior pupils who were given the role of prefect. In high school, there will also be a group of senior pupils who have been assigned the role of prefect and this is something you will be able to do when you reach the senior school.

School prefects may wear a badge, different tie or have braiding on their school blazer to identify them as prefects so they are pretty easy to spot. The prefects will have a range of duties such as helping out at school events, leading school committees or helping out at break times and lunchtime.

You can also ask a prefect for directions if you are lost or talk to them if you are worried or unsure about something.

When will I need to sit exams?

You will not begin studying towards your SQA exams until you are in 4th year. Although this seems ages away, remember the learning you will be doing in 1st year will begin building your knowledge which you will need.

In S1, S2 and S3 you may still have some class assessments to evaluate your learning so far. Don't worry, this is just so your teachers can see how you are doing.

Is there anything I can do at home to further my learning?

Although you do not need to spend hours and hours per day studying, there is no harm in doing a little bit of extra learning at home if you feel it will help you.

Perhaps you could spend 10-15 minutes reading over your schoolwork or do some extra reading on a subject.

Have a look online for some learning resources or ask your school if they can recommend any. BBC Bitesize is pretty useful for secondary school pupils.

Thank you for reading our guide. We wish you the best of luck as you begin your journey through high school.



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