

Supporting Your Dyslexic Child's Transition to Secondary School: For Families

Written by Dyslexia Victoria Support

Transitioning from primary to secondary school can be a big change for any child, but for children with Specific Learning Difficulties (dyslexia), it can feel especially overwhelming. With proper planning and support, you can help make this transition smoother and ensure your child thrives in their new environment.

1. Understand the Challenges of Transition

For a dyslexic child, transitioning to secondary school may involve:

- Increased academic demands: More subjects, complex texts, many more assignments and a faster pace of learning can be challenging.
- New social dynamics: Larger class sizes and new peer groups may feel intimidating.
- Organisational demands: Managing multiple subjects, teachers, and schedules can be overwhelming.

2. Planning Ahead is Key

For a dyslexic child, transitioning to secondary school may involve:

- Meeting with school staff early on to discuss your child's needs. Set up a meeting with the year coordinator, learning support, or IN (Individual Needs Coordinator) to ensure appropriate accommodations are in place. If a school has the capability, develop an individualised learning plan (ILP) or update any existing learning support plans. Include specific goals and accommodations for your child, such as extra time in assessments or assistive technology.
- Tour the school together. Visiting the campus beforehand can help your child feel more familiar with their new surroundings.
- Creating a visual timetable. Having a clear schedule for classes, homework, and after-school activities will help with organisation.

3. Building a Strong Support System

Foster open communication: Keep an ongoing dialogue with your child's teachers and learning support staff. Regular check-ins can help track progress and address any emerging issues.

Encourage peer support: Help your child form positive relationships with classmates. Peer support programs, encourage peer support buddy programs, or group projects that can help them feel more connected, these could be lunch time classes such as drama, music or chess. Connect with other families: Reach out to support groups such as Dyslexia Victoria Support or other local organisations for advice and community.

Supporting Your Dyslexic Child's Transition to Secondary School: A Fact Sheet for Families

4. Use Assistive Technology

Assistive technology can make learning more accessible and reduce frustration. Tools such as:

- Text-to-speech software can help with reading complex texts.
- Speech-to-text tools can assist with written assignments.
- Organisational apps can help manage timetables, homework, and deadlines.

Ensure your child knows how to use these tools and that the school provides the necessary technology during assignments, exams or assessments.

5. Focus on Emotional Wellbeing

Secondary school can be a time of increased stress for any child, but particularly for those with dyslexia. To support their emotional wellbeing:

- Listen to their concerns. Encourage your child to express any worries they have and validate their feelings.
- Watch for red flags and make contact with the Well-being Coordinator if you have concerns
- Boost their confidence. Help your child recognise their strengths, whether they're academic, creative, or personal, and celebrate their achievements.
- Develop coping strategies. Work on building resilience by teaching them how to handle setbacks and ask for help when needed.

6. Encourage Independence

Secondary school is a time for your child to develop greater independence. Encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning by:

Self-advocating: Teach your child how to communicate their needs to teachers and peers. Using learning strategies: Help them develop study routines, such as using mind maps, flashcards, or summarising information.

Staying organised: Support them in keeping track of homework, deadlines, and school materials. Meet regularly with teachers to ensure homework is on track.

Supporting Your Dyslexic Child's Transition to Secondary School: A Fact Sheet for Families

7. Stay Involved

While secondary school encourages independence, parental involvement remains crucial, particularly for dyslexic students. Stay informed about your child's progress by:

- Attending parent-teacher meetings. Regular communication with teachers helps you stay updated on how your child is doing and what additional support they might need.
- Monitoring workload. Keep an eye on homework demands and whether your child is managing the workload without feeling overwhelmed.
- Celebrating successes. Recognise and celebrate your child's achievements, no matter how small, to maintain motivation and positivity

8. Prepare for the Future

As your child progresses through secondary school, it's important to continue planning for the future:

- Explore accommodations for exams, such as the VCAA VCE Special Examination Arrangements in Victoria, see references.
- Consider post-secondary options. Look into universities, TAFEs, or vocational training programs that offer support for students with learning difficulties.

Final Thoughts

The transition to secondary school is a significant milestone, but with the right support and preparation, your dyslexic child can thrive. Stay engaged, advocate for their needs, and encourage their independence as they navigate this exciting new chapter.

For further support, connect with organisations such as
[Dyslexia Victoria Support](#) or [SPELD Victoria](#).

References:

Headspace. (n.d.). Transition from primary to secondary school. Retrieved from <https://headspace.org.au/explore-topics/supporting-a-young-person/transition-from-primary-to-secondary-school>

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA). (n.d.). Special examination arrangements. Retrieved from <https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/administration/special-provision/Pages/SpecialExaminationArrangements.aspx>

Parent questions to ask when interviewing a school, for a child with dyslexia.

Academic Support

1. Learning Plans

- Does the school provide individualised learning plans (ILPs) or similar documents tailored for students with dyslexia?
- How often are these plans reviewed, and who is involved in updating them?

2. Accommodations

- What accommodations are offered for assessments and assignments, such as extra time, assistive technology, or alternative formats?
- Are these accommodations readily available, or do they need to be requested?

3. Teacher Expertise

- Are staff trained in teaching strategies for students with Specific Learning Difficulties like dyslexia?
- Is there a designated Learning Support Coordinator or Individual Needs Coordinator?

4. Classroom Adjustments

- How are lessons adapted to support students who struggle with reading and writing?
- Are assistive technologies, such as text-to-speech or speech-to-text tools, available in classrooms?

Organisational and Social Support

1. Timetabling and Organisation

- Does the school offer help with organisational skills, such as visual timetables or planners for homework and deadlines?
- Are there apps or tools provided to help students manage multiple subjects and teachers?

2. Peer Support

- Are there buddy programs, peer support initiatives, or inclusive activities like lunchtime clubs?
- How does the school foster positive relationships among students to reduce social isolation?

Emotional and Wellbeing Support

1. Emotional Wellbeing

- Is there a Wellbeing Coordinator or similar support role within the school?
- How are staff trained to recognise and respond to emotional or mental health concerns?

2. Building Confidence

- How does the school celebrate the strengths and achievements of students with learning difficulties?
- Are there specific programs aimed at building resilience and self-esteem?

Transition and Independence

1. Transition Planning

- What support is provided to help dyslexic students transition smoothly from primary to secondary school?
- Are there opportunities to visit the campus and meet key staff before starting?

2. Encouraging Independence

- How are students encouraged to self-advocate for their learning needs?
- Are there regular check-ins with students to ensure they're managing their workload?

Parent questions to ask when interviewing a school, for a child with dyslexia.

Future Planning

- Exam Accommodations
 - What provisions are in place for secondary school exams and assessments?
 - Is the school experienced in applying for special arrangements for major exams (e.g., VCAA VCE Special Examination Arrangements)?
- Post-Secondary Support
 - Does the school provide guidance on post-secondary education or vocational options that support students with learning difficulties?
 - Are there partnerships with organisations or programs that specialise in supporting dyslexic students after secondary school?

Parental Involvement

- Communication
 - How does the school maintain ongoing communication with parents about their child's progress?
 - Are there regular meetings or parent-teacher conferences focused on learning support?
- External Support
 - Does the school work with external organisations like SPELD Victoria or Dyslexia Victoria Support?
 - Are families encouraged to connect with these organisations for additional resources?

By asking these questions, parents can determine whether a school provides the support necessary for their child to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.