



RUNNYMEDE

KEY STAGE 3

YEARS 7-9 / AGE 11 TO 13

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TELL ME WHAT I NEED TO KNOW

HELPING BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC, REFUGEE,
ASYLUM-SEEKING AND TRAVELLER PARENTS
TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN IN EDUCATION



• INTRODUCTION

The Runnymede Trust designed *Tell Me What I Need to Know* to help parents, particularly those from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME), Refugee, Asylum-seeking and Traveller communities to support their children's education more confidently and effectively.

Although the information and guidance that we provide will be relevant for parents from all backgrounds, we concentrated on these groups because statistics repeatedly show that, while some children from these groups do extremely well, many others fail to achieve their potential. There are a number of reasons for this, but it is clear that if parents do get involved in their children's learning, both in school and at home, that can make a difference. As our research shows, there is, too, no question that parents in our target group care and want to achieve the best for their children.

In the summer of 2006 we carried out an online survey. Over 200 parents and teachers responded. 88% of the parents felt that it is very important to support and be involved in their children's education. But both parents and teachers told us about their concerns and the barriers to involvement that they experienced. We have also looked at existing research on parental involvement and, although BME parents reflect many of the same concerns as other parents, there are particular factors that affect them more.

One concern consistently repeated by parents is that they don't have enough information: they don't understand how the education system works and don't know their rights. It is clear, too, that there are areas of misunderstanding, mistrust, sensitivity and lack of communication on the part of both parents and schools. Also evident, though, are signs that government, local authorities, schools, teachers, independent agencies as well as parents are searching for – and finding – creative solutions to the perceived problems.

Tell Me What I Need to Know attempts to address the concerns of parents and teachers and to bring together strategies to overcome the hurdles. Examples of 'good practice' are drawn from across

the country. Since parents are often in the best position to identify and understand their children's needs, we hope that this information will give them increased confidence to engage more effectively with their children's schools.

We have restricted *Tell Me What I Need to Know* to the education system in England and to the period when a child's formal education begins at the age of 3 until compulsory education comes to an end. The education system is constantly changing and complex. There is a lot that parents need to understand, particularly those parents who have not been through the system themselves. We have therefore divided the information part of *Tell Me What I Need to Know* into 4 booklets, covering the Key Stages of a child's education. Each booklet gives you the information you need to understand what happens in your child's school as well as guidance and suggestions to help you prepare for the next Key Stage.

This booklet concentrates on Key Stage 3, from age 11 to 14. Other booklets cover:

Foundation Stage	Age 3-5
Key Stages 1&2	Age 5-11
Key Stage 4	Age 14-17
Good Practice	

There is a great deal of information in this booklet, but you do not need to read it in one session. You can scan through the headings and decide which parts you need to know about now. You could then come back to other subjects at another time. If you have younger or older children, you might want to read about one of the other Key Stages.

Throughout this booklet, we've used the term 'parent' to include anyone who has responsibility for the care of a child.

The booklet called 'Good Practice' brings together the creative ways in which parents' concerns are being addressed and we have also offered suggestions about how parents can, themselves, try to overcome barriers. We hope that this booklet, in particular, will help parents and teachers to work in partnership as co-educators of our children.



- WHO'S WHO IN SECONDARY SCHOOL?
- WHAT HAPPENS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL?

WHO'S WHO IN MY CHILD'S SECONDARY SCHOOL?

Your child's school will be run by a governing body that has responsibility for the overall policies of the school. The board of governors in state-funded schools is made up of representatives from: the local authority (appointed by the authority); parents (elected by parents); school staff (elected by the staff); the head teacher and – sometimes – community members (appointed by the school).

The head teacher is in charge of the day-to-day running of the school, assisted by a deputy head teacher. Other teachers will be responsible for separate curriculum subjects.

WHAT HAPPENS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL?

The school year

In most schools, the school year is divided into 3 terms: Autumn term (September–December); Spring term (January–April); Summer term (April–July). There are school holidays halfway through and at the end of each term. You'll need to make arrangements for your child during school holidays.

Schools also have staff training – or 'inset' – days when teachers need to be in school, but pupils do not. You will be given advance notice of these days so that you can make other arrangements for your child.

Your child's first year in secondary school is Year 7.

The school day is divided into a number of lessons, lunchtime and breaks. Your child will still have a class (or 'form') teacher but also separate subject teachers for different National Curriculum subjects. There will probably be a 'head of year' or 'pastoral' teacher who will look after your child's general welfare.

New pupils often find the first few weeks of the first term physically tiring since they're now moving from classroom to classroom for each lesson.

Meals

School meals have recently been in the news and schools now try to make sure that children can get a healthy meal at lunchtime. Depending on the school,

there may be, for example, halal or vegetarian options. If there are no suitable choices provided for your child, you can talk to the class teacher or head teacher to see if arrangements can be made. Some parents choose to give their child a packed lunch.

Some schools use a computerised system with cards or fingerprint technology to pay for meals so that children do not need to bring cash into school.

Some secondary schools allow students to leave school at lunch times – though usually not in the first year – so you'll need to talk to your child about eating healthily.

Uniform

Some schools may have a uniform for daily wear and for Physical Education. When they decide on school uniform, schools have to take into account cultural and religious requirements. Some schools adapt their uniforms so that, for example, a uniform shalwar kamiz can be worn. They will usually allow girls to wear trousers or a headscarf though it's worth finding out if veils will have to be removed inside the classroom. Boys are normally allowed to wear a turban. For health and safety reasons, there are normally rules about wearing jewellery.

Behaviour and Discipline

Most schools have rules that set the standard for behaviour. You should be able to see a copy of the behaviour policy (school rules). If your child breaks the rules, there are a number of actions the school might take including giving a **detention** (being made to stay behind in class during break or after school). It is important to know whether the school needs to inform you. Some schools only tell parents in advance if an after-school detention is for more than 15 minutes. The school might be able to reschedule a detention if, for example, it happens on an important religious day or if you're worried about your child returning home alone in the dark.

Other actions that might be taken include: a reprimand; a letter home; removal from the class; loss of break or lunchtime privileges.

A more severe punishment might be **exclusion** from school for a fixed period (for a maximum of 45 days

• WHAT HAPPENS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL?



in total in a school year) when a child has seriously broken school rules or his/her presence would either harm others or disrupt learning. If your child is to be excluded, the school will call you and follow up with a letter that explains the length of the exclusion, why it's being used and who to contact if you want further information.

As an alternative to exclusion, children can be removed from their own class and sent to a designated part of the school, or to another class. This should only happen for a short period of time. Another possibility is that they might be sent to a **Pupil Referral Unit** (a special type of school, run by the local authority for children who are unable to attend mainstream school).

If your child is excluded from school, you will have to make sure that he/she is not outside of home during school hours for the first 5 days of the exclusion. If you do not, and your child is seen outside of home at those times, then you could be liable to a fine. If you can provide a reasonable justification for your child being in a public place, then you may not have to pay the fine.

Children can be **permanently excluded** from school as a last resort. If this happens, your child can no longer attend the school (and other schools might be unwilling to take him/her). The school's governing body has to review the decision but even if it confirms the decision, you have the right to appeal to an Independent Appeals Panel. The local authority still has to provide your child with a full-time education, so they must discuss other options with you. These might include your child being sent to a different school or a Pupil Referral Unit or being educated at home.

Statistics show that Black boys are between 3 and 6 times more likely than White boys to be excluded from school and that they are punished more severely than White boys for similar offences. Gypsy/ Traveller pupils are also disproportionately excluded. Permanent exclusion can have such serious consequences for your child that it's important to investigate the circumstances and to question why the decision was made.

Physical punishment is not allowed in any school.

You can get help and advice from the **Advisory Centre for Education (0808 800 5793)**, which produces a free exclusion pack for parents. The Centre also has an exclusion information line [020 7704 9822](tel:02077049822) and an exclusion advice line [0808 800 0327](tel:08088000327).

RACE AND CULTURE

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 says that public bodies (including schools) must have 'due regard to the need':

- to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination; and
- to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups.

This applies to admission, assessment, raising pupils' attainment levels, delivering the curriculum, discipline, guidance and support. Schools can't claim that they don't have the resources to meet these responsibilities.

This means that state-maintained schools need to make sure that they don't discriminate against you or your child because of your background and they must respect your culture. Under the Act, Romany Gypsies and Travellers of Irish Heritage are recognised ethnic groups.

Many schools celebrate Black History Month in October of each year and you may want to find out exactly how they do so and what children learn. Similarly, religious festivals like Diwali, Eidh, Ramadhan, Guru Nanak's birthday or the crowning of Haile Selassie are often commemorated.

If you feel that your culture is not respected and reflected in school life and the curriculum, you can discuss this with staff. If you believe that this is a problem that affects other children in the school, you may want to talk to other parents to see if you can approach the school together, perhaps involving the parent governor and/or the Parent Teacher Association.



- WHAT WILL MY CHILD BE TAUGHT?
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This may be more difficult if you're part of a very small minority but schools might still value your contribution since all students will benefit. In addition, schools also now have a duty to promote community cohesion (good relations between different communities).

WHAT WILL MY CHILD BE TAUGHT?

The **National Curriculum** outlines what will be taught in state schools. It aims to establish what education all children are entitled to, regardless of their background, and the standards for learning and attainment. It aims to ensure continuity between schools and between stages of education. The National Curriculum is divided into 'Key Stages'.

At Key Stage 3, pupils continue those subjects started in primary school and so they must study English, Maths, Science, Design and Technology (DT), Information and Communication Technology (ICT), History, Geography, Art and Design, Music, Physical Education and Religious Education. They may also study Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Careers Education. A modern foreign language is also added.

Concerns about the curriculum

All schools must produce a written statement of their policy on **Sex and Relationship Education (SRE)**, which should be taught as part of PSHE so that pupils 'consider the moral aspects of sex education and are encouraged to develop loving and caring relationships'. You have the right to withdraw your child from part or all of SRE except elements that are included in Science teaching.

You can withdraw your child from **Religious Education** lessons and collective worship.

Some schools will adjust **Physical Education** classes to suit, for example, children who are fasting during the period of Ramadhan. You need to let the school know if there are other reasons why your child might find PE classes difficult.

HOW WILL MY CHILD BE TAUGHT?

Many children find that in secondary schools, teachers are less indulgent than they were in primary

school. Teachers expect students to become more responsible about their own education; pupils need to be more organised when it comes to doing homework, and handing it in on time, knowing the timetable and what to bring into school each day, etc.

Setting and Streaming

Many secondary schools use 'setting' – grouping children according to their ability for certain lessons. Other schools use mixed-ability teaching. You can discuss any concerns you or your child have about the group or 'set' that she/he has been allocated with the class teacher. Setting should not be confused with 'streaming' where children are split into different ability groups for all lessons.

If you believe that your child is in the wrong group or 'set' for a subject, try discussing this with the class teacher to get an explanation of the teacher's assessment.

Children will take formal tests and schools will carry out 'mock' tests to allow students to learn what it feels like to work in test conditions: arriving on time, following instructions, obeying the rules, working in silence, etc.

Homework

Parents and children are often surprised by the increase in the amount of homework at secondary school. Most schools give children a homework diary so you can see what they are meant to be doing and when.

English as an Additional Language

Some children need to learn English as an additional language. They should be given extra help. Research shows, though, that being fluent in his/her first or heritage language is very important for a child so he/she may also be encouraged to read books in his/her first language.

HOW DO I KNOW HOW MY CHILD IS DOING?

Assessments

Your child will be assessed and his/her progress compared to what children have normally achieved at various stages. There are 8 levels in the National Curriculum (Level 1 to Level 8) each divided into 'a',

- HOW DO I KNOW HOW MY CHILD IS DOING?
- WHAT IF MY CHILD NEEDS EXTRA HELP?
- WHAT IF MY CHILD HAS SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS?



'b' and 'c'. At the end of Key Stage 3 (Age 14), most children will normally have achieved Level 5 or 6. Children achieving Level 7 are doing better than expected and those achieving Level 8 are doing exceptionally well.

Your child's teacher will also regularly assess his/her progress on an informal basis and should discuss any concerns with you.

Reports

After your child's SAT examinations at Key Stage 3, you will get his/her results along with those for all the children in your child's age group in the school plus the national results.

Schools hold a parents' evening at least once a year when you'll have the chance to speak to the class teacher and see your child's work. You'll normally only have a brief time to do this. Take a friend if you need to. You might also want to take an interpreter or one might be provided by the school.

Schools should give you an annual report giving details of your child's progress, highlighting achievements, strengths and developmental needs as well as attendance record. In some schools, reports are translated into the child's home language.

Apart from formal examinations, children are regularly assessed informally by teachers. You should be kept informed of how your child is progressing. If your child's test results come as a surprise to you, then you may need to review communication with teachers.

Communication

The school might contact you by phone, text, email or letter. Some letters might be translated. There may also be a named person who will contact you, perhaps a member of staff who is bilingual or has expertise in areas relating to Black and Minority Ethnic or Gypsy/Roma/Traveller communities.

Your child's homework diary also has space for you to write down any comments or concerns you have. The diary is normally checked by your child's class teacher and you should get a response.

You'll probably find, though, that face-to-face communication with school staff is much less than at primary school and you'll need to make more of an effort to keep up to date with what's happening to your child in school.

WHAT IF MY CHILD NEEDS EXTRA HELP IN SCHOOL?

Local authorities and schools can access money from the **Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant** to target additional support for minority ethnic groups that are underachieving. It can be used to provide help for pupils for whom English is an additional language and those who are newly arrived such as asylum seekers and refugees.

Pupils may also be given one-to-one help with literacy or numeracy or they may be taught in small groups.

WHAT IF MY CHILD HAS SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS?

Special Educational Needs (SEN) is a term that covers a number of different difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for a child to learn compared to other children of the same age. These might include difficulties with schoolwork, communication or behaviour. Help for children with SEN will, most often, happen within mainstream schools, sometimes with outside specialist help. The local authority has responsibility for SEN provision. The school's governing body has a duty to 'make every effort to see that the necessary special arrangements are made for any pupil who has special educational needs'. They also have to make sure that parents are told about what arrangements are being made for their child.

SEN diagnosis

It's important to trust your own instincts about your child. Although he/she may not have a diagnosis, you are likely to sense if something is wrong. You can talk to your child's teacher to see if he/she shares any of your concerns. You can also talk to the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) in school. You can try to get an assessment by an educational psychologist.

- WHAT IF MY CHILD HAS SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS?
- OTHER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES



Getting a statement of special educational needs

It can be difficult to get a statement of special educational needs for your child because there are limited funds available to local authorities. But if you believe that your child does have learning difficulties, you might get help from your GP and persist with the school's SENCO.

Some forms of special educational need may be considered to be a disability and your child might be entitled to additional support under the **Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2005**.

You can read the government's *Code of Practice on Special Educational Needs*, written to ensure that children with SEN get the right help. A free copy is available from the **Department for Children, Schools and Families** publication centre on **0845 602 2260**. The DCSF also publishes *SEN: A guide for parents & carers* in community languages (www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/sen/parentcarers).

Incorrect assessments

You may feel that your child has been wrongly diagnosed as having special educational needs. Research has shown that Black Caribbean and dual-heritage Caribbean pupils are 1.5 times more likely to be identified as having behavioural, emotional and social difficulties than White British pupils. Children who have not been identified by the school as being of Traveller heritage may be thought to have SEN when they have simply missed periods of schooling or have moved around different schools. Discuss concerns with the SENCO (take a friend with you, if necessary).

If your child speaks English as an additional language, this should not be confused with SEN. He/she may simply need extra help with English. Also, if your child has experienced trauma (this may be particularly relevant to refugee and asylum-seeking families), it's worth telling the school. They may be able to access specialist help.

You might also need to check if your child has previously unidentified difficulties with hearing or sight as these can cause problems with hearing what the teacher says or in reading from boards or from computer screens.

If you're not satisfied with a local authority's decision about the assessment of your child's needs, you can appeal to a SEN tribunal. You can find more guidance on the **Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunals** website at www.sendist.gov.uk. Schools must have a SEN policy and must tell parents how they can complain and how complaints will be dealt with.

Getting help

Parent Partnership services provide support and advice for parents about SEN. You can find them through your local authority.

You can also get help and advice from the **Advisory Centre for Education** (**0808 800 5793**).

WHAT OTHER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES MIGHT THE SCHOOL PROVIDE?

School trips

Your child's secondary school might organise school trips overseas, often related to a subject that is being studied, such as history or a modern language. They are not compulsory. The school may wish to use a 'group' passport. It is possible that, even if your child was born in Britain and has a British passport, you will need to provide proof of your nationality, such as a naturalisation certificate if you were born outside the UK. Pupils who are not British nationals can't be included in a group passport. Students who are not British nationals or nationals of a European Union member state will sometimes need a visa to travel to another European Union state.

Asylum seekers who leave the UK are considered to have abandoned their asylum claim or appeal and might not be allowed to return to the UK.

Students who have been granted refugee status, humanitarian protection or Discretionary Leave to Remain may not have passports and so might not be able to go on overseas school trips unless they get a travel document from the Home Office.

Schools don't want children to be excluded from the learning opportunities provided by school trips, so they can sometimes offer financial help for parents who have difficulty meeting the cost of a trip.



- OTHER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES
- WILL MY CHILD BE LOOKED AFTER IN SCHOOL?

Out-of-class activities

Your child's school may organise extra activities after school or at weekends. These might include clubs devoted to special interests such as sport, computers, chess, cookery, art, etc.

They are usually free, or a small fee might be charged to cover the cost of materials. Some schools will also have activities such as football (often run by parents) at weekends.

In addition to clubs, many schools have other supervised activities at the beginning and end of the school day. There might be breakfast clubs that start at 8.00am and after-school playschemes or homework clubs up to 6.00pm. There may also be after-school activities in youth clubs or community centres. There will usually be a charge.

With its Extended Schools programme, the government wants all schools to offer extra activities from at least 8.00am to 6.00pm by 2010. If you're working, you'll need to find out what arrangements you'll need to make if you can't pick your child up at the end of the normal school day. At some stage, you will probably need to decide when your child can be at home alone. This will, of course, depend on the age, personality and maturity of your child.

WILL MY CHILD BE LOOKED AFTER IN SCHOOL?

Schools have responsibilities under Health and Safety legislation to make sure that pupils are safe while they're in school. Although it is not written into law, courts have also accepted that head teachers and teachers have a 'duty of care' towards their pupils in school.

Health

Schools should be able to provide first aid if there are minor accidents. They will normally record incidents in a book and will send a note to you at home. If an injury or illness is anything other than minor, the school is likely to call you and ask you to collect your child.

Most state-maintained schools work with the local

NHS Trust to detect any health problems that children might have. They may arrange for checks on your child's hearing, sight, growth and general development or for dental checks to be carried out.

Children over 13 will be offered the Td/IPV booster against diphtheria, tetanus and polio, which is given as a single injection. A BCG vaccination will be offered only to the children most at risk of tuberculosis (TB). All girls aged 11 to 13 will be offered a vaccine to protect against HPV, the virus that causes cervical cancer. There will also be a 'catch-up' programme for girls up to the age of 18. You will be asked for your consent to vaccinations.

If your child has a medical condition or needs to take medication regularly, you should let the head teacher know.

Your child's school should also have:

- staff who have been trained to recognise signs of abuse;
- a senior member of staff who is responsible for child protection;
- procedures for checking on staff suitability before they are allowed to work with children;
- a child protection policy.

Racism

As a parent, you may be concerned about the possibility of your child having to deal with racism in school. Schools and teachers need to acknowledge that racism exists in society and it's therefore possible that it might exist within schools. They need to confront racism wherever and whenever it appears in schools.

Under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, public bodies (including state-maintained schools) must have 'due regard to the need':

- to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination; and
- to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups.

Schools can't claim that they don't have the resources to meet these responsibilities.

All state-maintained schools must also produce a written statement of their policy for promoting



• WILL MY CHILD BE LOOKED AFTER IN SCHOOL?

race equality and you can ask to see it. Schools must also note and report racist incidents to the local authority. The school's race equality policy is just as important in schools with few children from Black and Minority Ethnic or Traveller families as those with many. Just because there are few BME or Traveller children does not mean that racism does not exist within that school.

Independent schools don't have to comply with these requirements in the same way although the Commission for Racial Equality strongly encourages them to do so. However, the Race Relations Act does require them **not** to discriminate in terms of admissions, access to benefits or services, and exclusions. If your child's school is independent, you may still want to ask if they have a race equality policy.

If you believe that your child is subject to racism in school, you might first talk to his/her teacher or head teacher. If you are not happy with the results, you can discuss the matter with the parent governor representative. If that does not help, you can take your complaint to the local authority. You can try to get help from your local **Citizen's Advice Bureau** or **Racial Equality Council**.

Bullying

Bullying includes written, verbal and physically abusive behaviour. More recently, much has been written about 'cyber' bullying via email, websites and mobile phones.

Children may not tell parents about bullying, sometimes through fear of what it might lead to, sometimes out of embarrassment.

Changes in behaviour or the quality of their work might be a sign that something is wrong. Your child might suddenly no longer want to go to school or he/she might be unwell more often than usual or have difficulty sleeping. He/she may 'lose' more belongings. Or start asking for more money. He/she may have unexplained bruises.

Try to talk to your child about bullying. It's vital to listen to what your child does say about school. There

may be clues even if he/she doesn't want to be explicit. Do you know your child's friends? Have they said anything to their parents? Is your child's teacher aware of any changes at school? Would your child talk to other members of your family or to friends?

Schools must have written policies and procedures to prevent and deal with bullying. You can ask to see these policies.

Some schools have 'school councils' or mentors – older pupils who have had some training to deal with bullying. Your child may be able, as a first step, to talk to a council member or a mentor if they are unwilling to talk to a teacher.

If your child is being bullied, make notes of what is happening and talk to his/her teacher. Write down what action the teacher intends to take. If you're not satisfied, then you can talk to the head teacher or a parent governor. If that doesn't work, you can take your complaint to the local authority and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) or OFSTED. If you think that your child's health is being affected by bullying at school, you can ask your GP for a medical certificate so that you can keep your child at home. You could also consider moving your child to a different school. If the alleged bully is over the age of 10, then he/she can be prosecuted. You may feel that you have to report incidents to the police.

Being told that your child is bullying others would come as an enormous shock. None of us wants to believe that our child is a bully, but the fact is that bullies do exist in schools. Try to stay calm as you listen to any allegations. Listen carefully, too, to what your child has to say. While you naturally want to defend your child, do consider the possibility that your child might not behave exactly the same at school as he/she does at home. If you believe that your child has been wrongly accused of bullying, then take this up with the head teacher.

If there is any possibility that your child is bullying others or is part of a group of bullies, then you need to discuss this as calmly and positively as possible



- WILL MY CHILD BE LOOKED AFTER IN SCHOOL?
- DOES MY CHILD HAVE TO GO TO SCHOOL?

with your child and the school and see if there are any sources of help. It is vital not to ignore this.

You and your child need not feel alone and isolated. You can get help and support.

You can get help and support.

- **Parentline Plus** has a helpline: [0808 800 2222](tel:08088002222)
- **Kidscape** has a helpline for parents: [08451 205204](tel:08451205204)
- The **Advisory Centre for Education** gives advice to parents and children on all school matters: [0808 800 5793](tel:08088005793)
- The **Children's Legal Centre** gives free legal advice on all aspects of the law affecting children and young people: [01206 872466](tel:01206872466)
- **Bullying Online** (www.bullying.co.uk) has help and advice for pupils and parents.
- The **DCSF** website, **Don't Suffer in Silence** (www.dcsf.gov.uk/bullying/) has information for young people and parents.

Racist bullying

Unfortunately, some children do experience racist bullying in school or on the way to and from school. This might take the form of verbal abuse or even physical abuse. It is important to inform the school's head teacher about any incidents of this kind.

The school should have a written race equality policy and you should be able to get a copy. If the school is unwilling or unable to take action to prevent the bullying, you can complain to your local authority. If matters become serious enough, you may want to make a complaint to the police.

You can get help and advice from all the organisations mentioned under 'Bullying' above.

DOES MY CHILD HAVE TO GO TO SCHOOL?

You need to tell the school if your child is going to be away for any reason – if he/she is ill or needs to go to the dentist, for example. If you want to take your child on holiday during term time, you need to discuss this with the head teacher. If you take your child out of school during term time without permission, you could be fined. If you're going to be away for a long period, some schools will provide work that can be done while your child is away.

Schools will allow children to take time off school to celebrate major religious occasions but it is a good idea to let them know in advance, in writing, that your child will be absent.

If you are leaving the area or changing schools, you must inform your current school. Unexplained or long absences will be investigated by an Educational Welfare Officer.

Each school day is considered to be divided into half-day 'sessions' and most pupils have to attend all sessions unless there are very good reasons. There are special arrangements under Section 444(6) of the Education Act 1996 for Traveller children because the government understands that you might have special needs that make this difficult. If you can show that your work means that you have to travel around and that your child is registered with a school and has attended as regularly as possible, you won't be prosecuted if your child has been to school for at least 200 sessions in the year.

Local authorities have access to the Vulnerable Children's Grant, which is meant to improve access to education for vulnerable children, in particular, those who are unable to attend school or whose circumstances make it difficult for them to do so. Key groups include children who are looked after by the state, those who can't go to school for medical reasons, Gypsy and Traveller children and asylum seekers.

Truancy

You need to make sure that your child goes to school unless there is a good reason such as ill health. Missing lessons will, eventually, mean that your child will have difficulty catching up. Keeping children away from school for shopping trips, to help at home or even to assist with work may give the impression that school does not matter.

If your child has problems at school and doesn't want to go, then it's important to try to deal with those problems by talking to his/her teacher and/or the head teacher and, perhaps, getting support from other members of the family or from outside agencies such as the **Advisory Centre for Education** ([0808 800 5793](tel:08088005793)) or **Parentline Plus** ([0808 800 2222](tel:08088002222)).



- CONCERNS ABOUT MY CHILD'S SCHOOL
- WHAT DO I DO DURING SCHOOL HOLIDAYS?

If your child doesn't go to school and is not being home-schooled, an Educational Welfare Officer will contact you. Since it's the responsibility of parents to make sure that their children are being educated, they can be fined or even imprisoned if they do not cooperate with the local authorities.

WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT MY CHILD'S SCHOOL?

If you have concerns about the way in which the National Curriculum is being delivered or about how your child is treated in school, you might first of all contact his/her teacher. If that doesn't work, try discussing the matter with the head teacher. If your complaint still isn't sorted out, then you can complain to the governing body of the school in writing.

State-maintained schools have a procedure for dealing with complaints and you can ask to see a copy of this. For some complaints, a special governors' complaint panel may be called.

Local authorities also need to have a complaints procedure so if you are dissatisfied with the way in which the school is dealing with the problem, you can make a complaint in writing to the local authority.

As a last resort, you have the right to complain to the Secretary of State in the Department for Children, Schools and Families if you feel that the school's governing body or the local authority is acting 'unreasonably'. This would mean that they are behaving as no reasonable school or authority would do in the circumstances.

If possible, try to deal with incidents before they turn into major issues. If your child talks about something or someone they're having difficulties with at school – and it might be a teacher – listen to what they're saying and try to judge whether you need to take action. Your child might insist that you do nothing – he/she might fear what might happen as a result – but you might decide that, because things might escalate, or because the school needs to know that you have concerns, you must do something. You could start with a telephone call or a letter to the teacher concerned, class teacher or head of year to ask for a meeting. It

might help to make notes of what you want to say and take a friend with you to any meeting.

If staff raise issues about your child's behaviour or attitude, you might want to find out more. Is the problem with one teacher or many? Has there been one isolated incident or several? How has the school tried to deal with the problem? What suggestions do they have? How can you help the school to solve the problem?

If you are concerned about the effect of any reported incidents on your child's school records, you (and your child) have the right to see them if you make a request in writing although you may have to pay the cost of photocopying. If you believe that any part of the record is not correct, you can write to your local education authority. If it is incorrect, it must be amended.

There are only a few circumstances under which your request to view your child's records can be refused, for instance if you would find out information about another pupil or if the school believes the reports contain information about a child's risk of abuse.

WHAT DO I DO DURING SCHOOL HOLIDAYS?

There are likely to be holiday playschemes in your area. They may be organised by the council, community groups, churches or privately. They normally charge a fee and you will need to provide a packed lunch. The playschemes usually have a range of activities including art, sports, drama, etc. Many schemes also arrange outings to the cinema, museums, funfairs, parks or the seaside. The cost of outings is usually extra.

Many London boroughs organise a 'Summer University' in the summer holidays. Students can take a range of courses in areas such as ICT, Drama, Dance, Art, Computer Animation, Science, Sport, Cookery, DJ-ing etc. as well as academic courses. The range is enormous and most children will find something of interest. Many of the courses are free of charge or cost very little. Other parts of the country offer similar schemes. There may also be other activities organised by private groups. Some churches, mosques, community centres and temples also arrange activities during holiday periods.



- FINANCIAL HELP
- HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED IN MY CHILD'S SECONDARY SCHOOL?

The **Break Out** website (www.culture.gov.uk/breakout/) gives ideas and information on activities for children aged 5 to 14 after school and during the holidays. Many of them are government funded and are, therefore, subsidised or free.

WHAT FINANCIAL HELP CAN I GET FOR MY CHILD'S EDUCATION?

Children are entitled to free school meals if their parents receive any one of the following: income support; income-based jobseeker's allowance; support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999; child tax credit, but without entitlement to working tax credit and with an annual income that does not exceed a specified figure. School meal vouchers can't be used for packed lunches.

Some local authorities offer grants to help with the cost of school uniforms.

Some local authorities give help with fares to and from school if your child lives more than a certain distance from school.

You may also be able to get help through the Child Tax Credit depending on your income and circumstances. The childcare part of the Working Tax Credit may pay for part of eligible childcare costs. There is a maximum amount. You can get a claim pack by calling **0845 300 3900** or you can pick one up from your local **Jobcentre Plus**. Some employers might also give tax-free vouchers to help pay for childcare.

If you are a single parent, then, under the New Deal for Lone Parents, you can get help with childcare costs while you attend appointments with your Personal Adviser, job interviews or take part in approved training or work trials.

You can find out more by calling **0845 606 2626** or visit the website at www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Customers/New_Deal/index.html. Local authorities have access to the Social Inclusion Fund which can help with holiday and out-of-school childcare. The fund helps those on a low income with children under 14. This includes Travellers on temporary or permanent sites and refugees and asylum seekers in their first year of settlement.

You can get more information from HM Revenue & Customs' *Help with the Costs of Childcare: Information for Parents and Childcare Providers* at www.hmrc.gov.uk/leaflets or from the orderline at **08459 000404**.

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED IN MY CHILD'S SECONDARY SCHOOL?

If your child has been through the school system at primary level, you may be surprised at the different level of opportunity for involvement in secondary school. Most likely, you will no longer be taking your child to school every day so there isn't a ready-made opportunity to meet with other parents and to talk to teachers. It's also quite possible that your child will want to assert his/her independence and won't want you around the school. Whatever the reason, it's just as important as it ever was – possibly more so – to be sure that you know what's going on in the school.

School events

Secondary schools are likely to have concerts or special events, particularly at times of religious festivals or during Black History Month in October. At these times, in particular, the school might welcome your contribution. You may also want to attend any prize-giving evenings, especially if your child is receiving an award.

Some schools also hold meetings for parents to explain or discuss academic matters or proposed changes to school policy. These may be opportunities to have your opinion listened to and to hear what other parents think as well.

In addition, if the school has a **Parent Teacher Association (PTA)**, it might organise a welcoming event for new parents and will have regular meetings during the year.

Try to find the time to attend **parents' evenings**. These are opportunities to talk to your child's teachers – and, unlike in primary school, there are not likely to be many of them. If you're given a report in advance, read it carefully and work out which teachers it's most important to see and what questions you want to ask. You can ask staff for advice on how you can help with any difficulties that your child might have.



- HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED IN MY CHILD'S SECONDARY SCHOOL?
- HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY CHILD OUTSIDE SCHOOL?

Your child's school will also be inspected regularly by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and at that time you will be asked to fill in a questionnaire giving your opinions, concerns or praise for the school. Again, this is a good opportunity to have your voice heard.

Children often forget to bring home letters and invitations from school. It's worth regularly checking the school website and keeping in touch with other parents.

Home-school agreements

It is likely that you will be asked to sign a home-school agreement that lays out what you can expect from the school and what they, in turn, can expect from you. It is not legally binding and you do not have to sign it, but do read it carefully to understand what the school believes are your responsibilities. Home-school agreements should be reviewed from time to time and parents should be consulted before changes are made.

What can I do to help in school?

You might consider getting involved in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and attending meetings to keep informed about what's happening in the school and any changes that are proposed. The PTA might also be involved in fund-raising and you can offer any skills or expertise that you have.

The board of governors of each school will have a parent governor and the opportunity might arise for you to put your name forward. Parent governors are chosen by election. You will probably need to put in writing your ideas about how the school might be improved and what contribution you think you could make to the school and why other parents should vote for you. You can try talking to previous governors or the retiring governor about what's expected. You could also ask to shadow a current governor. Being a governor may not be easy; a commitment of time is needed and some parent governors from Black and Minority Ethnic groups report that they feel isolated, ignored or sidelined. However, the rewards may be great for you and your child, particularly if you can get support from other parents or groups.

HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY CHILD OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL?

Since there are likely to be fewer opportunities for you to go into school, it now becomes more crucial to talk to your child. Without interrogating him/her, listen carefully to what he/she says is happening in class and within his/her group of friends. He/she might sometimes tell you about what's happening to 'a friend' and this might give you a clue. He/she may not want to tell you directly, but you can sometimes get hints about difficulties with teachers, bullying, academic worries, etc. – issues that you might be able to head off by talking to teachers or the head teacher before they turn into major problems.

Even though he/she may now give the impression that it doesn't matter, your child still needs your support. It's worth noticing, encouraging and praising him/her when he/she has done well – and that needn't take a lot of time.

Inviting your child's friends home might give you an insight into what goes on at school and how your child is coping. You'll also get to know other parents and might learn about aspects of the school that your child doesn't remember – or want – to tell you about.

Television and computers aren't all bad. You can watch television together and discuss what's happening or issues that are raised. Some computer games have educational benefits and you can always play them with your child if you're concerned about the contents. There are also websites that help with homework topics and they can be very entertaining.

You can go to the library and choose books to read together. You might also be able to borrow audio tapes, videos and computer software. Most libraries have computers, and you can book time on them to get free access to the internet. Many museums and galleries don't charge an entrance fee and you might enjoy learning with your child by visiting them together. They often arrange special activities for family groups.

Homework

Making sure that homework gets done and checking it will help you to find out what your child is learning.



- HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY CHILD OUTSIDE SCHOOL?
- PREPARING FOR THE NEXT STAGE OF MY CHILD'S EDUCATION

There's no need to worry if you don't understand what your child is being taught; you can get him/her to explain it to you, which will also help to reinforce what he/she has learned.

It will help your child if a quiet space can be found for him/her to do homework. This might, for example, mean keeping everyone away from the kitchen table for 40 minutes or so, or making sure that a corner gets cleared in the living room.

Children will sometimes need help with homework. You might have the knowledge they need, but you could also go with them to the library to get information from the internet if you don't have a computer at home or, if you do, you could help to find relevant sites. Remember that schools don't want you to do your child's homework for them.

Parents often disagree with schools about homework. Some feel there's too little, others that there's too much. This is the kind of issue that you can raise with class teachers or at Parent Teacher Association or governors' meetings

Extra teaching

Supplementary schools (sometimes called 'complementary' schools) offer extra help and support with National Curriculum subjects outside of school hours. They may also have mother-tongue classes. Supplementary schools can help to boost your child's confidence. Religious and cultural lessons may take place in madrassahs, mosques, churches and temples.

Your child may benefit from help from a private tutor outside of school hours. Tutors may specialise in a particular subject such as Maths or English or Science. Some specialist tutors help with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia.

Tutors will charge a fee. You can often get recommendations for tutors from other parents.

Exams

Most teachers will try to keep children relaxed about SAT examinations. They'll set 'mock' exams so that children get used to what will be expected of them.

Children do, though, sometimes feel the pressure. You might want to try to reassure them about the tests and explain that they are not being judged – the aim is to find out what they have learned.

Cultural identity

Many parents feel that once children start at secondary school, they are faced with a dilemma of having to choose between two cultures or reconciling them. Parents want to help to strengthen their child's confidence in school by maintaining traditions and beliefs. Contact with friends and family, attendance at a church, temple or mosque can be important. Many parents also make a special effort to talk about family and cultural history or to make sure that this is taught outside of school, perhaps at a supplementary school.

Some parents feel that it's also important to seek out learning materials in which their children are not marginalised. You can find some suppliers and relevant websites as well as details of cultural activities and events in the **Real Histories Directory** at www.realhistories.org.uk. The **Black History Month** sites at www.black-history-month.co.uk/ and www.blackhistorymonthuk.co.uk have information on activities and events taking place during October of each year.

HOW DO I PREPARE FOR THE NEXT STAGE OF MY CHILD'S EDUCATION?

In some parts of the country, there is a '**middle school**' system where there is a first school, middle school and high school. Depending on the local authority, children transfer from middle school to high school at age 13 or 14.

Whatever system your local authority operates, you and your child will need to make a number of choices about what he/she studies next. SAT results at age 14 will give you both an idea of the subjects your son/daughter does well in and which ones he/she enjoys (they might not be the same thing).

The results will help with making decisions about the subjects that he/she might want to study and the qualifications that he/she will aim for at Key Stage 4. Your child's teachers are likely to be very



• PREPARING FOR THE NEXT STAGE OF MY CHILD'S EDUCATION

helpful in giving advice about subject choice. However, some parents do feel that they need to question and challenge the expectations of and assumptions made about their children.

Some children will choose subjects because they want to stay with their friends or because they like their teacher. You'll need to find out what lies behind their decisions.

It's also worth considering not only which subjects your child enjoys and is good at, but also which courses or jobs he/she might want to pursue in future. It's important not to rule out any options. The **Jobs4U** website gives useful information about what qualifications are needed for particular jobs (www.connexions-direct.com/jobs4u/).

Choosing subjects

Some subjects lead to a formal qualification while others – like physical education, careers education, sex and relationship education and drugs education – don't necessarily.

There are some subjects that your child will have to study: English, Mathematics, Science, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Physical Education, Citizenship, Religious Education, Careers Education, and Sex Education.

In addition, your child can take one subject from each of the following areas: the arts, design and technology, humanities, modern foreign languages. Not every optional subject is offered by every school so you'll have to check.

Once they are 14, children can get permission to drop certain National Curriculum subjects so that they can, for example, attend a college-based or a workplace-based course. The government-produced workbook **Which Way Now?** (www.connexions-direct.com/whichwaynow/) helps Year 9 students to examine the different options.

Types of qualification

There are many options, but they might not all be offered by your child's school. You'll need to check with the school what they offer and how many subjects your child can choose.

GCSE: Most schools offer General Certificate for Secondary Education (GCSE) courses. They usually last for 2 years and there are many subjects available, including work-related ones. As well as final exams, coursework forms part of most GCSEs though there have been a number of recent changes including the withdrawal of the coursework element of GCSE maths. Coursework can include essays, reports, artwork or design projects, for example, and is usually done over a period of time. GCSEs are graded from A* ('A-star') to G. The grade your child gets will depend on both coursework and exam marks.

GCSEs are tiered. Each tier has a range of grades that can be awarded. Usually, at some point in Year 10, teachers will decide which tier your child should enter in each of his/her GCSEs. The idea is for your child to take an exam in which his/her ability will be tested, without him/her being deterred by questions that are much too difficult or much too easy. Some GCSE subjects such as Art and Design, History, Music, PE and Religious Studies are not tiered. Most schools will decide which tier is right for each student around the January before the final exam, after the bulk of work has been covered and they have the results of mock exams.

Your child could also choose from 8 GCSEs in vocational (work-related) subjects: Art and Design; Applied Business; Engineering; Health and Social Care; Applied ICT; Leisure and Tourism; Manufacturing; Applied Science.

In some schools, students sit GCSE exams at the end of Year 11, in others they might sit some at the end of Year 10 and more at the end of Year 11.

Many employers will expect at least a GCSE qualification in Mathematics and English. In terms of future possibilities for further education or employment, students will be at a disadvantage without these basic qualifications so it's vital that your child understands how important these particular GCSEs are.

It's worth remembering, though, that if your child doesn't do well in his/her GCSEs, he/she can take them again, although some schools may ask you to pay the examination fee for repeat sittings.



• PREPARING FOR THE NEXT STAGE OF MY CHILD'S EDUCATION

GCSE short courses: Some schools offer GCSE short courses. 2 short courses make up a full GCSE since each course covers only half the content of a GCSE. The short courses are graded from A* to G. They are available in: Design and Technology; ICT; Geography; History; Modern Foreign Languages; Art and Design; Music; Physical Education; Religious Education; Business Studies; Electronics. Your child might be interested in a certain subject but may not have the time to do the full GCSE. Because the subject is still studied in some depth, this might allow your child to keep his/her options open. He/she might, for instance, want to take an A level in that subject later on.

The **Diploma** is a new qualification for students aged 14 to 19 and is available in selected schools and colleges. Diplomas offer a more practical, hands-on way of getting the essential skills that employers and universities look for. Diplomas are available in five areas: Construction and the Built Environment; Creative and Media; Engineering; Information Technology; Society, Health and Development.

Your child might work towards either:

- a Foundation Diploma - a level 1 qualification, equivalent to 5 GCSEs at grades D to G;
- a Higher Diploma - a level 2 qualification, equivalent to five GCSEs at grades A* to C.

Each Diploma takes two years to complete.

NVQs: National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are work related. They are based on 'national occupational standards', that is, the standards of competence expected of adults doing particular jobs in specific areas (for example 'retail operation' or 'preparing and serving food'). NVQs are suited to students who are interested in a specific job and want to study 'on the job' – in the workplace.

Edexcel BTEC qualifications are also work related and nationally recognised. They can provide an introduction to an area of work such as retail or administration or they relate to a specific job such as floristry or journalism. The First Certificate (part-

time study) and First Diploma (full-time study) take 1 year. The National Certificate (part-time study) and National Diploma (full-time study) take 2 years. The Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND) are usually taken after the age of 18.

Entry Level Certificates represent the first stage of the National Qualifications Framework. They allow students to go on to GCSEs, foundation GNVQs or NVQ level 1. Students studying for the Certificate include: 14- to 16-year-olds with special educational needs; young people in young offenders' institutions; and people who have been out of education for some time. Generally, students study for a period of 1 or 2 years for the Certificate.

Pupils can achieve entry level qualifications at 3 different levels that are broadly in line with National Curriculum levels 1-3. Pupils can take entry level qualifications alongside GCSEs, GNVQs, vocational GCSEs or NVQs. Tests assess tasks that can be written, spoken or practical.

Young Apprenticeships are new types of courses that allow students to gain experience of real work. Students can find out what it's like to work in: art and design; business administration; engineering; health and social care; the motor industry; the performing arts. Students on Young Apprenticeships still study the main National Curriculum subjects but they study for qualifications in a workplace. They learn through a combination of classroom lessons, practical training and work experience. Students on a Young Apprenticeship can study for a GCSE in a vocational subject (worth 2 GCSEs) or another type of work-related qualification such as an NVQ or a combination of qualifications. The qualifications are recognised by employers and educational institutions in England. After a Young Apprenticeship, your child might want to go on to a full-time Apprenticeship or further education or else start training or full-time work.

There have recently been a number of changes to the 14-19 curriculum. You can keep up to date with what's happening at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority website (www.qca.org.uk).



• HELP AND ADVICE

SOURCES OF HELP AND ADVICE

The **Connexions** website (www.connexions-direct/whichwaynow) will help Year 9 students to work through the options available.

There is also information for parents to help their children make subject choices at www.connexions-direct.com/index.cfm?pid=206 in Arabic, Bengali, English, Gujarati, Hindi, Mandarin Chinese, Punjabi, Somali, Turkish, Urdu and Vietnamese.

The **Don't Stop** website (www.aimhigher.ac.uk/dontstop/home/) will help students to find out more about going to university.

The government's **Parentscentre** website (www.parentscentre.gov.uk/publications) has a number of publications giving information to parents.

The Learning Journey (www.parentscentre.gov.uk/learnjourn/index_ks4.cfm?ver=graph) produced by the DCSF for Key Stage 4 gives information about the choices to be made. Short versions are available in Bengali, Chinese, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Somali, Turkish, Urdu or Vietnamese by telephoning the orderline on 08000 96 66 26.

Parentline Plus (www.parentlineplus.org.uk) offers support to anyone parenting a child. The website has useful information and a message board that lets you talk to other parents.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (www.qca.org.uk) maintains and develops the National Curriculum. The website has information and responses to frequently-asked questions.

The Advisory Centre for Education (www.ace-ed.org.uk) offers information about state education in England and Wales for parents of school age children. They have a general advice line 0808 800 5793, an exclusion information line 020 7704 9822 and an exclusion advice line 0808 800 0327.

National Black Boys Can Association, a national organisation that supports Black boys between the ages of 9 and 16, has a handbook, *Empowering Black Parents to Empower Their Sons* (www.blackboyscan.co.uk).

Friends, Families and Travellers (www.gypsy-traveller.org) gives advice and information to Travellers, whether traditional or new, settled or on the road. Telephone 01273 234 777.

The Refugee Council (www.refugeecouncil.org.uk) has advice lines providing impartial advice on the asylum process, support and entitlements to refugees and asylum seekers. Telephone for general enquiries, 020 7346 6700.

The Real Histories Directory (www.realhistories.org.uk) supports teachers, parents and the wider community in teaching and learning about cultural diversity in the UK.



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The Runnymede Trust is an independent policy research organisation focusing on equality and justice through the promotion of a successful multi-ethnic society. Founded as a Charitable Educational Trust, Runnymede has a long track record in policy research, working in close collaboration with eminent thinkers and policymakers in the public, private and voluntary sectors. We believe that the way ahead lies in building effective partnerships and we are continually developing these with the voluntary sector, the government, local authorities and companies in the UK and Europe. We stimulate debate and suggest forward-looking strategies in areas of public policy such as education, the criminal justice system, employment and citizenship.

Since 1968, the date of Runnymede's foundation, we have worked to establish and maintain a positive image of what it means to live affirmatively within a society that is both multi-ethnic and culturally diverse. Runnymede continues to speak with a thoughtful and independent public voice on these issues today.