



RUNNYMEDE



## KEY STAGE 4

YEARS 10-11 / AGE 14 TO 17

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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 4, from age 14 to 17. Other booklets cover:

<b>Foundation Stage</b>	Age 3-5
<b>Key Stages 1&amp;2</b>	Age 5-11
<b>Key Stage 3</b>	Age 11-14
<b>Good Practice</b>	

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.



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

At Key Stage 4, you might find that your child has most contact with his/her class (form) teacher, subject teachers and, perhaps, a careers adviser. In school, there will also be a head teacher and deputy head teacher. There may also be a 'head of year' or 'pastoral' teacher looking after your child's general welfare. He/she may also have contact with outside agencies that give advice on career and further education possibilities such as Aimhigher.

In addition, the Connexions Direct service is available for children between the ages of 13 and 19 to give information and advice on 'getting where you want to be'. Students may have access to a personal adviser who can give information, advice and practical help.

## 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 don't. You will be given advance notice of these days so that you can make other arrangements for your child.

You may find that, since your child is now studying for exams, he/she may be given 'study leave' – time when he/she is allowed to study, unsupervised, away from the school premises.

### 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 allow older children to leave school premises at lunchtime. You may need to discuss with your child your expectations about where he/she goes, what he/she does, what he/she eats and any other concerns.

### 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 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



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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.***

It is likely that a student's misbehaviour will need to be quite serious before the school will contact parents. It therefore becomes vital to be aware of what's happening in your child's school life and, if necessary, to go to the school and talk to staff in order to deal with problems before any serious action needs to be taken.

As children get older, they may find themselves more and more affected by peer pressure. Parents often worry that their child is growing up very fast and is being influenced more by friends than by their parents when it comes to issues like sex, drugs, drink or petty crime. Young people may be tempted to experiment in order to test boundaries.

For most parents, their fears turn out to be unfounded, but they may want, anyway, to prepare themselves

by getting as much information as possible and by finding out where they and their children can go for help. There are a number of organisations that offer information, support and advice:

- **Parentline Plus** (0808 800 2222, [www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk), email [parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk](mailto:parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk)) has information on peer pressure, alcohol and drug abuse and a number of other concerns that parents may have.
- **FRANK** (0800 77 66 00, [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)) gives information and advice to parents and young people about drugs.
- **ADFAM** ([www.adfam.org.uk](http://www.adfam.org.uk)) gives information to family members facing problems with drugs or alcohol.
- **R U Thinking** (0800 28 29 30, [www.ruthinking.co.uk](http://www.ruthinking.co.uk)) gives information, advice and guidance to young people under 18 on sex, relationships and contraception.
- **Brook** (0800 0185 023, [www.brook.org.uk](http://www.brook.org.uk)) gives information and advice to young people under 25 on all issues to do with sexual health.

## RACE AND CULTURE

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 says that 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.

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



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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 PTA.

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?

By now, you and your child will have made a number of decisions about what he/she will study and what qualifications he/she will aim for.

There can, though, be times when schools feel that it is not appropriate for students to study the full National Curriculum. They might believe that a student will do better studying fewer curriculum subjects for a short period of time. Schools can 'disapply' all or part of the National Curriculum for up to 6 months. This means that certain subjects will not have to be studied. This could happen, for example, when a pupil arrives from another country and needs time to develop his/her English or when a student comes back to school after having been educated at home or excluded from school and so needs time to adjust.

## HOW WILL MY CHILD BE TAUGHT?

Some learning continues to take place in the classroom, but some courses also include coursework. This means that your child is given a project, essay or practical experiment to work on or research to do outside of the classroom that will count towards his/her final grade in the exam. Some of the coursework will be done at home

using textbooks, encyclopedias, newspapers, radio, television or the internet. Coursework can account for between 25% and 40% of final marks in an exam.

The government has made changes to coursework. There is no longer any coursework for Maths. From September 2009, unsupervised tasks will not make up part of the grade for GCSEs. In some subjects, they will be replaced by 'controlled assessments' – for example, research and investigation could still take place outside of the classroom, but final assessment tasks, such as essays, would be written under controlled, supervised conditions or access to the internet might be under supervision. You can get more information on coursework at [www.qca.org.uk/qca\\_9914.aspx](http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_9914.aspx).

Some students might be allowed 'study leave' – time when they are allowed to study, unsupervised, outside of school. They will still also be given homework to complete.

Schools will also carry out 'mock' examinations to allow students to learn what it feels like to work in examination conditions: arriving on time, following instructions, obeying the rules, working in silence, etc.

Many students spend some time outside of school in a place of work ('work experience' or 'work placement') for a few weeks. They can start to learn about the world of work and what employers expect since they will normally work the same hours as other staff and be given specific duties to carry out.

If your child is studying certain subjects, extended work placements, where he/she spends one day a week in the workplace for several months, may be part of the course. They are also part of the Young Apprenticeship programme.

## HOW DO I KNOW HOW MY CHILD IS DOING?

### Assessments

Staff regularly assess students and should keep you informed of any concerns they have. If you have your own worries about how your child is progressing, then it's important to go into school to talk to either his/her head of year or class teacher. You can talk

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about how the school might be able to help your child or what you might be able to do outside of school.

### Reports

You will get a report showing what examinations your child has been entered for and what grades they are expected to achieve. After the exams, you'll get Information about the attainments of all pupils of the same age in the school and nationally.

### 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.

You'll probably find, though, that face-to-face communication with school staff is much less than before. Remember that you can contact the school and arrange to see a member of staff if you need information or have concerns about your child. Now that your child is approaching school-leaving age and will be taking a number of exams, it's even more important to keep in touch with his/her teachers.

## 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.

## 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.

If your child has been assessed as having special educational needs, schools can modify the curriculum to suit his/her needs. If it's felt necessary, though, 'disapplication' from all or part of the curriculum might be necessary. This could mean that the student does not have to study part of the curriculum for a period of time.

### 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. Try to get an assessment by an educational psychologist. It is possible that difficulties might not have been picked up so, even though your child is older, it is still worth talking to teachers if you have worries. Help can still be provided.

### 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**

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602 2260. The DCSF also publishes *SEN: A guide for parents & carers* in community languages ([www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/sen/parentcarers](http://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 reading from the board or a computer screen.

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](http://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 day trips to museums, galleries, local colleges, etc., to help with various aspects of your child's study.

The school might organise school trips overseas, often related to a subject that is being studied, such as history or a modern foreign language. Some schools arrange 'exchange' visits where your child may spend time with a family in another country and then their child comes to spend time with you.

The school may wish to use a 'group' passport for overseas visits. 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.

Trips aren't compulsory, but since schools don't want children to miss out on the learning opportunities provided, they can sometimes offer financial help for parents who have difficulty meeting the cost.

### Higher education programmes

**Aimhigher**, a national organisation, may arrange campus visits, residential summer schools, taster days in colleges and universities as well as mentoring programmes for students. The intention is to encourage young people from under-represented groups to consider higher education. These activities could be extremely valuable, particularly for young people who do not have experience of colleges or



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universities. The programmes can also help students to explore the various possibilities that are on offer.

### Out-of-class activities

Your child's school may offer 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 have activities such as football (often run by parents) at the 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 may 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. You will 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.

If your child is taking part in a work placement or Young Apprenticeship, all the activities will be approved for under-16s in terms of health, safety and welfare in the workplace.

### 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.

At some point during secondary school, 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. If a student gets pregnant and can't go to school, the local education authority still has to provide suitable alternative education.

### 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':



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- 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 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 encouraged 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. As children get older, they may also believe that they can handle the situation themselves or with their friends.

Changes in behaviour or the quality of his/her 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 says 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 mentioned anything? Is your child's teacher aware of any changes at school? Might your child talk to other members of your family or friends?

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

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 governor. If that doesn't work, you can take your complaint to the local authority and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCFS) 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 the incidents are serious enough to be reported to the police.

Being told that your child is bullying others would come as a shock. None of us wants to believe that our child is a bully, but the fact is that bullies do exist in schools. The first thing is to try to stay calm as you listen to any allegations. Listen carefully, too, to what your child has to say. While naturally wanting to defend your child, do consider the possibility that your child doesn't 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



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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 positively as possible with the school and see if there are any sources of help. It is vital not to ignore this since any bullying can lead to extremely serious consequences.

You can get help and support from the following organisations:

- **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](http://www.bullying.co.uk)) has help and advice for pupils and parents.
- The DCSF website, **Don't Suffer in Silence** ([www.dfes.gov.uk/bullying/](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/bullying/)) has information for young people and parents.

### Racist bullying

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

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. If your child is soon to take exams, you'll need to consider how any lengthy absences might affect his/her ability to achieve his/her best.

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 mean that your child might 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.



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

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 outside agencies such as the **Advisory Centre for Education** (0808 800 5793) or **Parentline Plus** (0808 800 2222). Your child will soon be able to leave school and needs to make the most of the opportunities offered in the school environment.

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 – you'll need to 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. You might find, though, that your child no longer wants to go to local playschemes. You will have to make decisions about how much time your child can spend alone or with friends. Do you know what he/she will be doing,



- FINANCIAL HELP
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where she'll be going and with whom?

Many London boroughs organise a 'Summer University' in the summer holidays. Students can take a range of courses such as Film-making, Web-design, Dance, Drama, Song-Writing, DJ-ing, Fashion as well as academic and work-related 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. In other parts of the country holiday activities might be organised by the local authority or by private groups.

Some churches, mosques, temples and community centres also organise activities during holidays.

The **Break Out** website ([www.culture.gov.uk/breakout/](http://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](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Customers/New_Deal/index.html).

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](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/leaflets) or from the orderline at **08459 000404**.

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

Many children, as they get older, become very sensitive about their parents and the possibility that they might be embarrassed or criticised by their fellow students in school. So, they might be reluctant for their parents to come into school. It's therefore vital to take any opportunity to visit the school and talk to teachers and to keep talking to your child.

Many children will seem to be reluctant to discuss school with you, but it's worth persisting – without making it seem like an interrogation. You could try, for example, taking turns to talk about your day.

As teachers expect students to take more responsibility for their education, you'll probably find that they talk to students more and parents less. There are fewer chances to interact with the school in person and if, for instance, there are problems with behaviour, the school might contact you only when matters have become quite serious.

If you have concerns about your child's behaviour it's worth going to the school and talking to the staff at an early stage. Don't wait to be asked. You might be able to prevent things becoming more serious.

If the school has a Parent Teacher Association (PTA), it will have regular meetings during the year and you might want to attend. Try to find the time to attend parents' evenings. These are opportunities to talk to your child's teachers. If you're given a report in advance, read it carefully and work out



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- **HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY CHILD OUTSIDE SCHOOL?**

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.

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.

Students 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.

### **HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY CHILD OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL?**

It is very, very important that your child understands the importance of getting the best possible grades in exams, particularly in Mathematics and English. For GCSE English, examiners will be looking not just at the student's ability to speak the language, but also their understanding of the different ways in which the language is used. Students will also be expected to be able to read, interpret and understand various types of texts. In Mathematics, students need to understand maths as used in daily life.

If, at any time, you are concerned about your child's literacy or numeracy, it's worth talking to his/her teacher and getting advice about what support can be given either in school or outside.

Qualifications are important for your child's future. He/she will, therefore, need to revise for exams and it's crucial to allow him/her the time and space to work at home, particularly if he/she is given 'study' leave. If it's not possible for him/her to study at home during study leave periods, you can talk to school about what other arrangements can be made.

Your school will help your child to organise work placements but you might be able to give him/her useful insight into the world of work by talking about your own work environment. You might even have

useful contacts when it comes to getting a placement. It is worth finding out if coursework is required for each subject that your child is taking, how much needs to be done, and when the deadlines for work are. Remember that, unlike with homework, the marks your child gets for coursework will count towards his/her final grade in his/her exams. Coursework must be your child's own original work. He/she must not copy from the internet or books or anyone else's work unless he/she is quoting from them and acknowledging that by giving references. You will need to make sure that he/she understands this and that the consequences of copying from elsewhere can be very serious. Students can lose part of their marks or be disqualified from the exam and even, sometimes, from all the exams held by a particular exam board for a certain period of time. You can help your child with coursework by listening to his/her plans and giving advice but you mustn't tell him/her what to do or do any of the work for him/her. If there are things that your child doesn't understand about what needs to be done for coursework, make sure that he/she discusses them with teachers.

You also need to know when exams will take place. Timetables are sent out in advance so you need to make sure that you see them so that dates aren't missed. You can also ensure that your child understands what will be expected of him/her. For instance, that he/she must not talk to other students during examinations, shouldn't take his/her mobile phone in with him/her, and should use only equipment (like calculators) that is permitted.

Students can, though, become very stressed about examinations. Try to stay calm yourself (or, at least, give the appearance of being calm). Your child should be encouraged to do his/her very best but it's worth bearing in mind that he/she will be able to re-sit exams if necessary. Your child might need the most support while waiting for the results of his/her exams.

### **Cultural identity**

Many parents worry that, as their children get older, they may lose a sense of their cultural identity. Some parents feel that it is important to maintain traditions of language, clothing, food, music, faith and discipline at home. This may seem more difficult as children



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

feel the pressure to adapt to a different way of life. Some parents get help from friends and family or from other community members or through the teachings in temples, churches, madrassahs or mosques. It is important to give children the opportunity to engage with their home culture and the strength and knowledge to be confident about their own heritage. As they get older, there are likely to be a wider range of events and activities that you can take part in together such as street carnivals held in your area, films, exhibitions, lectures and concerts.

You can find details of cultural activities and events in the **Real Histories Directory** at [www.realhistories.org.uk](http://www.realhistories.org.uk) as well as suppliers of culturally relevant books, films, music etc. The **Black History Month** sites at [www.black-history-month.co.uk/](http://www.black-history-month.co.uk/) and [www.blackhistorymonthuk.co.uk](http://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?

After Key Stage 4, compulsory education ends. Your child can now leave school. There are a number of big decisions to be made.

Your child might want to start work or become self-employed and will need your support, encouragement and guidance and, probably, financial help if he/she also wants to leave home.

Going into full-time work, though, doesn't have to be the end of your child's learning. He/she may still want to take work-related qualifications while he/she works and earns a living. If he/she has done a Young Apprenticeship, your child may want to continue into a full Apprenticeship. Please be aware that from 2015 it will be compulsory for your child to continue in education or training until the age of 18. This does not have to take place in a school and can be work-based so young people will still have a number of directions to choose from.

If your child is not happy with the results of his/her examinations, he/she may wish to re-take them. Confidential advice is available to him/her from the **DCSF** national results telephone helpline on **0808 100 8000**.

If your child does want to continue his/her studies, then there may be financial help available to him/her through the Education Maintenance Allowance. He/she might be able to get up to £30 a week to help with books, travel, equipment, etc. You can find out more at [www.dfes.gov.uk/financialhelp/ema](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/financialhelp/ema).

Students who want to continue their education can sit a number of different examinations. They might want to stay in their current school's 'sixth form', move to another sixth form or go on to a dedicated sixth-form college. Further education and sixth-form colleges are registered with and inspected by **OFSTED**. Reports can be found on the OFSTED website ([www.ofsted.gov.uk/](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/)). Most colleges have open days for prospective students or trainees and you and your child will be able to talk to current students and staff.

You can help your child to explore the possibilities that are available through the national **Aimhigher** scheme ([www.aimhigher.ac.uk/](http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk/)), which gives advice to students and families.

There are a range of qualifications that students can work towards:

Students can combine **AS (advanced subsidiary)** levels with A levels and vocational A levels. The AS level has 3 units, can lead to a full A level if a student wishes and forms the first half of an A level. AS levels normally take 1 year of study to complete. Many students concentrate on 3 or 4 subjects at A level. A levels have 6 units and are normally taken after AS level. They usually take another year.

**Vocational A levels** and **Advanced Vocational Certificates of Education (AVCEs)** are designed to teach job-related skills that a young person will need in the workplace. They are usually related to areas such as engineering, hospitality and catering, leisure and tourism, etc.

Some schools and colleges offer the **International Baccalaureate Diploma**, an internationally recognised qualification. It is a comprehensive 2-year curriculum aimed at highly-motivated students aged 16 to 19.



- PREPARING FOR THE NEXT STAGE OF MY CHILD'S EDUCATION
- HELP AND ADVICE

**National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)** relate to the world of work and test whether a student can carry out the skills needed in a job. They are usually taken while the student is working. They don't normally have to be taken within a specific time period. There are NVQs for most areas of work from beauty therapy, childcare or policing to accounting, environmental conservation or health and social care.

**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.

**City & Guilds qualifications** are work related and nationally recognised. They can be taken in areas such as ICT, journalism and radio, sport, fashion, occupational health, etc.

All the options can be discussed with your child's teachers, careers adviser or Connexions Direct adviser before he/she leaves school.

If your child can't yet decide between work and further study, one possibility might be voluntary work, maybe overseas. You can find more information at [www.do-it.org/](http://www.do-it.org/) or [www.csv.org.uk/](http://www.csv.org.uk/).

Your child might not yet know exactly what he/she wants to do. You will need to explore the options together. There are a number of sources of information available. Whatever your son or daughter decides it is likely that he/she will benefit from your continued support and guidance in the future.

## SOURCES OF HELP AND ADVICE

**The Don't Stop** website ([www.aimhigher.ac.uk/dontstop/home/](http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk/dontstop/home/)) will help students to find out more about going on to higher education and university.

The government's **Parentscentre** website ([www.parentscentre.gov.uk/publications](http://www.parentscentre.gov.uk/publications)) has a number of

publications giving information about options available.

**The City and Guilds** site ([www.city-and-guilds.co.uk](http://www.city-and-guilds.co.uk)) has more information about City and Guilds qualifications.

**The International Baccalaureate Organization** ([www.ibo.org](http://www.ibo.org)) has more information on the Diploma.

**The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority** ([www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk)) has information on recognised qualifications.

**The Careers Gateway** ([www.careers-gateway.co.uk](http://www.careers-gateway.co.uk)) has information on possible careers and the qualifications needed.

**The Advisory Centre for Education** ([www.ace-ed.org.uk](http://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**.

**Parentline Plus** ([www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://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.

**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](http://www.blackboyscan.co.uk)).

**Friends, Families and Travellers** ([www.gypsy-traveller.org](http://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](http://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](http://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.