



# NEW SCHOOLS AND NEW NORMS; PREPARING YEAR 6 STUDENTS FOR TRANSITION INTO YEAR 7 DURING COVID-19

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Usually, this time of year means many secondary schools across the UK are hurriedly finding creative ways to transition primary school students to secondary school. This year, that task is faced with an even larger burden; doing so during a global pandemic that has impacted students across the nation heavily.

Leaders and transition teams, led by Executive Principal Laura Sanchez, at the Lionheart Academies Trust have taken this opportunity to pull together and discuss ideas and implementations for a safe and welcoming transition for new Year 7's. We know that in a time where distancing and isolation has become the new norm, it is vital for them to now feel connected and included; a true part of the Lionheart community.

As a Trust we wanted to ensure that the transition was still supportive of the whole learner; both academically and holistically. Our core purpose is to ensure that Year 7 feel well prepared and supported during an unsettled time. We're also conscious that parents and carers may find transition equally challenging, so we're determined to ensure there are resources available for all. Overall, we wanted to make sure that learners and their families understand what being a 'Lionheart Trust student' truly means before they join us officially in August.

Predominantly, the purpose of transition is to support the wellbeing of learners. To do this, we must build relationships virtually, with our online platforms becoming our new medium of communication with young people. Equally, we are also conscious that the learning divide means academic preparation is more vital than ever, so we provide transition work to complete.

This "hands on from a distance" approach by the

Trust has utilised a range of communication channels which begin at Trust level and are broken down and realised at school level.

## TAKING EVENTS ONLINE

Secondary school calendars across the Trust include three key dates; Open Evenings, Welcome Evenings in March once been offered a place, and Induction Evenings prior to their start date. With lockdown coming into place prior to two of these three events, we've been forced to take these online. Similarly, registration forms which would normally be completed in person have been distributed online to ensure schools have the necessary personal, medical and background information about each student.

## MAKING THE ACADEMIC JUMP

On each school website we've hosted copious English, Maths and Science activities for learners to complete and submit. They provide a taste of a secondary curriculum and allow them to begin to understand how they'll soon be expected to work. This work is emailed to the Year 7 team and personalised responses are sent back to learners. For some primary schools this work has been used in the Year 6 bubbles by the teachers to help prepare them for transition.

## TUTOR VIDEOS

Conscious that our future Year 7s will not be able to meet staff members before arrival, each Year 7 tutor relevant members of staff have created videos, available on



websites and emailed home. These help to familiarise students with staff members who will play a key part in their educational journey.

#### LEARNERS WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

Our SEN teams have made over 100 'wellbeing' phone calls to our Year 6 SEND learners. They have also arranged virtual meetings with the learner and their families, supported and introduced by their staff in primary schools. There have also been introductory presentations so that learners can see videos and photographs of their key staff; with voiceovers from our SENCO's to make them more accessible.

#### SCHOOL TOURS

By harnessing the power of technology we have been able to ensure our future Year 7s get a virtual tour of key areas in the school, and rules whilst moving around the school. These have been shared via email and on our website.

#### UTILISING SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a powerful tool and a great way to connect with future students and parents. Many of our future Year 7s are engaging in online competitions which have weekly winners such as 'Battle of the Pets' or 'Battle of the Bakes.' We also run English and Maths riddles which future Year 7s and their parents have been keen to get involved in.

#### A HERO'S JOURNEY

We believe that our Year 7s will be our future heroes; having coped with huge changes during this pandemic. They all have access to an online transition booklet specific to their new school with a variety of tasks and fact finding missions. These are then submitted to the Year 7 tutor team via email, ready for the new term.

#### LIONHEART CHALLENGES

In addition, each school has a set of 'Lionheart Challenges' for our learners to complete that will help develop their holistic character, with links to our Trust ethos. It also provides insight into the 'Lionheart Journey' and what this means. Centralised addresses have been set up to enable this communication and parent/carer feedback has already been really positive.

Of course, each school has certainly put their own twist into transition, for example The Cedars Academy and Martin High School in Leicestershire have a 'singyourheartout' virtual event. Schools collectively use Microsoft Teams to connect with as many primary classrooms as possible; hosting Q&A sessions and talks.

#### THE RESULT OF ALL OF THIS?

Extremely high engagement levels (it is common for email campaigns to see engagement of over 90%), parents and families who feel connected and strongly tied to their new school, and young students who are supported more than ever.

