

INTRODUCTION

As a parent myself, the only way I can describe my experience of both the state and independent school sector is that of being on a roller coaster. We have the highs and then the lows. When things go wrong, you feel totally isolated with no independent party to turn to and basically you are on your own. The telephone calls from friends and friend of friends looking for advice and support, confirms that we are all going through the same thing at some time or another has been my inspiration for writing this e-book.

This opportunity allows me to give an honest and open guide on getting the very best out of the Secondary School system. I have incorporated methods and experiences to help you face the most common problems you may have, without being presumptuous thus allowing you to make more informed decisions and choices.

The long, tiring battle of trying to get your child into a school of your choice, then through the school system as smoothly and effectively as possible, is always at the forefront of our mind. We want the transition to be as smooth and stress free as possible. However, we face many challenges such as:

‘What do I need to do to prepare my child for secondary school?’

‘How can I improve the chances of getting my child into the school of our choice?’

‘What can I do if my child doesn’t get into a school of our choice?’

‘What is the transition between primary school and secondary school?’

‘How can I support my child in his or her education?’

‘My child isn’t doing well at school, what can I do about it?’

‘What can I do if my child gets excluded?’

These controversial questions and many more stir excitement in an attempt to answer them, but also provoke frustration, with the need to fix the ‘hidden’ problems. During the process of addressing them, I am going to share with you some experiences encountered and the secrets to getting the most out of the system.

The best gift a parent can give their child is a **good education**. The more education you have, the better the choices you have! Be aware of what message you are sending your child, is the focus to be on wearing designer trainers, playing the latest game console or getting the best possible education!

Very often it is said, *‘It doesn’t matter which school you send your child to, if they want to learn, they will!’* Yes, there is some truth in that, but we are all products of our environment! Take the example of being placed in a disruptive environment, at some stage there is the possibility of being drawn into some type of incident. However, this is where you hope that the grounding you have instilled in your child would be enough to allow them to avoid this.

Having **all the resources** you need at your disposal and **the right people** to help you use them, puts you at an advantage. Imagine you have a state of the art computer, not knowing how to get the best out of it, just sitting there and doing nothing! Our children are that state of the art computer, waiting to receive good instructions, right programming and the opportunity to perform to the best of their ability. Whatever your choice, be it a mixed, single sex, academy, faith or private school; where your child goes to school can determine their entire future so, choice matters!

Being constantly told that, *'you'll never amount to anything,'* at what stage do you start to believe it and begin to see yourself that way? Or if you are told, *'you can do anything you set your mind to, be anything you want to be!'* when do you begin to buy into that dream? Somewhere in those first 5 years of Secondary education you will start believing and reacting to these statements which will of course determine what you pursue! Fact remains that you will never outperform the image you have of yourself.

Therefore, a school whose mission it is, to find your strengths and raise it to its highest level will positively help you to compensate for your weaknesses. Enabling your child to build a positive self image will have a huge impact on their overall being because, we act as the person we think we are!

One final word, at the end of this book, I have compiled a list of useful websites and educational jargons which I am positive you will find handy from time to time. Go through it as it has information that I have not included fully in my topics in order to avoid repeating myself.

PREPARATION FROM THE AGE OF 5

The process of education begins long before your child starts school and well established by the time they are ready for Secondary School. For an easier transition, they need to establish certain routines:

Encourage your child on a daily basis from a young age (approx 5) to discuss their day with you. Take time to listen and acknowledge what they have to say. Avoid responding in a negative way, instead encourage positive alternative action to any problem they are experiencing. This will begin to pave the way for when they are older, making it easier for them to come and discuss anything with you.

Don't settle for answers such as, '*it was a normal day, nothing happened.*' Well, something must have happened! Somebody must have sneezed! This is not a drilling so if they are not forthcoming, take the initiative and talk about your day. Be consistent by doing it on a daily basis, eventually it becomes a natural part of the day. I often took the opportunity, whilst I'm preparing dinner; the family gather in the kitchen to discuss 'our day'. It's a wonderful bonding time and remember once those years are gone there can never be regained.

Get them into the habit of being the first to let you know if they have done something wrong. Reassure them that it is better for the news to come from them first, rather than you having to hear it from someone else. No matter how bad it may seem! Yes, you might get angry and upset at first, but once the emotion settles you will be able to devise an action plan to deal with it. What's that saying, '*To be forewarned is to be forearmed!*' The other plus side of this is once teachers realise that your child communicates and literally tells you everything (maybe most things), the school's perception of your family changes, usually for the better!

Show an interest in your child's work by looking at their books regularly and that means when they are in Secondary school as well! Remember you are not looking for faults/mistakes – that is not to say you are ignoring mistakes but decide prior, what the objective is for looking at their work. Is it to see where they might need additional help or is it to give a confidence boost? Do not deal with both at the same time or day if possible! Encourage them to share their newfound knowledge with you.

Establish what type of learner your child is. Are they: