Is there anything I could have done to have made that easier?

Dear New Year 7 Parents,

It is only with the beauty of hindsight that you can look back and ask yourself the question, 'Is there anything I could have done to have made that easier?'. It is with this question in mind that we have been asked to put pen to paper with some insights into what we have found helpful as our girl negotiated the first couple of years in her school journey with the Queen Elizabeth's High School.

The transition from Primary to Secondary is a big one. They learn to cope with the size and bustle of a larger school in time but there is a greater need for independence and to get themselves organised more effectively than they might be used to. Things that we found helpful from the start were talking positively about how busy school life would be compared to Primary, organising independent bus trips into town with friends, social events such as swimming, where the children could be left safely without parents necessarily being with them to build some independence. We also invested in a diary/planner over the summer to get her used to writing down things she would need to remember (there's a lot of that required at Queenies). The children will also need to understand how to check their school email account and that they need to respond to emails or at least read them on a regular basis.

The reality of a Grammar School education is that the children do have to work quite hard after school is finished. Encouraging them to make time for and having a quiet space for homework is important. In the first year, the volume of work and the length of the day is a step change and your support and positive encouragement will be needed to help them to make time to do a little bit more each day. Agreeing a time that suits the family is useful. We found that between 30 and 60 minutes most days was about the right amount of time needed to get homework, knowledge book revision and general things like bag packing done for the next day. It seems like a lot at the start but, after a few weeks, it all settles into a normal routine.

Because it is hard work and they need to keep at it, we've also found that keeping our teen focused on 'what's in it for her' is a big and ongoing part of our job. She's cracked the organisation, the bus journey, the friendship groups and has settled into school life well. As they get settled however, social interests and media start to become more and more important. With growing confidence, it can become 'cool' to mess about and to become less engaged with doing well. Sometimes it's not very 'cool to be clever!' With some measure of success, we've worked on the message that 'nerds frequently become billionaires' and we talk as a family about what kinds of jobs are available if you have a great education and the benefits of having choices in life. This has given her a lot of focus on what she wants to do with her future and an understanding of what she needs to do to make her dreams a reality.

Despite all the challenges, our daughter loves going to Queenies and she looks forward to school every day. We do hope that our reflections on the things that have helped us as a family, will help support your son or daughter as they start their own journey.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew and Elaine Wilkinson