

## COMMENTARY

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### Starting high school: supporting students (and their whānau) through change

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Everyone experiences change in different ways. For some people, change is a time of excitement and possibility; for others, it can feel unsettling and even frightening. For many of us, it's a bit of both.

When children leave primary school to embark on their secondary school education, it can evoke feelings of both excitement and anxiety for students and their parents and caregivers.

During this time of transition, there's a lot going on for young people in terms of their learning and social development. To help make this transition as smooth as possible, we offer a range of experiences to introduce students and their parents and caregivers to the school in a staged and supportive way. Our approach includes:

- my visits to Upper Clutha primary schools to talk about what students can expect when they join our MAC community
- our Year 7 curriculum leader and our special needs coordinator meeting with Year 6 teachers at the local primary schools to share a handover of information about students
- hosting an Open Day at MAC at the end of Term 4 for prospective Year 6 students
- teaching Years 7 and 8 students in a 'homeroom' environment where the same teacher delivers core subjects like maths, English, science and social sciences
- introducing students to other subjects such as music, computing, languages, physical education, health, food and nutrition, drama, materials technology, visual arts, and Māori performing arts
- running a Peer Support programme where senior students spend time with Year 7 students running activities, reading books, and making connections
- hosting parent and caregiver information sessions
- holding parent-teacher interviews in Term 1.

Our Years 7 and 8 teachers are very attuned to the needs of students at this stage in their educational journey.

Our Head of Learning Area for Year 7 Tiffany Kemp says teaching Year 7 students can be a dynamic and fulfilling experience due to their enthusiasm for learning, cognitive development, and emotional growth.

*"The years between childhood and being fully fledged teenagers are an exciting time of flux, but can also be daunting. Friendships are usually the biggest concern, as students want to be with their friends. Now that all*

*Year 7 students are located in the same building, this is less of a concern. Some students worry about getting lost. To help with this, we have a first full day of school for the Year 7 students before the rest of the students return from the summer holidays. This way, our Year 7 students can move freely around the school and get to know where their classes are held. Our senior peer support student leaders also visit the Year 7 classes and run activities weekly with the students for the first six weeks and then also visit twice in Term 2.*

*Students need trustworthy adults in their lives who can support them on this journey. I love my role and seeing all the students change from the start of Year 7 – there is such a huge amount of growth!”*

### **What our Years 7 and 8 students say**

- *I was a bit worried about where to find everything on the big campus.*
- *I love all the clubs and activities at high school, especially kapa haka.*
- *The whānau system helped me feel more comfortable when I started high school.*
- *The Year 7-only day at the start of the year helped me feel better about starting high school.*
- *The orientation activities and all the clubs really helped me feel comfortable when I started at MAC.*

### **What parents of Years 7 students say**

- *The way the teachers care about their students and the peer support from the Year 13s helped make my child's transition as smooth as possible.*
- *The school planned classes so kids had a few established friends with them which made a massive difference.*
- *The communication from the school and the teachers was fabulous.*
- *Our Year 7 teacher was very available by email and we planned calls whenever there were any difficulties.*
- *The transition was much smoother than I expected and the staff were very supportive.*

Please remember that we have a team of Years 7 and 8 teachers who work hard to create a supportive environment for their students. We also have an expert pastoral care team to support our students. We encourage parents and caregivers to get in touch with us if they think their child needs help.

### **Useful resources**

MAC website: [Starting Year 7](#)

MAC website: [Parent and caregiver handbook](#)

### **More information**

Please contact Principal Nicola Jacobsen on 03 443 0498 or [principal@mtaspiring.school.nz](mailto:principal@mtaspiring.school.nz)