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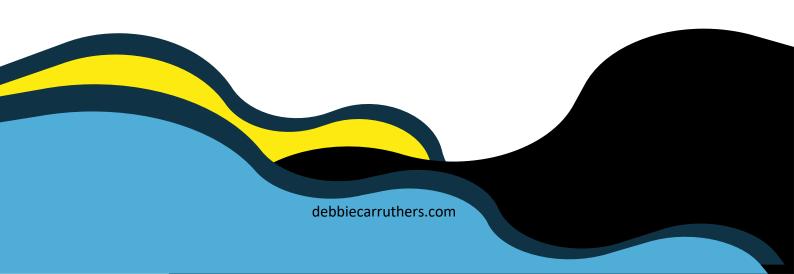
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Any opinions, statements and advice are the author's own and were written in a within a particular time, place and cultural context. Information is comprehensive but not exhaustive and may not account for the reader's individual circumstances.

The author acknowledges the Barramadigal People of the Darug Nation as the traditional owners of the land on which this guide was written.

Gender neutral pronouns have been used unless otherwise relevant.

Dedicated to Kristi, who stepped up and survived year 6. Twice.



### **Contents**

About the Author	1
Introduction	2
Needs and Behaviour	3
Managing Students	10
Key Stakeholders	19
Increased Workload	25
Exciting Events	33
High School Transition	40
The Final Countdown	45
Common Misconceptions	49
Surviving Year 6: The Novel Behind the Guide	51



### **About the Author**

Debbie Carruthers is an experienced classroom teacher with a particular interest in high school transition.

Debbie has a bachelor's degree in Health Science and post-graduate qualifications in Education and Psychology. With over 20 years of experience as an educator, she has taught extensively in both primary and secondary schools and was course coordinator in the Master of Education (Primary) at UNSW.



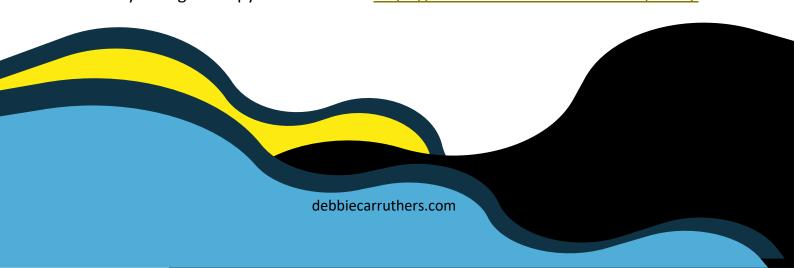
With a background in PDHPE, Debbie is passionate about wellbeing. Her particular interest in the middle grades was sparked early in her career when she took on the role of Year 7 Advisor, transitioning students into high school from neighbouring primary schools. Later, she moved into primary teaching and used her knowledge to work on major school transition projects. This involved introducing and leading initiatives to improve the high school transition experience for students and their families.



As a parent herself, Debbie recognises the importance of teachers and parents working as partners in education. She listens the needs and concerns of friends and colleagues regarding transition to high school and wants to help ensure the experience is positive for a many people as possible.

Debbie is the author of middle grade novel, Surviving Year 6. She lives in a Northwest suburb of Sydney and has written this guide within that socio-cultural context.

Get your signed copy of the novel at <a href="https://www.debbiecarruthers.com/book/">https://www.debbiecarruthers.com/book/</a>



### Introduction

They are like a whole different species of child, year 6 kids. Attitudes shift, behaviours change, and classrooms take on a whole new smell.

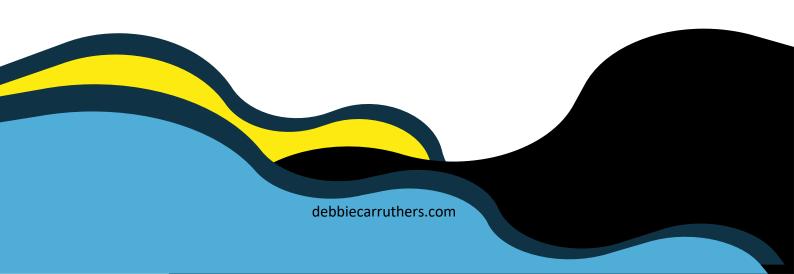
This is a significant period of change in a child's life, and you have been given the challenge and the privilege of guiding them through the year ahead.

After six long years of patiently working their way up, they are finally relishing their place on top of the pecking order and they are ready for a year packed with camps and excursions, leadership opportunities and fundraising events, graduation assemblies and farewell dinners.

In a few short months, they will have to start the climb all over again when they head to high school. This comes with a plethora of emotions which manifest themselves in a range of visible means.

It is understandable that you may feel overwhelmed or ill-equipped for the year ahead.

This Year 6 Survival Guide for Teachers is created from my own experiences. Whether a beginning teacher or a seasoned performer, you might just find it helpful, or you might know someone else who will.



## NEED\$ AND BEHAVIOUR



### The Growing Brain Explained

### The Brain and Learning

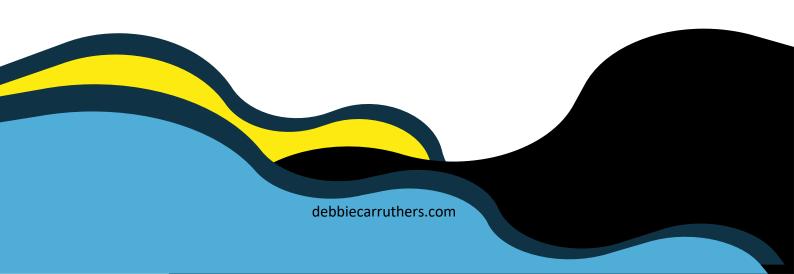
The brain is an incredibly complex organ. Each part of the brain plats a different role in the body. An intricate balance of chemicals and hormones keeps humans alive, conscious and functioning.

Major differences in personality, ability and behaviours can be a result of even the slightest of anomalies in structure or function.

Everybody is unique but some people's brains process information vastly differently to what is expected. With or without the formal diagnosis, the learning needs of neurodivergent individuals differ in various ways from mainstream learners. Teachers are expected to create and implement individual adjustment plans. Parents should be engaged in the process.

Optimal learning adequately stimulates different parts of the brain. Exercise wakes up the brain, and music activates it. Creativity and logic use different parts across both hemispheres.

In a child, the still developing brain is creating all sorts of new neural pathways. Many of these are created as they learn and grow. Children have different natural abilities, but everyone can learn.



### The Brain and Behaviour

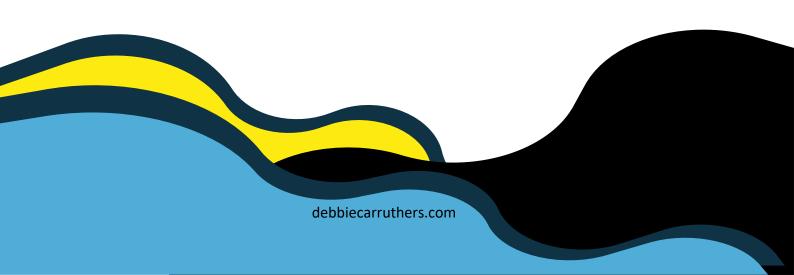
The **forebrain**, in particular the pre-frontal cortex, sits right behind the skull at the forehead. It solves problems by taking in information, weighing it against what is already known, and making well-considered decisions. Just as a middle-grader is increasingly confident but not yet mature, this part of the brain does not function so well until it is well-developed. Children and young people are prone to making poor decisions for this reason.

The **brainstem** is the toddler, spontaneous and impulsive. It acts without thinking. Structurally, it is the stalk, running from the mid-brain down to the spinal cord, sending messages to the rest of the body. The brain stem keeps us alive, regulating sleep, body temperature, breathing and heart rate.



Right in the middle, hidden between the two hemispheres of the brain, is an almond-shaped structure called the **amygdala**. This is pronounced *Amy* with a *g* followed by *dala*, a bit like *dollar*. This is essentially feelings-central, regulating emotional responses based on perceived level of threat. It is the connection point between the forebrain and brainstem.

Effectively, the amygdala keeps the brainstem in check by maintaining its communication channels with the forebrain.



When it comes to behaviour, the brain is a bit like a parent holding hands with a small child, walking along a jetty near the beach. In the case of a middle-grade child, it is more like an older and somewhat wiser sibling looking after the toddler of the family. The older sibling is still a kid but is sensible and keeps the little one settled. If all is going to plan, the toddler holds the older kid's hand, everyone is safe and nobody does anything stupid.

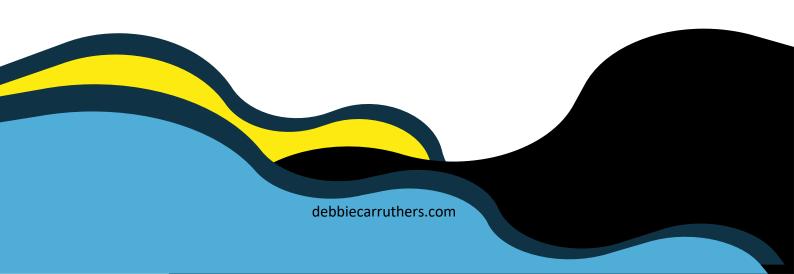


When something happens which causes the big kid to let go of the toddler's hand, there is a disconnect between the thinker and the doer. The brain of a pre-pubescent individual reacts like a toddler, ready to jump or fall into the sea at the start of a storm.

Jumping in with them to is pointless and can even be harmful. Sometimes the kid needs a floatation device to kick back to the shore before a connection can be re-established. During danger, they might be crying out for someone else to help them reach the

shore.

A reconnection must be made between the impulsive and the sensible self before the individual can reason. This suggests that when a child loses it, they need to be given the support as well as the space they need to recover before an adult can talk about it with them.



### **Understanding the Students**

As a cohort, year 6 students are like a unique species. For students in sixth grade, there is so much more going on than the kids let you see. With puberty rearing its ugly head, kids are morphing as they move towards the complex period of adolescence.

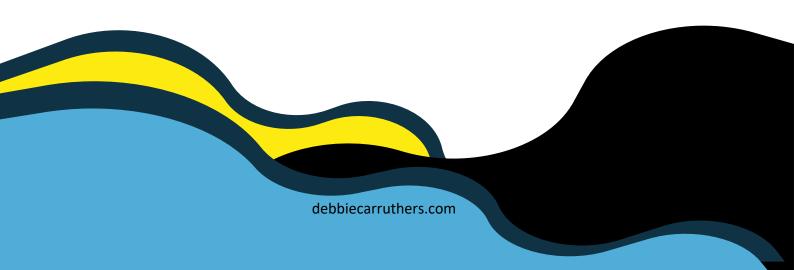
Collectively, students in their final year of primary school have a reputation for being overly confident, smelly preteens who ignore instructions. They roll their eyes, do whatever they please and speak rudely to teachers.

Anybody who has been unlucky enough to be a casual teacher placed on a class of unknown sixth graders on a hot, windy or wet Friday afternoon may shudder in agreement. K-2 specialists who have been placed on year 6 to mix things up may also be calling out, 'Amen, sister.'

In most cases, this is not the day-to-day reality.

The smelly part is real. Some year 6 students must be in the room when a teacher semi-regularly reminds the class, as a group, to wash their shirts each day and remember to wear antiperspirant deodorant. This is opposed to fragrant body sprays, which when mixed with body odour, only serve to vaguely mask the pungent smell and confuse the senses.

The show of arrogance, however, is often a facade, masking layers of insecurity and anxiety. It is otherwise a display of temporary confidence.



They are, after all, the tallest and strongest kids in a school where they feel safe Page | 8 and accepted. This will soon pass when they make their way to high school to be dwarfed by giants.

Some teachers may have experienced some eye-rolling or back-lash from year 6 kids previously in the playground. This is not an indication of what it is like to be their classroom teacher. When one finds themselves at the helm, navigating these kids through daily tasks and challenges at school, everything changes.

### **Earning Their Respect**

Just like all creatures in the animal kingdom, any group of people instinctively look to one of their number to show them the way. Ideally, the head of the pack, or whichever animal metaphor you prefer to describe the strongest, most dominant person in a classroom would be the classroom teacher. Unfortunately, this is not always the case.

Automatic respect for authority is a rare entity these days. To assume respect is ignorant. These kids will test you. They notice the failure of a teacher to make any kind of effort to connect with them it feels like a slap in the face. A teacher demanding conformity or lecturing them with unreasonable expectations is not the way to earn the students' respect.

Many teachers have a negative bias against year 6 kids and assume the worst. Give them a chance to speak and listening to what they have to say. These kids need to know you are on their side. That does not mean being their friend. They want to know you want the best for them.



A suggestion is for the class teacher to write the students a letter, introducing themselves on the first day and ask students to reciprocate. It is helpful in terms of  $\,^{\rm Page}\mid 9$ getting to know each student's family make-up, motivation and preferences for learning, all while assessing their grammar, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation.

### Social Media Drama

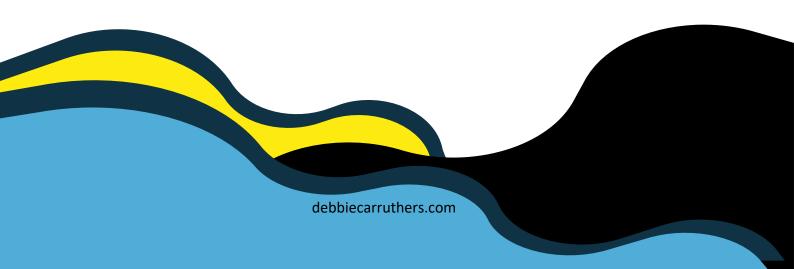
There tends to be more social drama in year 6. This is possibly because of the plethora of emotions associated with finding their place on the social hierarchy. They begin to question authority as they become increasingly aware of how they are seen by peers.

Although they are still too young for social media in more ways than one, many students use online platforms to connect and interact with their peers outside school hours, usually with permission from home.

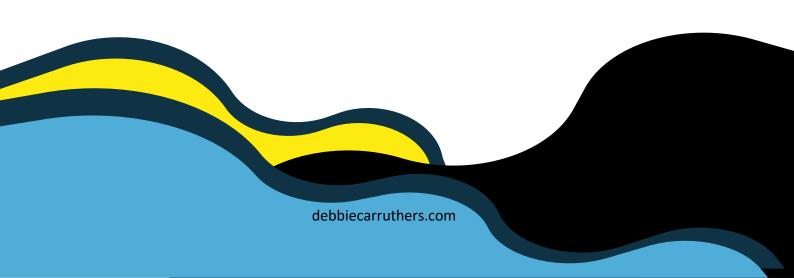
Children of this age do not have the psychosocial maturity to make higher order decisions. When conflict arises, they sometimes make choices which have a major impact on their relationships with peers. Many of these actions are irreversible and have long-term consequences.

Staff in schools are often left to deal with the conflict which results from social media use in home settings.

As teachers, it can be easier to avoid this through regular education than to deal with the fallout. If it begins getting out of hand, sometimes year 6 or years 5 and 6 have a cohort meeting to remind the collective rules.



## MANAGING STUDENTS



### **Behaviour Management**

### That kid

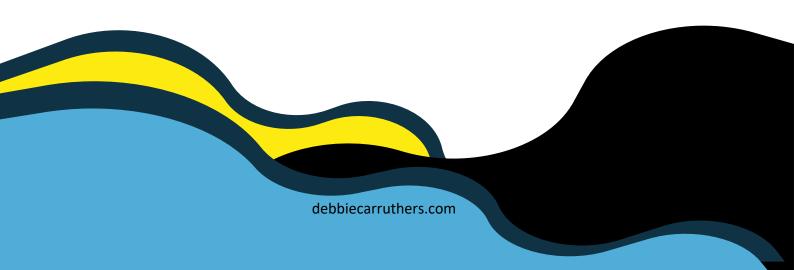
We have all taught them, some of us more than others. Even the teachers whose classes sit in silent obedience every lesson, those who never say it aloud because they want to protect their professional integrity.

Every teacher has taught *that kid*, the one who demands so much of your time and zaps you of so much of your energy that you go home exhausted every afternoon. The kid who manages to infiltrate your home life and even your dreams. No, your nightmares. This is the kid who makes you question whether perhaps teaching really *is* the career for you.



When they are making you pull out your hair with frustration or quit your job at lunch time, it is tough to hear that it is inappropriate to label a child as difficult. 'It's the behaviour, not the child,' many say. 'Perhaps you need to address your inadequacies as a teacher,' add others, being so discouraging that you want to either stay home and cry or punch them in the face.

None of us is perfect and we should be always ready to learn and grow. That said, unsolicited advice or criticism can be the opposite of helpful when what you actually need is validation and support. 'You've got this! We may have different approaches but here are some things that have worked for me.'



It makes some sense to flip it to the perspective of that child.

When a child struggles with learning so much it makes them want to pull out their hair with frustration or drop out of school. It is difficult for them to sit still quietly and when they fail to do so, they are often labelled difficult.

'Why can't you just behave?' Teachers ask. When they build up the courage to tell a teacher they do not understand, they are reprimanded for not listening. It is as though the teacher is saying, 'I taught it in a way that makes sense to me. Some other kids understand, so you must not be paying attention.'

When kids' individual needs are not met, they disengage. It is almost impossible to meet the individual needs of every child, but you can let them see that you are making an effort to get to know them and support them. Just like us, kids want to hear, 'You've got this! We may have different approaches, but I'll try my best to help you learn.'

All students need expectations, routines and boundaries as well as freedom and space to explore and grow. Getting this balance right is a challenge. The overall message could be that kids want you to be for them, not against them.

Some teachers insist on silence and others run noisy lessons. In both cases, a teacher may have the students engaged in rich learning or the information might be going into one ear and out the other. There is wisdom in looking to colleagues who seem to be masters of the balancing act. You do need to school policies and procedures. Remember, however, you are not your colleague.



There are as many approaches to classroom management as there are to teaching  $\frac{1}{Page \mid 13}$ itself. Students in your classes have varied preferences and learning styles too.

In her capacity as a teacher, the author has spoken with several children who frequently find themselves in a bit of trouble, asking which qualities in a teacher positively or negatively affect their learning. Patterns have emerged suggesting the value of feeling happy and safe at school in order to build a positive environment for learning. Approaches to wellbeing and psychological safety seem imperative.

### What Kids Say About Teachers and Learning

Teachers with a Negative Impact	Teachers with a Positive Impact
Teach stuff I don't care about	Teach cool stuff kids like
Focus on my behaviour	Focus on my learning
Yell and scream at me	Smile at me
Make me feel stupid	Build up my confidence
Teach boring lessons	Teach fun lessons
Ignore the good things I do	Praise me when I do well
Shame me in front of others	Pull me aside later
Can't control the class	Stay in control
Expect me to do stuff when it's too hard	Know how I best learn
Blame me for everything	Listen to what I have to say
Always put my name on the board with crosses	Include me and do check-ins or gentle
against it	reminders



### **Understanding the Child**

No matter the school, the environment or the class, each child has a unique set of personality traits, experiences and learning preferences. If you are a classroom teacher, get to know these as early as possible. It is often impossible to meet all the needs of everyone if you want a life outside teaching. It is helpful to try to know your students so each of them feels they belong, and their voices are heard. This is especially important in year 6.

Learn personality types and communication styles early. This is a good idea for colleagues as well as students. There are brilliant and free online surveys available to explore this, which are worth the investment of time. Alternatively, you could ask or observe your students in order to best understand their strengths and preferences.



### Author Anecdote:

When I was in year 5, there was this boy in my class who appeared to do whatever he pleased whenever he felt the inclination and never seemed to be reprimanded.



This boy would arrive late and out of uniform before engaging in a constant barrage of disruptive behaviours like wondering around the room, helping himself to items belonging to others and calling out incessantly. I don't remember him completing any class work and there is no way he submitted any homework.

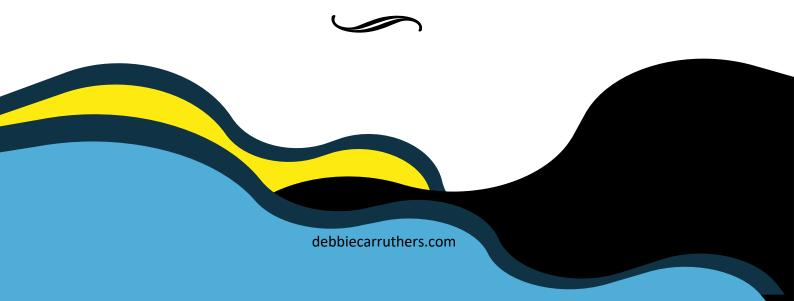
Our teacher was quite scary. If any other kid dared to step out of line, it was almost like she cried "Off with his head!" One girl even wet her pants because she feared challenging the teacher. This boy, however, felt quite at ease in the classroom, treating it a bit like it was his home.

Just over halfway through the year, this boy announced that he was leaving and we all breathed a sigh of relief. It seemed obvious that our ever-grumpy teacher would celebrate his leaving, but she surprised us all by instead celebrating him.

We all sat and listened, baffled, while she told him all his wonderful positive qualities that she treasured and to our further surprise, our tough-as-nails teacher cried. She showered him with gifts of a new bag and stationery. To the rest of us, especially the diligent and well-behaved, this did not seem fair.

I heard much later that the boy was moving from a foster home to a boarding school for wards of the state. Word was, the carers were kicking him out because he was such a troubled kid that they couldn't handle him anymore.

Perhaps he had different needs to the rest of us?



I have taught that kid. Well, not that exact kid but a few students with a similar story, for whom school is or was their happy place, free from the negative criticism of parents, the fear of retribution and sometimes even the drugs at home. They are never absent because they want to be at school.

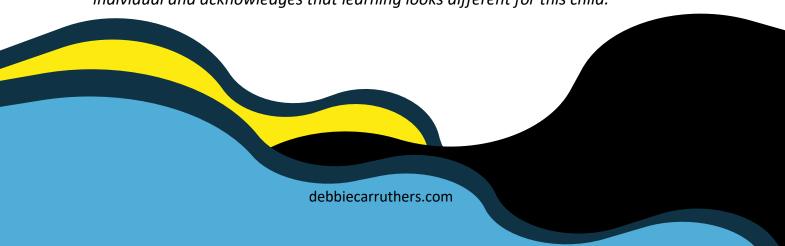
These students arrive late to school because they had to walk themselves there. Their lunchbox is often empty because there was not food at home. Their school shirt is always dirty, ripped or a size too small and if they wear a hat or jacket, it is always the wrong one. Their shoes are worn-out, sometimes with holes.

In the playground, they get into fights with students, and they are forever being reprimanded by other teachers who speak to them with utter disdain, always expecting the worst from them and trash-talking them in the staff room, demanding consequences. The senior executives are all too familiar with these infamous students who frequent their offices. The paper trail grows each day.

The classroom teacher, after numerous tearful, sleepless nights, has tried everything to manage the individual student. Parental contact is repeatedly attempted but rarely with any reply. There are seating plans, behaviour plans, warnings, notifications, insistence on normal routine, high expectations and the removal of privileges.

None of it works.

What this child needs is someone to trust, someone who actually cares about them and shows grace - undeserved and unrequited love; someone who celebrates the individual and acknowledges that learning looks different for this child.



With this realization comes real change. Other students may not understand but the teacher is gently tending to a seed that will continue to grow well beyond those classroom walls or even those school gates. The teacher won't see the end result.

In retrospect, my grumpy year 5 teacher may have been the only one to tell that disruptive boy in my class that he was worth something, that he mattered. She may have been the only one to see past the disruptive behaviours and recognise his admirable qualities. Her classroom may have been his safe place, where he was allowed the time and space to explore, grow and learn at his own pace. I now admire that teacher and try to replicate her love for the loveless.

I tell you this story because this teacher, while usually very strict on conformity, adapted in a situation as required. Despite her usual approach to classroom management, she let go to meet the needs of this high needs, traumatised student.

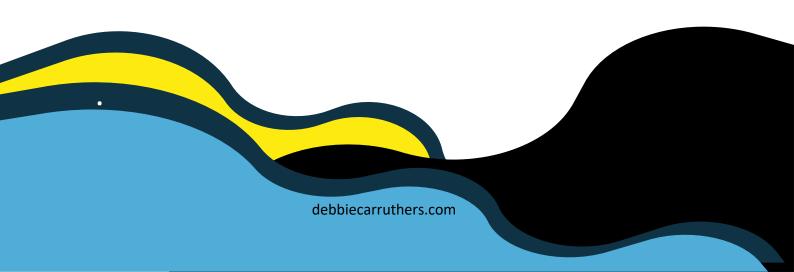


In my far more recent years as a teacher, three of my own year 5 and 6 students were oppositional and defiant. Their circumstances, however, have differed from the boy back in the nineties and from each other. Each of these three kids tested me day in and day out for a few months but I am grateful for the opportunities I had to work with them because they left a lasting impact on me, and I on them.

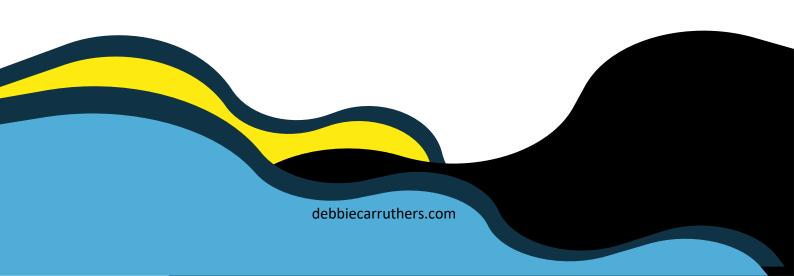
One student's traumatic experience taught them not to trust adults, so they put up walls to keep anyone from getting close enough to hurt them. This chid affected me more profoundly than any other. I was determined to win them over and by my birthday in late March, they gave me a pot of flowers, picked from a stranger's garden along with a handmade card. Unfortunately, this family moved interstate and the child had to start all over again.

Another student was a female taught to be strong in a man's world, but her resolve turned into stubbornness out of fear of disempowerment. In a letter to me at the end of the year, she wrote, 'Thank you for understanding me.' The third was a boy who had been in a fair bit of trouble. His experiences had taught him that authority figures were enemies, so he got in first with rebellious behaviours.

Almost every teacher ranted and raved at these kids and then complained they did not conform. I was heavily criticised by colleagues for not discipling them strictly enough. For the sake of building trust, I learned to pick my battles and build rapport via a strengths-based approach. In time, I earned the trust of each of these students, and they became receptive learners.



### KEY STAKE-HOLDERS



### Getting the Boss on Board

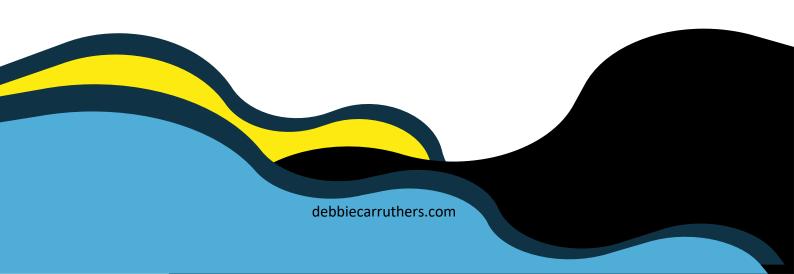
Year 6 teachers tend to be the greatest advocates for their own students, more vehemently so then in any other year. It does not do the teachers any favours in the eyes of the school executive but shows the students much-appreciated loyalty.

It seems in many schools that year 6 students are frequently brought together for lectures on conduct. At these meetings, they are reprimanded for behaviour choices and reminded that they are the school leaders and role models.

While there is usually some truth to what is said in these meetings, expectations on year 6 students can differ exponentially and unfairly from students and other year groups. Do not forget, they are still children.

Fiercely loyal and personally invested, it can be difficult for the classroom teachers of year 6 students to sit back and listen to these lectures without feeling that they too are being reprimanded.

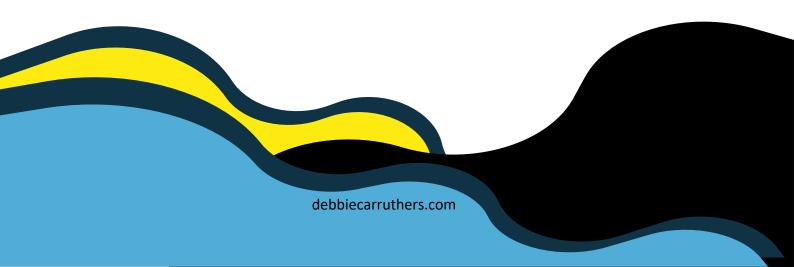
Support from Principals, DPs and APs is essential for many of the activities and events throughout year 6. It opens a realm of possibilities for your student cohort. No matter how they might appreciate your ideas and efforts, running a school is a huge and complex feat.



Year 6 teachers will be the very best advocate for the year six kids in getting  $\frac{1}{21}$ support. Your plans, however, may not align with the school's plan. Keeping that in mind, it's probably a good idea to familiarise yourself with the school priorities so that you can work out where this best fits in order to get the support early on.

Funding may not be available, and time might be short. Be creative in how you might tackle these problems. Some ideas to overcome hurdles to overcome might include:

- Do not assume that the boss, or that all the executives are against the students or teachers. Sometimes your boss or another member of the executive can be the best support.
- Cutting costs Be resourceful, with wise management decisions. This could mean, for example, choosing a more cost-effective food supply or getting donations to the school, and not necessarily have to be in the form of money. It could be time and resources from community members, such as waiving the cost of hall hire or baking the cake for the farewell dinner.
- Aligning Activities with the curriculum If it's in the teaching and learning program and can be justified with information in the documents, it will be easier to get permission from your school's executive. Planning a market day, for example, can be incorporated into mathematics programs. Funding could be sought by students in persuasive writing.
- Getting parent helpers where possible Even if you have a boss who does not allow parents on school grounds, some of them are keen to help from home. You will wear yourself out if you try to do it all. Some people truly want to help.



### Parents as Partners

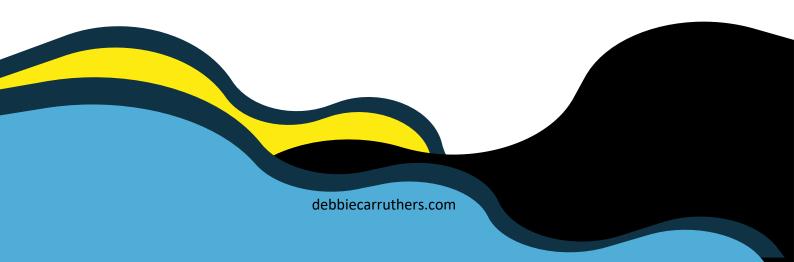


Author Anecdote: Every educator knows one. 'That parent', whose adoration for their own precious cherub is so great, they blind themselves to the possibility that just perhaps, the other children might be in the right. Proceed with caution. They are always watching.

Like a horse in the stalls waiting for the barrier to open, they also wear blinkers, with determination to follow the war path in front of them. The office doors open to warmly welcome community members, but that parent is the first to enter, storming in like a raging bull demanding immediate retribution.

Just seeing them arrive has physical and emotional effects on the staff members. The mere anticipation of a visit makes teachers either cower in a corner or retreat out the back door. Our trained response is comparable to that of rats in Skinner's box, where their wrath serves as punishment for any kind of action against their child.

We tread carefully in order to avoid the inevitable explosion caused by shining a light on their own child's responsibilities. This parent is such a bully that teachers take longer to carefully make decisions to please or placate them.



Where there are children, there are parents and carers. It is possible to avoid  $\frac{1}{23}$ conflict as a teacher. Being proactively kind to students and their parents has many benefits, one being that it reduces the chance of a raging parent storming into the office asking for the teacher's head.

Most parents have their children's best interests in mind. Most try to attend important events such as major assemblies, but some are never present and others ever-present. Either of these are potentially helpful or problematic in terms of schooling.

To many parents, their own children are the centre of their worlds. They like to see them succeed and to be happy and safe. If someone gets in the way of that, protective instincts kick-in and they may come across as a little aggressive in their response. In some cases, they say or do things that are not very helpful to anybody in the situation. It takes significant resolve to control emotions when one's children seem to be victimised or targeted, even if this is not happening, demands an unreasonable portion of your time and energy, like *That Parent* above.

At the other end of the scale is the absentee parent, who declines invitations and ignores information from the school. They do not book an interview, or they do not turn up for it. Emails and phone calls go answered. Without contact, the classroom teacher cannot work in partnership with them.

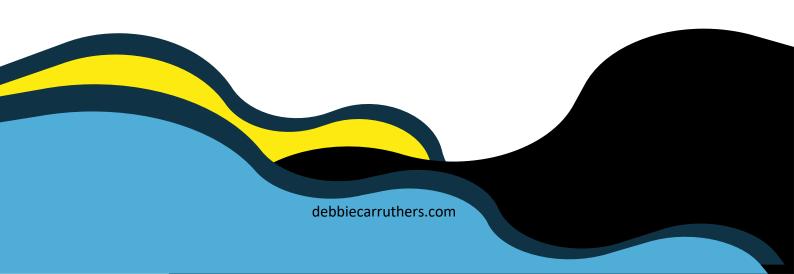
Some parents are seemingly disengaged with their children's schooling and extracurricular activities. They might drop them off at the beginning of the day and pick them up at the end. This is not necessarily neglectful, on their part. There could be a language barrier or a time issue. Try to avoid making assumptions.



Either way, make a few early efforts to engage with them and you should ensure a positive working relationship minimising complaints and conflicts. It also makes it less anxiety-provoking if it becomes necessary to make contact.

Some ways to treat parents as partners include:

- Send home a welcome letter to introduce yourself and invite them to reply. This is letting them get to know you and asking them to share.
- If a school does a Meet-the-Teacher night, greet them warmly and convince them that you want the same thing. You want their students to thrive as individuals as part of a class.
- Try to use their names. Begin with their title, 'Good afternoon, Mr Lee,' until they tell you otherwise.
- Make positive phone calls home This is uplifting for you and makes a parent's day. Better still, it usually gets back to the student.
- Food. If they visit your classroom or come to an event, offer them something to eat and drink.



# INCREASED WORKLOAD

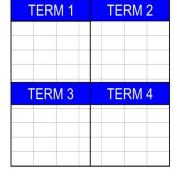


### Managing Your Workload

Work smarter, not harder. That is all very well to say, but how does a teacher

achieve this? What does it look like in practice?

Teachers given the task of helping kids navigate their way through the final year of primary school are likely to have an increased workload compared to some of their colleagues. Kids need twenty-four-hour supervision on camps and there is no additional time off class to compile year books.

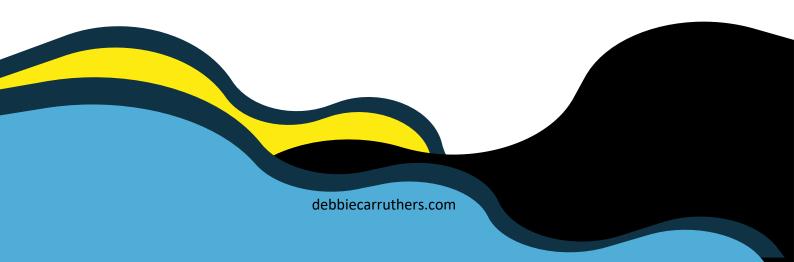


In many schools, particularly those in the public system, there is no additional pay or time available to make-up for any of the extra work.



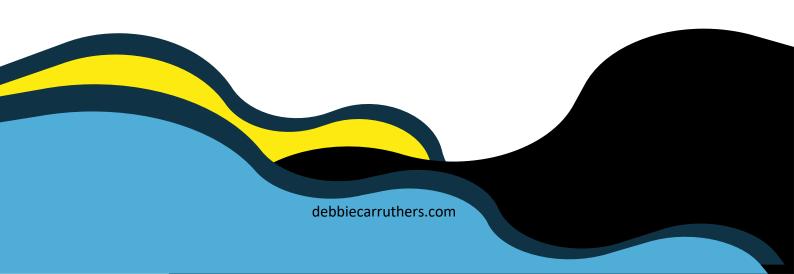
While some schools offer time-in-lieu for teachers who take on additional responsibility, a large number do not. Time-in-lieu often requires of casual workers. In the opposite case, schools expect teachers to do all the extra work out of the kindness of their hearts. Sadly, for staffing reasons, some schools no longer offer day or overnight excursions for students.

One bonus is that by year 6, students are old enough and capable enough to do some of the menial tasks which take needlessly large periods of time for a single teacher to complete. This does not equate to making them do your work and it certainly does not mean students can access private information.



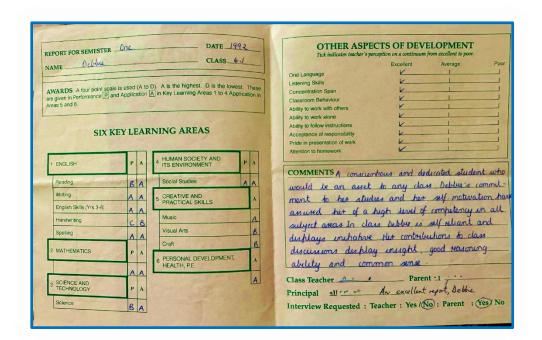
There are many ways that teachers of year 6 can use time more effectively. Here are a few examples which may help:

- Look for ready-made teaching resources and adapt them to your school and class content instead of reinventing the wheel.
- Share the load with colleagues. This means giving and receiving, so work is not unfairly distributed.
- Use self- and peer-marking and feedback to reduce errors for the teacher to correct later. The process is helpful for student learning and saves you time.
- Tell students to clean-up or rearrange furniture instead of doing it yourself.
- Find effective online games, activities and assessments with automatic marking.
- Learn to use spreadsheets to collate information. Even for those who are not
  mathematically minded, they can be helpful for record-keeping. If you are
  not skilled or knowledgeable here will be spreadsheet-master colleagues in
  your school who can teach you. Online versions are even better for
  accessibility purposes.



### Wretched Report Writing

Some of you remember back in the 80s and 90s, when a school report was a single page with 6-8 grades, a couple of ticks for effort and a brief comment about each kid. Those days are long gone.



The author's own school report from year 6 in 1992, when teacher workload was more manageable.

Teachers may become a little recluse for a couple of weeks prior to the due date for reports. It tends to happen twice each year, at report writing time. Much like an accountant at around tax time, this is the time of year where teachers must squeeze an extra week's worth of work into two or three already packed weeks. This is after collecting and recording data for evidence throughout the semester.



Things to consider when writing reports include...

- Be aware that reports from the first semester of year 6 are often requested as part of a student's application for private or specialist schools and programs.
- Most parents want to know that the teacher knows their child and that their performance reflects their ability, or at least that they are on track. If their child is working to a level below what is expected, the parent will want to know what the teacher is doing to help them catch-up.
- It is common for teachers in primary schools to grade more conservatively than those in secondary schools, particularly in high performing primary settings.
- Many parents still do not understand the grading system, possibly because different teachers and schools have different interpretations of the grade descriptors.
- Working beyond does not mean working with a syllabus designed for another grade. The grade descriptors have always defined it as demonstrating the ability to apply knowledge and skills across contexts.
- Unintentionally, teachers can measure each students' achievements against the cohort, instead of against the outcomes.
- While each student is unique, the curriculum is much the same. If anything is duplicated for different students, it is ESSENTIAL to double-check names.



### Curriculum and Student Workload



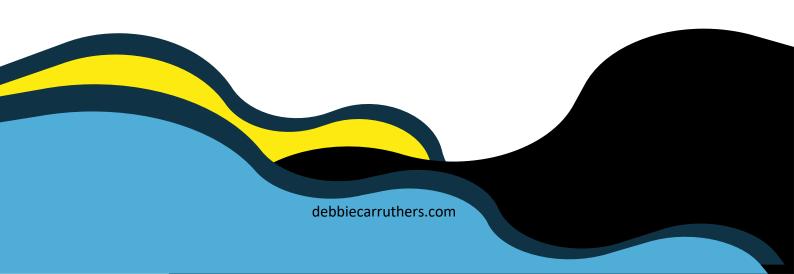
A significant part of a teacher's role is curriculum delivery. Essentially, it means to teach or deliver the content. Its purpose is to meet outcomes, building skills and knowledge.

In primary schools, students need to achieve outcomes in all subjects or key learning areas. Understandably, teachers and schools may prioritise English and mathematics, but ignoring other subjects means opting not to meet requirements across the broad scope of the curriculum. The importance of developing the whole child is neglected. Children are going to high school without knowing how to read basic music notation or how to catch a football, assumed skills and knowledge for other areas of the curriculum, so do not neglect them.

### **Students With Additional Needs**

In primary schools, classroom teachers make their own adjustments to curriculum delivery based on whole-class and individual student needs. For the lucky ones, there may be a support teacher or officer around to help students with additional needs.

High schools have a different approach for students with additional needs. They usually have support staff, but a child might have eight different teachers, each of whom may teach 180 students in a week. This makes learning support more difficult. Some high schools have targeted classes focusing on life skills. In these classes, curriculum is altered and aimed at preparing these students for day-to-day life beyond high school.

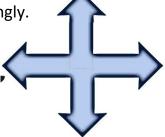


### So Many Disruptions!

Anyone who has written a 10-week program at the beginning of a 10-week term knows it is highly unlikely that they will teach it in its entirety. Regular lessons are frequently disrupted by carnivals, assemblies, parades and meetings. This is even more pronounced in year 6.

Here are some simple solutions:

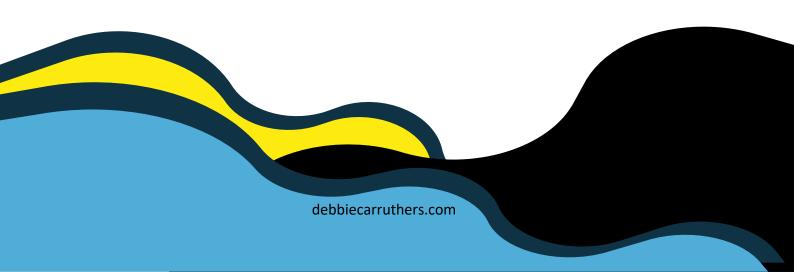
- Assume the distractions will happen and plan accordingly.
- Integrate literacy and activities into other subjects.
- As in high school, write a timetable and stick to it.



### Homework

There are four main reasons year six teachers set homework.

- 1. *Consolidate learning* This assumes that homework boosts educational achievement; a position which contradicts research.
- 2. *Meet school requirements* This is about following directives about school or stage policies.
- 3. Prepare students for additional homework in high school, although homework in many secondary settings comprises mostly of unfinished schoolwork and formal assessments.
- 4. It is what they have always done.



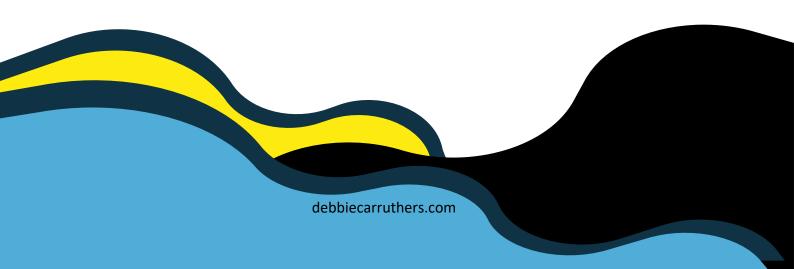
One time, many years ago, I approached a colleague on behalf of students who Page | 32 were up late each night completing maths homework. He remained steadfast, insisting that on the slim chance that one or two students may choose to complete a university degree in Mathematics, they all needed two hours a day of homework to prepare. It did not matter to him that maths was one of many areas of study, nor that the non-mathematicians took twice the amount of time to complete the set tasks.

### The Homework Debate

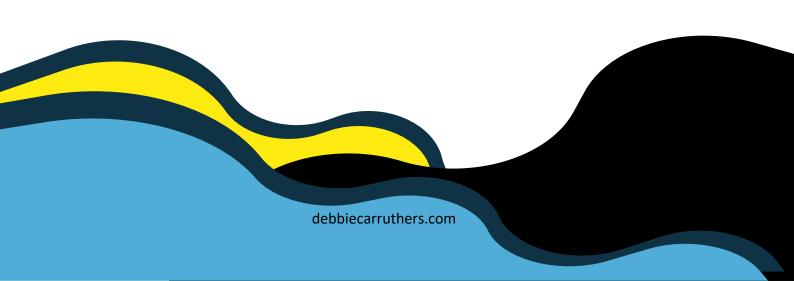
Some teachers set up to two hours of daily homework to encourage students to practice and apply what they do in class each day, in order to consolidate and reinforce their learning. Many parents and teachers insist that homework be prioritised over after school jobs, sport and other commitments.

Since high school students will be assigned homework to prepare for university, some teachers and parents insist that children in primary school do homework to prepare for high school. It can help to build homework into familiar everyday routines. If students are used to the additional curriculum workload, they may transition more smoothly to secondary school.

On the opposing side of the debate, parents and teachers value the current wellbeing of the child over the long-term career outlook. Assuming that bumper hours of homework is likely to become a reality in seventh grade, this is thought to justify an increase in homework for students in upper primary school.



# EXCITING EVENTS

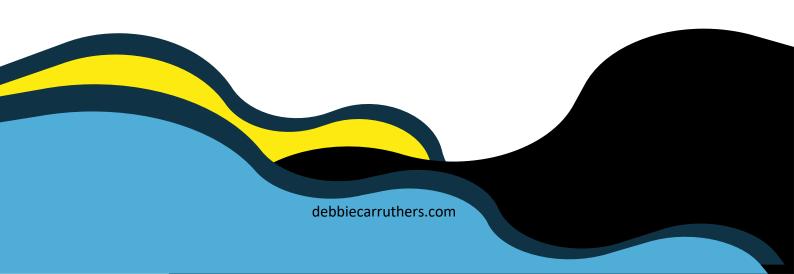


Teaching year 6 inevitably comes with running special events in addition to those  $\overline{Page \mid 34}$  of the rest of the school. Timing must work with your school's calendar. Keep in mind report writing time, for the sake of teacher workload.

For each year 6 or whole school event, use the following:

### **Event Checklist**

Get permission for event and check the calendar for clashes
Book the venue and organise resources with costing
Write a Risk Assessment
Organise and run planning meeting(s)
Collect numbers for Working with Children Clearances
Permission note for participants and leaders, including cost
Distribute running sheet for the day
Notify the canteen
Send a list of participating students to the office
Post-survey (optional)

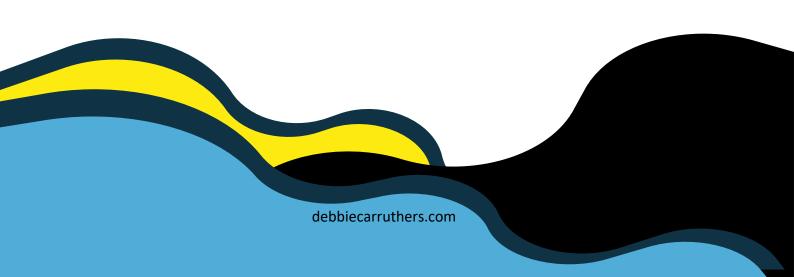


<sup>\*</sup> Your school may have its own checklist

### **Suggested Timeline of Events**

Schools vary in what they offer but consider reading on for suggestions.

Approximate timing	Event		
Mid-February	Leadership induction and training		
Early March	Parent information night		
May	Fundraiser		
Winter or Spring	Camp		
Early September	Fundraiser		
Late Term 3	Q & A Forum		
Last week of Term 3	Start planning yearbook		
Mid-term 4	In the same boat		
November	Orientation days		
Early December	Year 6 farewell dinner		
2nd last week	High school week		
Final few days	Graduation and year books		
End of last day	Clap out / Guard of Honour		
February next year	Year 6 reunion afternoon tea		



### **Fundraising Events**

Schools raise money for a variety of reasons. Sometimes the money goes to the Parents and Citizen's Association. Other events raise money for charities. Year 6 fundraisers often go towards a buying a gift for the school from the graduating class, as well as subsidising costs for year 6 families.



### Market Day

Year 6 kids divide into groups of 3-4 and come up with a stall idea each, recording the equipment and costs required for each stall. It helps to invest in some re-usable equipment to store and use each year.

Some ideas for stalls might include nail painting, hair braiding, face painting, fresh popcorn, drinks, slime, brooches and keychains, bookmarks, beaded jewellery, craft and art. It is wise for kids to prepay for tokens or to have a single booth with a teacher in charge of collecting money for tokens on the day. The same goes for running a Carnivale event.

### Carnivale

As above, students work in small groups. There can be some market stalls in addition, a Carnivale has performances and games.



Examples of activities for a Carnivale might include an obstacle course, target games, hoola-hoop competitions, a haunted house, sponge throw and dance or gymnastics performances.





### **School Disco**

A disco can be held at recess or lunchtime in a hall. Year 6 kids can pick a theme, advertise, bring in streamers to decorate, pick the playlist and run games.

Having glow sticks and drinks available for purchase adds to the fun and the bank account.

It is a good idea to have attempt to block the windows and have a disco ball and blacklight to let people glow.

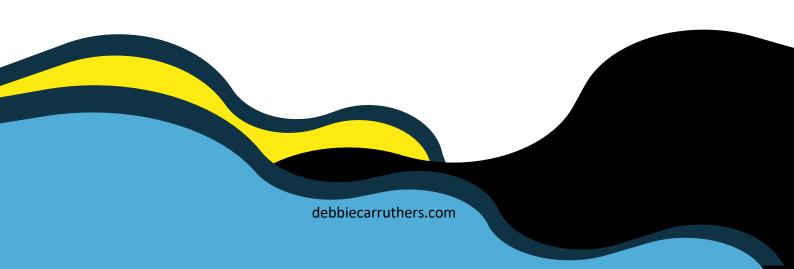
### **Colour Run**

A run is more fun with obstacles and better still with a splash of colour. Bulk purchases of bottles of coloured powder can end up costing under \$1 per participant, so a colour run can be a fun way to raise a large amount of money in a few hours.



A colour run is messy, so hold it at the end of the day. While helpers are essential, be careful in your selection if students volunteer to hold hoses or bottles of dye. Avoid the eye-area.

Other ideas include mufti-days, cake sales, milk-shake morning teas, barbeques, raffles movie nights, trivia nights, art auction and selling produce from the school veggie garden.



### Student Leadership

Most schools provide some sort of opportunity for student leadership for year 6 kids. This may be captains and prefects, SRC chairs, house captains, playground buddies and more. It varies for each school.

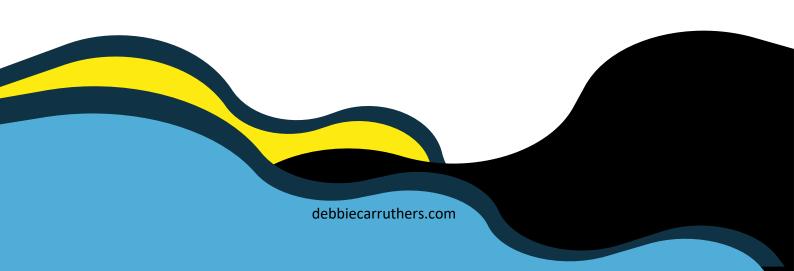
While some students have natural leadership skills, it is likely that none of them have had any formal training. Consider running a Leadership Training course for all student leaders towards the beginning of the year. This should involve some role-specific information as well as general content, such as:

- Communication and Public speaking
- Time management and Decision Making
- Emotional intelligence and Conflict resolution
- Team-building skills and Delegation



### Information night for Parents and Students

It may be worth considering holding an information evening at the beginning of year 6. This could be an opportunity for parents to meet the year six teachers and receive information about a timeline of events throughout the year. It would also be a wonderful opportunity to provide information on the application and enrolment process for secondary schools. It may be helpful to have the enrolment forms ready for distribution to parents on the evening and to point out its features step-by-step. This can save stress for the parents filling out the form and the school office staff in processing them.



### Year 6 Camp

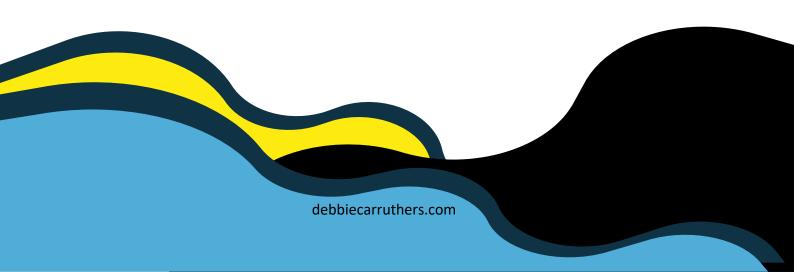
Many schools organise an overnight or multi-day excursion for year 6 students. This involves a significant amount of organisation. Venues need to be booked months in advance, both for accommodation and activities, as do buses. Risk assessments must be sighted. Costs need to be calculated too. There are tour companies who do all this work for you. They come at a cost, but these companies can have special access to busy places.

Parents need plenty of time to pay, so permission notes are usually sent out early. Once numbers are confirmed, students need to be divided into buses for travel, groups for activities and rooms for sleeping. There are medical conditions and dietary requirements to consider too.

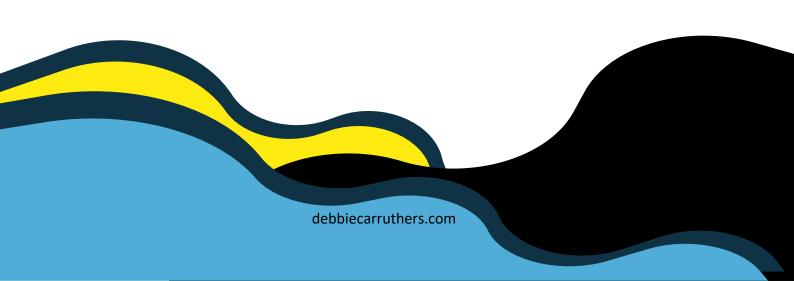
Aside from the necessary arrangements for your camp or excursion, it might be a great idea to increase interest and engagement through learning in advance can be a great idea. Information can be integrated into lessons such as in Geography, Science, English or Mathematics.



This is all sounds a little overwhelming in terms of workload, but these excursions are wonderful opportunities to build rapport with students. Even if they do not show gratitude and you do not receive any extra pay or tine off as compensation, you are helping them make memories for a lifetime.



### HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITION



### So Many Choices Local Independent Selective

### **High School Transition**

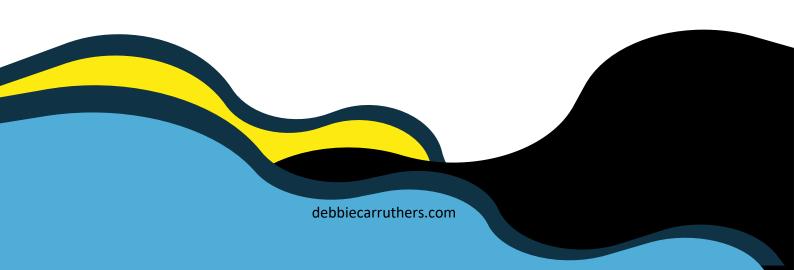
Moving from primary in secondary school is a big deal for kids. Many primary schools, however, leave the work to the secondary schools. In addition to orientation days, It is common for the local high school to host year 5 and/or year 6 kids from down the road for immersion tours and lessons. The benefits of this are two-fold. Students planning to attend the local high

school become familiar with the school's layout and meet some of their future teachers in their future classrooms. Some will already have older brothers and sisters there. Any students heading to other secondary schools still get to see the differences in bell times plus specialist teachers and classrooms, even if they do not intend to enrol at this setting or are unable to do so.

### Students with Additional Needs

Some high schools are fabulous with promoting positive transition to high school for students with additional needs. This is particularly the case with students enrolled in support classes. When one of these students is moving from a support setting in their primary school, there is usually a very strong connection between the two schools, with extra orientation days and transition meeting involving teachers and parents of those individuals involved.

Ideally, there would be a conversation between the year 6 teacher and the year 7 coordinators at the future schools of every child. It is in the interest of the high school to know what to expect in the following year. It is interest of the child for the primary school teacher to seek that connection.



### What Can Primary Schools Do?

There are a few things primary schools can do to improve wellbeing in their students throughout the process of transitioning to high school.

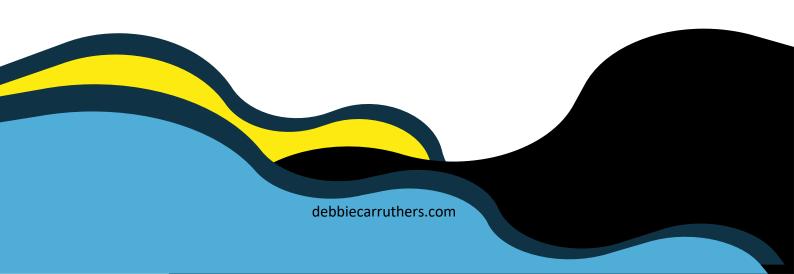
I am particularly passionate about this. With experience as a Year 6 into 7 Adviser in a high school and leading high school transition programs as a year 6 teacher in two vastly different primary schools, my interest is informed by previous successes and challenges. I am available for school visits to work with staff to plan and implement these programs. Visit debbiecarruthers.com to book a visit.

### High School Q & A Forum for Children and Parents

This can be helpful if held at the right time, which, from experience, is best late in Term 3. The idea is to invite kids to bring their parents along for an information evening where they can ask questions about your school's transition programs as well as questions about the reality for kids and parents in high schools.

Q&A Forum
Your Questions
Answered

A lead teacher can host the forum with a panel of experts to answer questions. The experts are predominately made up of ex-students and ex-parents from your primary school in the year before. Familiar faces have stories worth listening to. It is helpful to have different genders and different systems (private and public) represented on the panel. A high school teacher can also be a valuable source on information, although they must be aware they cannot speak on behalf of every high school.



### **Students Heading to Alternative High Schools**

Students going to a high school other than their local may be anxious about not knowing anybody heading to their secondary setting. This can be problematic for those who were not accepted at their school of choice, particularly for those who may struggle socially. There are a few options to help these kids make connections with those in similar situations from neighbouring schools. Creating more than one opportunity for these kids to meet up together is a great idea.

### **High School Week**

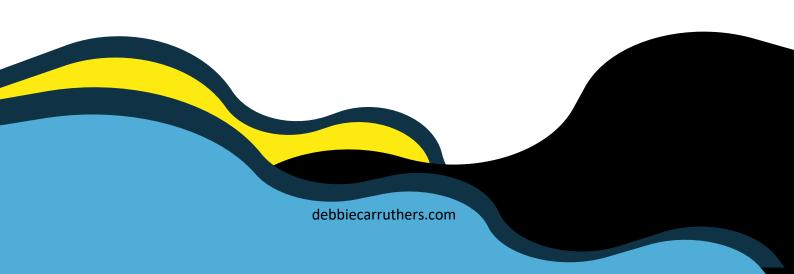
At the very end of year 6 at your school, having a few days of mock high school can be an excellent way to engage students.

Give some notice and the kids will be excited in advance. The anticipation will motivate them to keep going.

Timetable								
	Μ	Т	W	Т	F			
	Roll	Roll	Roll	Roll	Roll			
1	Ma	PE	Sc	La	Ma			
2	Sc	DT	La	Ma	La			
3	PE	Sc	Ma	PE	Sc			
4	La	Ma	PE	Sc	PE			

Some suggestions as to how to run an effective program include:

- Begin with Home Room or Roll Call in their regular class once a day.
- Re-arrange classes and mark the temporary roll each 'period.'
- Have timetables and between teachers and rooms for different subjects.
- Include new subjects such as Languages or Design and Technology.
- Get students to carry their bags around with them all day.

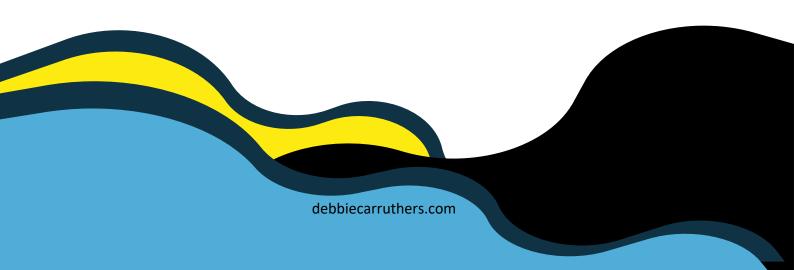


Invite students to a reunion afternoon tea for early in year 7. I borrowed this idea from another school but have seen it work in different settings.

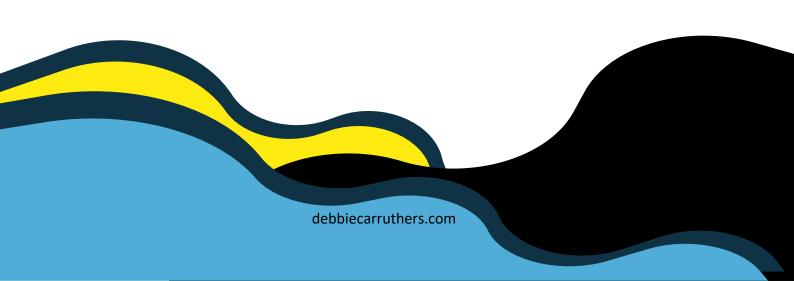
### These are my recommendations:

- Check the date against your own school calendar and the calendar of major local high schools. Many secondary schools offer a camp in the early weeks of year 7, so it is worth avoiding clashes, where possible.
- Host it about two or three weeks into the new school year is ideal.
- Include an invitation in the students' graduation packs and point it out to the kids and parents so they can put it in their family calendar
- Begin about 45 minutes after school. This allows some time for students to travel from their various high schools to the event.
- Encouraging students to wear their new uniform adds to the excitement.
- Provide food but there is no need to go overboard. It is mostly about them reuniting.
- Invite all the executive plus the teachers who taught that cohort over the years.





# THE FINAL COUNTDOWN



### **Yearbooks**

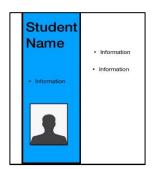
A few weeks out from the end of the year, someone needs to organise the yearbook. Every teacher and year 6 can have a page to fill out and perhaps even decorate. You can choose whether to provide a set template.

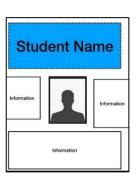
In your planning, aware that people will be absent or have incomplete pages. Account for this. Any student who does not have a photograph in the school records needs to have their picture taken. There are three ways to publish a yearbook:

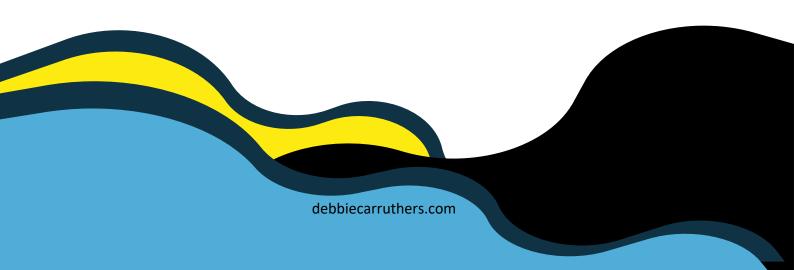


- The cheapest option is to only supply students with a digital copy, though it is not quite so special.
- The most cost-effective but least convenient method to print and bind them is at your school.
- If you are going for a professional look, send them away to a printing company. This costs more and may take more time.

-







### Year 6 Farewell or Graduation Dinner

This is event is a big deal for year 6 kids. As it is held in the busiest time at the end of the year, do as much planning as early as possible.



A venue will need to be booked. If the event will be held in the school hall, check for other users, including any afterhours care centres on the grounds.

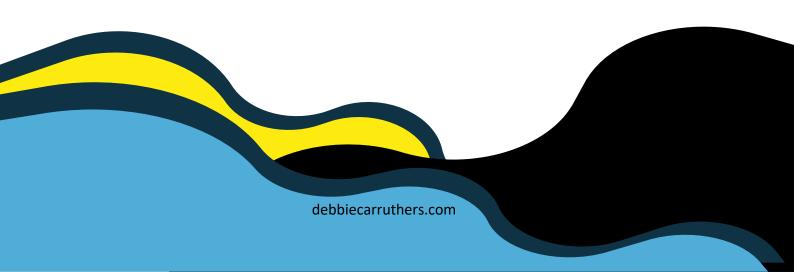
Otherwise, consider the capacity, cost and inclusions at various venues. It may be a formal occasion but remember the event it is

for children. They may prefer schnitzel and chips over oysters and caviar. Many will also have dietary needs and it is important to cater for these.

Select the song list for any dancing and ensure you check the lyrics, so they are appropriate for kids of this age group.

Invite parents to be part of the event in some way, even if only as spectators for the final dance. Parent helpers can be valuable. Although they may not attend the event itself, they can help in attending planning meetings, organising invitations and RSVPs, making cakes, setting up decorations and packing up.

A theme can be fun, such as Under the Sea, Hollywood or Enchanted Forest. No matter the theme, try to store decorations, where possible, for future years.



### **Graduation Ceremony**

Parents will want to be included in this formal assembly. Siblings within a school will also want to attend. Some schools have a morning tea for everyone afterwards.

Ensure students are in full uniform and on their best behaviour. It can be helpful to do a practice run a day or two in advance so the kids who the order of proceedings.

Often, the School Principal and classroom teachers of the graduating cohort will each do a speech. Kids usually appreciate the effort and the sentiment, as will the parents. After all, you have all completed the year together.

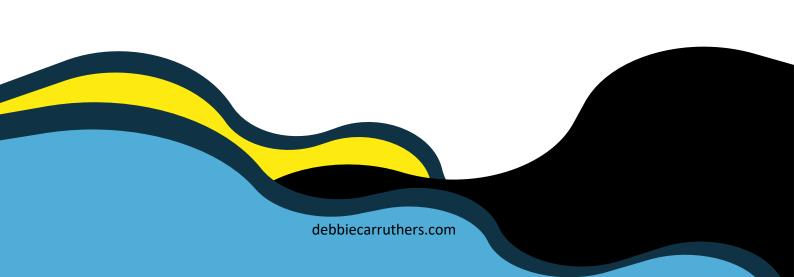
### Clap Out

Otherwise known as a Guard of Honor, this event is a rite of passage. Students literally move through a corridor of their teachers and younger peers out towards the school gate for the very last time.

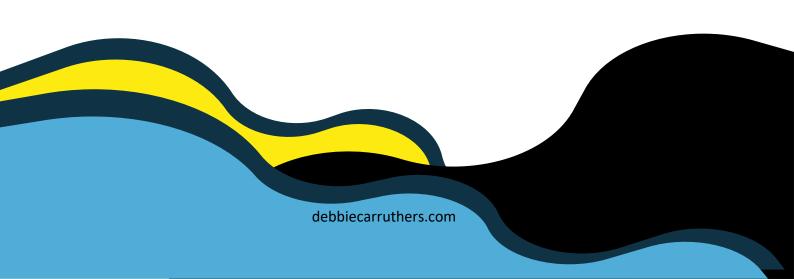
Plan this and communicate proceedings with the rest of the school, including colleagues and parents. Some schools invite other school leavers to join in.

If this is your first-time teaching year 6, have some tissues ready, because it is full of emotion. Not just for the students either.

Congratulations, my friend. You have survived year 6.



### COMMON MIS-CONCEPTIONS



### A Grade = 2 years ahead

The student has an extensive knowledge and understanding of the <u>content</u> (for their stage) and can readily apply this knowledge. In addition, the student has achieved a very high level of competence in the processes and skills and can apply these skills to new situations. (See <u>NESA</u>,)

### Year 6 classes are horrible

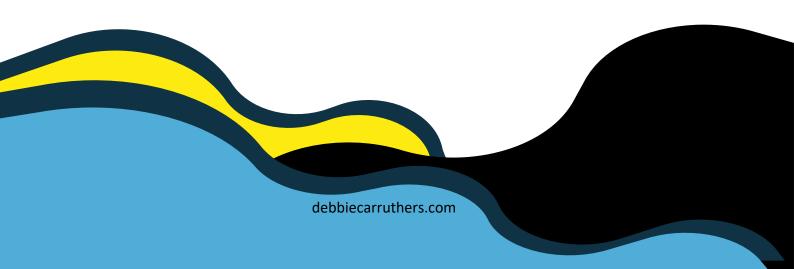
As discussed earlier in this guide, the way year 6 students relate to teachers is different to their younger peers. This is due to a combination of reasons. If a teacher goes in with the right intentions, to connect, listen and engage, the students usually respond positively. A teacher can have a more grown-up relationship with year 6 students, as long as they genuinely want them to thrive, both individually and collectively.

### Senior Executive are the enemy

Personalities and priorities vary. Ultimately, however, most people want to see the students learning and thriving at school. Vastly different people can co-exist and even co-operate with minimum conflict.

### Academia comes first

The learner should be prioritised over the learning. No matter which model of learning is considered, students will not fully engage with content while their other needs are not being met. Wellbeing is essential and should come first.



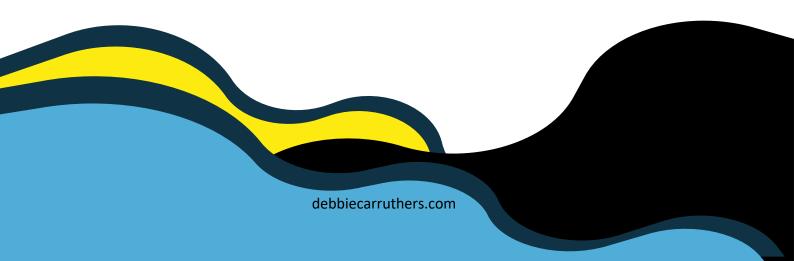
## Surviving Year 6 The Novel Behind the Guide



This teacher guide, and A Parent's Guide to Surviving Year 6, were inspired by Debbie Carruthers' debut novel, *Surviving Year 6. It is* a heartfelt, funny, and relatable story that captures the triumphs and trials of the final year of primary school.

The novel follows three unforgettable characters — Joey, Sally, and Bella — as they navigate friendships, secrets, and the social complexities of Year 6. Through moments of humour and heartbreak, students are encouraged to reflect on identity, empathy, and resilience. It is a powerful tool for building social-emotional awareness in upper primary students.

Whether used as a read-aloud, mentor text, small group novel study, or independent reader, *Surviving Year 6* offers rich classroom connections and discussion opportunities.



### **Book Description**

### Three kids. One year. Everything on the line.

It's the last year of primary school at Hillwood Heights, and Joey, Sally, and Bella are just trying to make it through in one piece.

Joey is always in trouble, when somebody else started it. Sally is hiding a serious illness because she just wants to be a normal 11-year-old kid. Bella is struggling to keep her perfect image intact.

Then a new kid comes along and everything changes. Tensions are high, friendships shift and secrets pile up.

Nothing can prepare them for the moment their Year 6 camp takes a dangerous turn. Classmates must work together to save one of their own, giving a whole new meaning to Surviving Year 6.

A laugh-out-loud, heartfelt middle-grade novel about friendship, resilience, and learning to stand together.

Discover how friendships are tested and heroes are made in Surviving Year 6.

Perfect for fans of Jeff Kinney and R.J. Palacio.

### Explore the novel, download free classroom resources, or request a school visit at:



www.debbiecarruthers.com/book

### For teaching packs, class sets, or speaking engagements:



www.debbiecarruthers.com/contact



### Reviews



Kids laugh and groan at characters they recognise in their own school and eagerly read on to see how life pans out for them. The turbulent times of the lead-up to high school is captured perfectly in these pages.

### Kirrily, Year 6 Teacher

A wonderful book by a very talented author. Both adults and children will enjoy this warm, humorous and sometimes bittersweet story of a group of diverse students as they navigate through the trials and tribulations of preteens.

### Dennis, Stage 3 Teacher and Year 6 Parent

My year 6 son couldn't put this book down! He devoured it in 2 days and said, 'It was really good. I liked how it was told from 3 different character's perspectives.

### Yolanda, Year 6 Parent.

My class love it! The story is engaging and highly relatable to school students journeying towards the unknown of high school. The character relationships are spot-on and it is sprinkled with typical humor and challenges faced in this age-group.

### TJ, K-6 Teacher

