A PARENT & STUDENT GUIDE

Curriculum *Alignment* & Transition Support

Moving between the British, American, and IB systems — how to understand where your child stands, close the gaps, and keep them on track.

Apex Academic Consultancy

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Why Alignment *Matters*

A student who moves between education systems is not behind — they are simply working from a different map. The job is to redraw that map clearly.

Every year, thousands of families relocate between countries and school systems — from the UK to Qatar, from an American international school to a British one, from a national curriculum into the International Baccalaureate. For the student caught in that transition, the experience can be disorienting. Topics they have already mastered are repeated; topics they have never seen are assumed as prior knowledge. Neither is their fault, and both are entirely fixable.

This guide explains how the three major systems compare, where the common gaps appear, and what a structured alignment plan looks like. It is written for both parents making decisions and students doing the work.

> **THE CORE PRINCIPLE**
>
> Curriculum systems differ far more in **sequence** than in **substance**. The same mathematics and science is taught in every system — but in a different order, at a different pace, and with different names. Alignment is about finding the specific points where sequences diverge, and bridging them deliberately.

The Three Systems at a Glance

FEATURE	BRITISH (UK)	AMERICAN (US)	IB DIPLOMA
Structure	Key Stages 1–5	Grades K–12	Final 2 years
Key exams	GCSE, A-Level	SAT, ACT, AP	IB Diploma
Specialisation	Early	Broad, late	Broad & balanced
Assessment	Terminal exams	Continuous + tests	Exams + coursework

Year & Grade *Equivalency*

The single most useful reference for any transitioning family is a clear age-to-year map. Use it to identify exactly which year group your child joins — and what the system expects them to *already* know at that point.

AGE	UK YEAR	US GRADE	MILESTONE
5–6	Year 1	Kindergarten	—
6–7	Year 2	Grade 1	UK: KS1 assessment
10–11	Year 6	Grade 5	UK: SATs / 11+
11–12	Year 7	Grade 6	UK: secondary begins
13–14	Year 9	Grade 8	UK: GCSE options
14–15	Year 10	Grade 9	UK: GCSE begins
15–16	Year 11	Grade 10	UK: GCSE exams
16–17	Year 12	Grade 11	A-Level/IB begins
17–18	Year 13	Grade 12	A-Level exams

The "Half-Year" Problem

The UK academic year runs September–July; cut-off dates for year placement differ between systems. A child born in summer can end up placed a full year apart depending on the system. Always confirm placement with the receiving school directly — do not assume based on age alone.

Where the Gaps Appear: *Mathematics*

Gaps are predictable. After years of teaching students moving between systems, the same divergence points recur. Maths is where sequence differences bite hardest, because each topic depends on the last.

US → UK (into GCSE)

The US often introduces algebra later and in a more compartmentalised way. Students arriving into UK Year 10 may not have the algebraic fluency GCSE assumes — particularly rearranging formulae, simultaneous equations, and surds.

UK → US (into High School)

UK students are often *ahead* on algebra and geometry but less familiar with the discrete "Algebra II / Pre-Calculus / Calculus" course structure and the graphing-calculator dependency common in US classrooms.

Into the IB Diploma

The AA vs AI pathway choice is critical. **AA** (Analysis & Approaches) suits students heading toward maths-heavy degrees; **AI** (Applications & Interpretation) suits applied and social-science paths. Choosing wrong is a common, costly error.

> DIAGNOSTIC FIRST
>
> Before any catch-up work begins, a proper diagnostic identifies exactly which topics are missing — rather than re-teaching everything or guessing. This is always our first step with a transitioning student.

Where the Gaps Appear: *Sciences*

Science transitions carry their own predictable friction points — less about raw difficulty, more about structure and depth.

Combined vs Triple Science

UK GCSE splits into Combined Science (double award) and Triple Science (separate Biology, Chemistry, Physics). US students transferring in need this decided early, as Triple covers materially more content and is often expected for competitive science A-Levels.

Depth vs Breadth

US science tends to be broader and more conceptual earlier; UK science goes deeper on fewer topics sooner. Neither is "better" — but the transition student feels the mismatch acutely, and needs support bridging the specific depth gap in their new system.

Practical & Coursework Expectations

The IB and A-Level both carry significant practical and internal-assessment components that a US transfer student may not have encountered. These are learnable skills — but they must be taught explicitly, not assumed.

> *"The students who struggle most in a transition are rarely the weakest — they are the ones whose specific gaps were never named. Name the gap, and it closes fast."*
>
> DR KRISHAN P. CHAUHAN

Your Alignment *Action Plan*

Whether you are a parent organising the move or a student doing the adapting, here is what actually works — in the right order.

1

Confirm the Exact Placement

Contact the receiving school and confirm the precise year group, exam board, and any entry assessments. Get the specification codes.

2

Run a Diagnostic

Assess against the new system's expectations. Identify specific missing topics, not vague "weak areas."

3

Prioritise Load-Bearing Gaps

Fix foundational topics everything depends on first — algebra before calculus, cell biology before genetics.

4

Bridge, Don't Overwhelm

Target the highest-impact gaps rather than attempting everything at once. The student is already managing a lot.

5

Review & Adjust

Reassess after 4–6 weeks. Alignment is a short, focused campaign with a clear endpoint — not an open-ended slog.

For Parents, *For Students*

A successful transition is a partnership. Each side has a distinct job.

FOR PARENTS

Your job is logistics and reassurance. Get the specifications, arrange the diagnostic, and resist the urge to panic about early wobbles — they are normal and temporary.

Keep communication open with the new school. Ask specifically: "What does the curriculum assume my child already knows at this point?"

FOR STUDENTS

Your job is honesty. Tell someone exactly what you don't understand yet — that is data, not weakness.

The faster the gaps are named, the faster they close. Nobody expects you to arrive knowing a system you've never studied.

A Realistic Timeline

WEEKS 1–2	**Settle & diagnose** Let the student adjust; run the diagnostic assessment in parallel.
WEEKS 3–8	**Bridge the core gaps** Focused sessions on load-bearing topics, sequenced deliberately.
WEEKS 8+	**Consolidate & monitor** Reassess, confirm the student is on-pace, taper support.

HOW WE HELP

Dr Chauhan has spent his career inside international education, currently as Head of Mathematics at an international school in Qatar. Cross-system alignment is daily work for us. For a diagnostic and a structured plan, book a free discovery call at **apexacademicconsultancy.com**.