

# The Kenyan Parent's Complete Guide to CBC & University Pathways

From Grade 1 to University Admission, Everything You Need to Know

By *BetterTomorrowSystems* | March 2026

## 2-6-3-3 New Structure

Understanding the complete education journey

## 7 Core Competencies

Skills beyond traditional exams

## Multiple University Pathways

Options for every student's strengths



# How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed to meet you exactly where you are. Find your child's current stage below to jump directly to the sections that matter most to your family.

Your Child Is Currently In...	Their Education Path	Your Priority Sections
<b>PP1 – Grade 6</b>	Primary School (CBC)	Sections 1, 2, 5, 10
<b>Grade 7 – 9</b>	Junior Secondary (CBC)	Sections 1, 2, 5, 7, 10
<b>Form 1 – 2 / Transition</b>	Transition Cohort	<b>Sections 3, 4, 7, 8</b>
<b>Form 3 – 4 / Grade 10–12</b>	Senior Secondary	<b>Sections 6, 7, 8, 9, 10</b>
<b>Graduating This Year</b>	University Transition	<b>Sections 6, 8, 9, 10</b>



# What CBC Means for Your Child

The Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) replaces the old 8-4-4 system with a new structure: **2-6-3-3**. This means 2 years of pre-primary, 6 years of primary, 3 years of junior secondary, and 3 years of senior secondary. The system emphasizes continuous assessment through projects, portfolios, and observations rather than single high-stakes exams.



1

## Pre-Primary (2 Years)

PP1 – PP2, Ages 4 – 6

Foundation building through play and exploration

2

## Primary (6 Years)

Grade 1 – 6, Ages 6 – 12

Core competencies development

3

## Junior Secondary (3 Years)

Grade 7 – 9, Ages 12 – 15

Subject specialization begins

4

## Senior Secondary (3 Years)

Grade 10 – 12, Ages 15 – 18

University and career preparation



# 7 Core Competencies Your Child Will Develop

CBC focuses on seven key competencies that prepare students for real-world success beyond traditional exams. Each competency builds practical skills your child can apply throughout their life.



## Communication

Expressing ideas clearly in writing, speaking, and digital formats



## Critical Thinking

Analyzing information, solving problems creatively, and making informed decisions



## Collaboration

Working effectively in teams, respecting diverse perspectives, and building relationships



## Self-Efficacy

Confidence in one's abilities, resilience through challenges, and self-motivation



## Imagination & Creativity

Generating new ideas, innovative thinking, and artistic expression



## Citizenship

Understanding rights and responsibilities, community engagement, and ethical values

**At Home Tip:** Talk with your child about their projects and portfolios. Ask *"How did you solve that problem?"* and *"What did you learn from working with your group?"* This reinforces competency development.

# CBC vs 8-4-4: What's Changed

Understanding the differences between the old system and CBC helps you support your child effectively. The shift moves from one-time exams to continuous assessment and from standardized testing to competency-based evaluation.

Aspect	8-4-4 System	CBC System
Structure	8 years primary + 4 years secondary + 4 years university	2 years pre-primary + 6 years primary + 3 years junior secondary + 3 years senior secondary
Assessment	Exams every end of term. Final exam at end of year determines promotion to the next grade	Continuous assessment through projects, portfolios, and observations every term
Subjects	Fixed subjects with limited choice until Form 3	Core competencies with pathway choices from Grade 7
Grading	Letter grades (A – E) based on exam scores	Competency levels (Excelling, Proficient, Developing, Beginning) based on demonstrated skills
University Entry	Based solely on KCSE scores	Based on Grade 12 scores plus projects, portfolios, and pathway alignment

**The Key Mindset Shift:** Success is no longer determined by one exam day. Your child's consistent effort, projects, and demonstrated competencies throughout each term build their university pathway.

# Dear Student: What You Should Know About CBC

This page is for you, not just your parents. Read this.

## 📁 The System Is Still Figuring Itself Out

If you're confused about CBC, you're not alone. Teachers are confused. Parents are confused. Even the government is still figuring out parts of the system. **This is not your fault.**

- You're part of the first generation testing a completely new education system.
- The rules are literally being written as you go through school.

## What You Can Control (Even When Everything Feels Uncertain)



### Keep Your Own Copies of Everything

Schools lose things. Teachers change. Portfolios disappear. Take photos of every project and keep a physical or digital folder of your best work.



### Ask Questions (You're Allowed To)

Don't be afraid to ask teachers about projects, assessments, and pathway options. If they can't answer, it's their problem, not yours.



### Talk to Your Parents If Pathway Choice Feels Wrong

You're 14-15 when choosing your pathway; it's okay to not know your career yet. If it feels wrong, talk to your parents and a guidance counselor.



### Your Portfolio Is About Growth, Not Perfection

Universities want to see you're learning and improving. Show your journey from "Beginning" to "Proficient" – that's a good story.

## Your Rights

- See your portfolio and understand your competency levels.
- Get feedback on projects for improvement.
- Switch pathways if you made the wrong choice.

# URGENT: Read This if Your Child Was in Form 1 or Above in 2022–2023

The **Transition Cohort** refers to students who were in Form 1, 2, or 3 when CBC was announced in 2022. These students face unique challenges as they bridge between systems. Understanding their pathway is critical for university preparation.

## Question 1: Which System Is My Child Following?

**Why this matters:** Students who joined Form 1–3 in 2022–2023 may follow modified 8-4-4 or transition to CBC pathways.

**If unclear:** Ask the principal for written confirmation of your child's assessment system and university entry requirements.

## Question 2: How Are Their Projects and Portfolios Being Documented?

**Why this matters:** CBC requires continuous project work and portfolio building that contributes to university admission.

**If unclear:** Request a copy of your child's portfolio and project log. Ensure teachers are documenting work properly.

## Question 3: What Pathway Should They Choose for Senior Secondary?

**Why this matters:** Grade 9 students must choose Arts & Sports Science, Social Sciences, or STEM pathways affecting university options.

**If unclear:** Schedule a guidance counseling session before end of term. Consider your child's strengths and interests.

## Question 4: How Will This Affect University Admission This Year?

**Why this matters:** 2024–2025 graduates need clarity on whether they'll use KCSE or CBC Grade 12 scores for university entry.

**If unclear:** Contact KNEC directly at [k nec.ac.ke](http://k nec.ac.ke) for official confirmation. Don't rely solely on school information.

# Red Flags: What to Watch For

While most CBC implementation is progressing smoothly, some schools face challenges. Knowing what to watch for helps you advocate effectively for your child's education. The Teaching Service Commission (TSC) confirms that teacher training and resource gaps remain in some areas; this is systemic, not your fault. You're not alone in navigating these challenges.



## Critical: No Portfolio Records

Your child has no documentation of projects, assignments, or competency assessments. This directly impacts university admission.

**Immediate Action:** Meet with the principal and request weekly updates. Document all meetings in writing.



## Critical: Unclear Pathway Choice

Your Grade 9 child hasn't been guided on Arts, Social Sciences, or STEM pathway selection affecting university options.

**Immediate Action:** Demand a guidance counseling appointment within 2 weeks. Research pathway requirements online.



## Advisory: Inconsistent Assessment

Teachers don't provide regular feedback on projects or portfolio work. Your child doesn't know their competency level.


**Monitor Closely:** Schedule monthly check-ins with teachers. Ask for written progress reports each term.



## Advisory: Limited CBC Resources

School lacks project materials, laboratory equipment, or technology needed for practical competency development.

**Monitor Closely:** Join the Parent-Teacher Association. Advocate collectively for resource allocation with other parents.

 **Important Context:** The TSC reports 70% of CBC implementation challenges stem from teacher training gaps, not parent or student failure. **You are not to blame.** Systemic issues require systemic solutions. Your advocacy helps drive improvement.

# Parent Strategies: What Works for Your Situation

## Low-Income & Rural Families

Resourcefulness and community support can overcome financial barriers. Focus on accessible, low-cost strategies that leverage existing community resources.

- Form a study group with 3 – 5 families to share materials and tutoring costs
- Use free mobile learning apps: Ubongo Learn (works offline)
- Partner with local churches, mosques, or community centers for study space
- Visit county libraries for free internet and reference materials
- Ask teachers for printed project guidelines to complete at home

**Monthly budget: KSh 500 – 1,000** for mobile data, printing, and group contributions

## Urban & Busy Parents

Time is your constraint, not resources. Use technology and delegation to stay engaged with your child's education despite demanding schedules.

- Set up school WhatsApp groups for real-time updates from teachers
- Use calendar apps to block 30 minutes weekly for education check-ins
- Hire a tutor for 2 hours weekly focusing on weak subjects only
- Delegate project supervision to a trusted relative or neighbor
- Schedule quarterly parent-teacher meetings during work hours

**Monthly budget: KSh 3,000 – 5,000** for tutoring, data, and transportation

## Supporting Struggling Children

Every child learns differently. If your child is struggling, identify the grade band and apply targeted strategies. Remember: struggling doesn't mean incapable, it may mean they need different support.

Grade Band	What's Likely Happening	Your Action
PP1 – Grade 4	Fundamental literacy or numeracy gaps affecting all subjects	Request learning assessment from school. Consider remedial classes. Read together daily.
Grade 5 – 8	Transition challenges, increased workload, or undiagnosed learning differences	Meet with guidance counselor. Explore learning support programs. Adjust home routines.
Grade 9 – 11	Pathway mismatch, exam anxiety, or cumulative knowledge gaps	Reassess pathway choice. Consider alternative pathways. Seek professional counseling if needed.

**James's Story, Machakos:** "My son struggled in Form 1–2 with the transition. We discovered he learns better through hands-on projects than exams. We switched his pathway to Arts & Sports Science, and now he's excelling."

The lesson: **don't force your child into a mold that doesn't fit.**

# Senior Secondary Pathways & University Admission

From Grade 10, students choose specialized pathways that align with their strengths and university goals. Understanding each pathway helps you guide your child toward the right university programs.



## Pathway 1: Arts & Sports Science

**Subjects:** Music, Visual Arts, Physical Education, Literature

**Leads to:** Universities (Bachelor of Arts, Music, Sports Science) | TVET (Performing Arts, Coaching)



## Pathway 2: Social Sciences

**Subjects:** History, Geography, CRE/IRE, Business Studies

**Leads to:** Universities (Law, Education, Business, Social Work) | TVET (Secretarial, Accountancy)



## Pathway 3: STEM

**Subjects:** Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Computer Science

**Leads to:** Universities (Medicine, Engineering, Computer Science) | TVET (Technical courses)

## University Admission: KCSE vs CBC Pathways

### KCSE Track (Old System)

Students who completed 8-4-4 take KCSE exams in November. Universities admit based on aggregate points (mean grade) from 8 subjects.

- Clear, standardized grading (A – E)
- Well-established university entry requirements
- Single exam day determines outcome
- Familiar to parents and teachers

### CBC Track (New System)

Grade 12 students complete continuous assessments plus final exams. Universities admit based on competency levels and pathway alignment.

- Portfolio and project work included
- Pathway-specific requirements
- Less pressure from single exam
- Emerging standards being refined

📌 **University Access Reality:** Approximately 36% of students currently access university. However, this includes both pathways. CBC offers additional TVET and technical college options that were previously overlooked.

**The goal is the right fit, not just university admission.**

# Your Action Plan: What to Do Now

Take action today with these time-bound strategies. Even 5 minutes daily makes a difference. Print this page and post it where you'll see it weekly.

## Daily (5 – 10 Minutes)

- Ask: "What project are you working on?"
- Review: Check school WhatsApp or portal
- Encourage: Celebrate one small win

## Weekly (30 – 60 Minutes)

- Connect: Call teacher if concerns arise
- Document: Update project portfolio
- Research: Check university requirements

## Monthly (1 – 2 Hours)

- Meet: Schedule parent-teacher conference
- Assess: Review competency levels
- Plan: Adjust strategies as needed

## Once Per Term (Half Day)

- Verify: Confirm pathway and assessments
- Organize: Gather all documents
- Prepare: Start university research early

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## Questions to Ask at School

### For Teachers

"Can I see my child's project portfolio and competency assessment records?"

"How is my child performing in each of the 7 core competencies?"

"What specific support does my child need to improve?"

### For the Principal

"Which assessment system is my child following for university admission?"

"Are CBC projects and portfolios being properly documented?"

"What resources does the school need to support CBC implementation?"

### For Transition Cohort

"Will my child take KCSE or CBC Grade 12 exams?"

"How are mixed-grade students being assessed fairly?"

"What happens if my child struggles with the pathway choice?"

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**Congratulations, you have taken the first step toward mastering your child's learning journey. Take the guesswork out of the CBC and continue your journey with the tools to help your child thrive.**

Give us your feedback. Write to us via our email address [info@btsafrica.org](mailto:info@btsafrica.org)

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