

PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR SCHOOL

A Guide for Parents and Guardians

The period before a child starts school for the first time can be an anxious time for parents. We have put together the following information as a simple guide to how you can best prepare your child for this exciting time in their lives!

Promoting Independence

Your child will really benefit from being as independent as possible when they start school. Of course staff will always be on hand to help, but children feel a real sense of achievement when they can accomplish things by themselves! Examples include being able to dress and undress independently, as this will really help with PE sessions.

Children in Reception will also have access to an outdoor space throughout the day, so being able to put their coat on and zip it up independently will really help them - as will being able to put on a pair of shoes or taking off their jumper when they get hot.

Another important part of being independent at school is being able to use the toilet independently, including washing and drying their hands. It will also be helpful if they are able to blow their nose on a tissue and put it in the bin.

Having lunch independently may also be new to your child. If they will be having hot dinners, practise using a knife, fork and spoon. If they are taking a packed lunch, practise opening the packets and containers of food they will be taking.

Social Skills

Being able to interact appropriately with other children and share resources is a key skill that will help your child when they start school. Socialising with other children will help to promote these skills and you could arrange these with future classmates if possible. You could model useful social phrases such as "my turn please" or "let's share" and join in with pretend play to start the game off and then fade out as children get into character.

Communication and Language

Many parents worry if their child will be able to tell the teacher if they need something or if they will make friends. Good communication skills underpin these abilities. If you have any concerns about your child's communication and language skills please don't hesitate to speak to your child's class teacher for support and advice. Remember, children develop at their own pace.

We know that parents can have a huge impact on their child's talking and listening development and the summer is a perfect time for trying out simple language boosting activities.

Listening and Attention Skills

Your child will be given many spoken instructions throughout the school day and will need to be able to shift their attention from what they are doing to listening to what the teacher is saying. A lovely activity to promote this is to go on a "listening walk" where your child listens for all the sounds around them. You could also jot down all the sounds your child notices and talk about these back at home to retell the journey based on the sounds they have heard.

Understanding Spoken Instructions

Classroom instructions often contain several parts for children to remember. A simple game of "Simon Says" during long car journeys this summer could really help. Give your child an instruction to do, like "Simon says put your finger on your nose" and see if they can follow your instruction. The game becomes more difficult as they are only supposed to follow your instructions if you start the sentence with "Simon says ..." Can your child listen carefully and only follow the instructions when directed? The game can be made more challenging by building up to instructions with two or three steps, for example "Simon says touch your nose, then clap your hands and then put your hands on your head".

Vocabulary Development

At school, children will be expected to start extending their vocabulary so it is a good idea to encourage your child to learn and use new words.

Outdoor "treasure hunts" work well too. Collecting objects found on walks in the park or on the beach, help introduce new types of vocabulary such as describing words. Treasure can also then be used to create feely bags, where objects have to be described by the way they feel before revealing what the object is.

Narrative Skills

Reception age children will be encouraged to use language to organise and sequence ideas and events. You can model important concept words, like "first", "last", "next", "before" and "after", and the correct use of past, present and future tenses of verbs, which typically will not yet be fully developed.

Reading and Writing

Teachers do not expect children to know their alphabet or be able to read when they start school. A good foundation in sound awareness skills such as rhyming and identifying what sounds a word begins with would be helpful. Sharing songs and books is a really good way to

support this. Encourage your child to develop an interest in books and other forms of text, for example comics, postcards, labels and posters. You could visit your local library and encourage your child to choose books they would like to listen to and look at. Read with your child and discuss what you have read, for example, ask what they liked about it. Consider reading books about "starting school" with your child. Use these to discuss all the fun activities they will be doing at school.

"Name Treasure Hunts" can be a fun way of getting your child to recognise their name. Write your child's name on pieces of paper and hide them around the house. Encourage your child to find them. A good foundation to being able to write is to develop your child's fine motor skills. This is because good fine motor skills enable a child to hold a pencil firmly as they learn to write. Threading is a great way to develop fine motor skills, whether it is with beads or buttons, or making necklaces out of dried pasta. Weaving wool around a cardboard template or strips of card through each other are also other simple activities that you could do at home, as is playing with handheld construction toys, small toys and cutting and sticking activities.

If your child is ready to be interested in mark-making encourage this and praise their efforts. This is an important pre-writing skill. However many children will not be ready for this.

Mathematical Development

Being able to count verbally will be of great benefit to a child starting school. Practise counting forwards and backwards. One to one counting can also be done incidentally throughout the day, for example counting steps as your child climbs the stairs. You can count anything!

Encourage reliable one to one counting by showing your child how to point to each item as they count, or to move the items as they count so they do not count each item more than once. This will help your child understand what numbers mean. You can also sing counting songs.

Shape, Size and Quantity

You could go on a shape hunt to see how many circles, squares, oblongs and triangles your child can find. You could look for repeating patterns too. Talk about the shape and size of objects. Play with blocks and encourage your child to think about size, colour and shape.

Number Recognition

As they begin to recognise some numbers, a number hunt is a fun way to look for numerals on doors, on clocks, buses, cars, signs, at home, at the shops or on TV. You could also play "I spy" but with numbers.

Other things to bear in mind:

- Use every day experiences as learning opportunities for example take your child with you to the shops. They can learn about:
 - Reading and writing as you write and follow a shopping list
 - Learn about numbers, counting and money when helping you to pay for items
 - Learn about their local environment on the way to and from the shops, etc
- Encourage your child to help you with simple jobs around the home, for example gardening, tidying up, baking and cooking. This will help them to develop co-ordination and listening skills as well as independence and self-confidence.
- Explore different ways of being creative, for example:
 - Colouring and drawing with pens, pencils and crayons, painting
 - Cutting and sticking materials together
 - Building models with "junk" materials like cardboard boxes or construction toys like Lego
 - Exploring sounds made by instruments or "noise makers" (for example rice in an empty yoghurt pot) and listening to and moving to music
- Remember that everything your child wears or takes into school needs to be named. Consider buying iron-on name labels as a quick way to name everything at once or use a permanent laundry marker.
- We offer fruit as a snack during the day. Encourage your child to try a range of different fruit to explore their likes and dislikes and also practise peeling bananas and oranges.
- Encourage your child to be active. Help them to explore climbing equipment in a local park, play running games, practise riding a bike or a scooter and play simple games with a ball or frisbee.
- We provide a home visit which allows staff to visit you and your child in your own home setting. This enables your child to meet their new teacher in a setting where they feel more secure and relaxed. Don't worry about these meetings - it is just a chance for staff to begin to get to know your child, collect any important information about your child and pass on any information about the school. It is also an opportunity for you to ask any questions you may have and pass on any information about your child.