



Starting Primary School

A parent's guide



Starting school can be a daunting time, both for your child and for you! This guide is for you as a parent to read and share with your child to help you both prepare for this exciting time.

By taking into account some practical and emotional considerations about your child's education and confidence about starting school you should both be able to negotiate and enjoy this milestone event.

Help for parents

Children are quick to pick up on the emotions of those around them. Make sure your child doesn't pick up any worries you may have about them starting school. Having a confident attitude will make your child feel safer.

Whatever you do, don't dismiss any apprehension your child says they're feeling about starting school. It's important to listen to their worries and have a think about what you can do to help. Perhaps they're worried

about the journey they'll be making to school? If so, perhaps a few practice runs in the summer holidays to familiarise them with the route may help. Or it might be that they're nervous about making friends, so be sure to emphasise the fact that everyone will be feeling the same. In many cases, they'll be starting alongside friends from pre-school so they won't be 'alone'. Whatever fears your child may have, they're all equally valid, so try not to dismiss them. And if you didn't have a very positive experience at school try not to let that influence your child!

Read books or make up stories with your child about separation fears (for example; 'Once upon a time, there was a little bunny who didn't want to leave her mummy in the hutch. She was afraid of what she might find outside....'). This might help your child feel that they're not alone in being afraid of separating from his parents. Ask at your local library for books about starting school.

In the early days of starting at school give your child a bit of leeway - they're going to need a bit of 'bedding in' to their new routine, getting used to the classroom environment. Expect your child to be tired at the end of the day so cut them some slack and think about the impact weekend activities may have on their ability to cope. Ensure that they are eating and sleeping well to give them the energy to cope with the increase of workload.

Preparation

As a parent there's lots of practical matters you'll need to consider before the start of school and thereafter. Having all of the required school uniform is an obvious one

Ask the school about, lunches, term dates, uniform guidelines (including hairstyles, jewellery and footwear) after school activities, equipment needed, school policy brochures, school transport etc.

If your family is split and your children divide their time between two households, ensure they have a replica checklist at both homes.

Ensure the school knows how to contact you and remember to update the records when you get a new contact number.

When buying a school uniform for your child there are considerations to be made for small children:

Buttons: shirts/blouses/cardigans with buttons can be very tricky for small children to do up on their own after PE. Polo shirts that slip over the head are great and it doesn't matter if the buttons aren't done up.

Shoes/plimsoles: ensure your child is able to do and undo their shoes. Laces look great but a young child can't tie them and if they become undone your child could fall over them.

Coats: consider the way a coat fastens, again buttons are impractical for younger children. Hoods are great as children find them easier to hang on their pegs so they spend less time on the floor!

Wellies: ensure your child's name is on the tops of their wellies as there will probably be more than one pair in the same design as your child's. When they are small a picture or symbol is also good as they may be unable to recognise their name.

For Girls

Tights: try to get tights that are slightly too big as children find these very hard to get on but even harder if they're too tight.

Dresses: try to get the ones that slip over the head and not button up.

For Boys:

Trousers/Shorts: there are 3 different fastenings for boy's trousers. These are hook and clip like male suit trousers, popper and pull up. Lots of children are unable to undo and do up the clip type of trousers until they are



older so ensure your child will be able to undo and do up their trousers as this can cause anxiety around going to the toilet.

Label all of your child's clothes. This includes bags, PE Kits, lunchboxes, shoes, gloves, hats, scarves and even socks.

There are different ways to do this – you can either buy a laundry pen to mark their labels, buy sew on labels or buy iron on labels. It is a good idea to put the label on the clothes themselves rather than on the care label as these can easily be removed. Another idea is to put another label on the bottom of the jumper below the rib so if there is any question about having the wrong jumper on your child can easily turn the bottom over to find their name instead of having to take it off.

Remember when labelling that the teacher can have up to 30 children all getting changed for PE at the same time and putting their clothes in the middle of the table. If the clothes are not labelled it becomes really hard to work out whose is who's when they are all the same.

Try to encourage your child to be as independent as possible at home when getting dressed and undressed. When getting undressed at home encourage your child to put their clothes in a pile. Getting into this habit will help them find

their clothes easily when they are getting changed at school.

It is your legal responsibility to ensure that your child attends school regularly and on time. Punctuality is an important part of a routine and will also help prepare them for the world of work even from this early age! Important information can be missed if your child is late to school and it can leave them feeling lost and unprepared for the day. Find out what time school starts and ensure your child arrives at least 5 minutes before to enable them to be at registration on time. A few test runs of the route to school before term starts can help give you an idea of the time needed to get there. If your child is to be absent for any reason inform the school in writing with as much advance notice as possible. This may not be authorised as it is at the discretion of the Head teacher to grant leave of absence. Contact the school on the day of an illness before 9:30am and on your child's return provide a note. Any lengthy absence due to illness may require a doctor's note.

Non-emergency medical and dental appointments must be taken out of school time and any holiday taken during the school holidays. Every day counts at school and any time missed can be difficult for your child

to catch up on if they are absent. Frequent absence can also impact on your child's friendships at school and leave them feeling anxious about fitting in when they return.

FAST FACTS

7.7 million

School days are lost through absence each year.

90%

Attendance over an academic year is 4 weeks missed

5 minutes

Late every day is the equivalent of missing 3.4 days a year.

10-12 hours

Sleep needed for the average 5 year old.

EVERY DAY COUNTS

The First Day

Make sure your child understands what they are expected to do and where they are going when they get to school. Reassure your child where the toilets are and where they have to put their coats, bags and lunch etc.

Tell your child when you are leaving and when you'll be back. Some parents feel it will be easier to sneak out when their child is not looking. This can make things worse, because your child might feel confused or upset when they realise you're not around. They might then be more difficult to settle the next time you leave them.

Settle your child into an enjoyable activity before leaving and say goodbye briefly, don't drag it out. Keep a relaxed and happy expression

on your face as you leave. If you seem worried or upset your child might think the place is not safe.

If you feel your child may get upset try leaving them for short times – getting increasingly longer with a trusted family member or friend before school starts. Avoiding separations from your child can make the problem worse.

Try not to worry – lots of children feel sad about parents leaving them – and lots of parents feel very upset about this situation. But remember this time will pass and in a short while your child will feel settled and happy. Talk through any anxieties with the teacher and let them know about anything you are doing to help your child.

Building your child's confidence

As your child prepares to enter a new, unknown world of education there's perhaps never a more important time to nurture their confidence and self-esteem. Of course, parents praise, encourage and give love, affection and attention to their children throughout their childhood, but it can often be at this point in their lives that many children can become self-doubting, introverted and unsure of their place in the big, wide world.

As such it makes sense to do your best to ensure you help your child grow in confidence as they prepare to take on the demands of school. From having the self-belief to tackle new academic challenges to developing their social skills as they widen their group of friends, confidence and assertiveness will be invaluable in ensuring their time at school is both happy and successful.

Find out about fun activities outside of school such as Martial Arts, Music, Dance, Brownies, Cubs to help children develop new skills and

relationships. It helps put school life and friendships in perspective.

Give praise willingly and often – don't highlight your child's shortcomings or show frustration if they are struggling with a new school subject, for example. Concentrate on what they are doing well and let them know how pleased you are with them, then work together on the subjects that don't come so naturally to them.

Devote quality time in the evenings - take the time out to look at work they have brought home or find out what happened in PE today. Don't focus solely on academic success - sports and extra-curricular activities they have excelled at are equally worthy of praise.

Emphasise the fact that everyone makes mistakes - if your child has had a bad day and not done so well in something try not to be critical. The important thing to remind your child of is that sometimes failing at things is part and parcel of life - we can't be brilliant at everything!

Always give your full attention to your child when they are trying to express their concerns about something - don't brush their anxieties under the carpet and say "we'll talk about it later..." they will feel you're not taking their problems seriously and may not come to you in the future when they have a problem.



It's inevitable that your child will fall in and out of favour with different groups of friends during their education.

Girls in particular can be changeable and cliquy at times so assure your child there is nothing 'wrong' with them if they're feeling excluded from the 'in crowd' or are having difficulty forming special bonds. Friendships take time and effort and sometimes don't work out. This is an area where children have to find their own way - but if you have any concerns that your child is struggling to make friends contact the school for advice.

Recognising the signs of bullying

Aggressive banter, name calling and teasing has always been a part of playground culture. But there is a big difference between brief school yard disputes that are soon forgotten about and actual bullying. True



bullying can have a lasting effect on the victim. At its worst it can ruin lives and leave severe emotional scars children carry with them into adulthood. Today's parents not only have to worry about verbal jibes; internet and mobile phone technology has widened children's access to online information. Be aware of online gaming and who your child is communicating with and what they are viewing. It's a good idea to search online for 'internet safety for kids' to ensure your child is accessing safe and age appropriate information.

It's important to be in tune to your child's emotional state wherever possible - a noticeable change in their behaviour could indicate there's a problem at school which they may not

be telling you about. Here are some signs to look out for in your child - be wary of assuming they are definitely being bullied if they display any of the below treading carefully in approaching the subject if you think something isn't right.

- Your child appears to suddenly go off school. They may complain of 'feeling ill' (more frequently than usual) and ask to stay off school.
- Your child seems withdrawn, anxious and stressed but 'closes up' quickly if you comment on their behaviour.
- Your child has nightmares, panic attacks or may wet the bed.
- Any interest they may have had in after-school activities or hanging out with friends seems to dry up.
- Clothes, belongings or dinner money goes missing.
- Your child may come home with physical markings such as bruises or burns.

If you think there's a problem, ask your child. Listen and explain that you are not angry with them. Take their concerns seriously. Stay calm. Phone the school to arrange an appointment.

The appointment will most likely be outside of teaching hours. Make sure that your child knows what's happening and is involved as much as possible.

Keep notes of the incident. If there are any bruises, take photos or if anything has been stolen, write down details.

It may be helpful to take a calm friend who can act as note-taker and supporter. Tell the school that you would like to work with them to solve the problem but ensure that anything agreed at the meeting is acceptable to you and to your child. Ask how the school deals with these matters and how long they will need to deal with the problem effectively. Arrange a follow-up appointment to review the situation.

After the meeting write up what was agreed. You may want to send a copy to the school. Reassure your child that they were right to tell you. It is up to the school to be vigilant; it should not be your child's responsibility to continually tell on the bully.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome, raise your concerns with the Headteacher and/or Chair of the Board of Governors.

Communicating with the school

If your family is going through a difficult time such as divorce, bereavement or family or medical problems, tell your child's teacher so they will know to act gently and to be particularly supportive.

Tell the school of any medication, and when it needs to be taken. Your child may need to carry a card or bracelet detailing medication.

If there are problems, make an appointment to discuss them with your child's teacher. Don't wait for Parents' Evening. Ask what extra support you can give at home.



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Text based on the literature which accompanies the Starting School Summer Group course devised by North Abingdon Children's Centres

www.northabingdon.childrencentre.org