

School Readiness

What you can do to help your child before they start school.

Your child has been learning from the moment they were born and there are those who support the theory that your baby is already learning whilst in the womb. Each child learns from the stimuli that they receive and these start the brain into making all the links they need to develop to make the most of their learning. You and other people, with whom your child has had contact, will have been influencing their development. The majority of their experiences will have been happy, positive and well supported. As your child moves on in their learning journey they need to enhance their prime areas of learning: communication and language; personal, social, and emotional; and physical skills, which will enable them to continue to have happy and positive learning experiences.

In school we have noticed an increasing decline in many children's prime areas of learning. To ensure that your child can make the most of their time at school please take time to ensure that they:

Can manage their own dressing – this includes putting on clothes that are often inside out, one leg in and one leg out etc. Many children struggle when getting changed for P.E. and this can cause them anxiety.

Can manage their own toileting needs – this includes taking themselves to the toilet, wiping their own bottoms, flushing the toilet and washing their own hands effectively. Accidents will happen and are dealt with in a calm and sensitive way. However a child that is unable to take themselves to the toilet will be a child that spends time worrying instead of learning.

Can listen, understand and respond - this is all about having time to talk and to listen to each other without the distraction of visual and auditory equipment such as telephones, televisions, iPads etc. and without being impeded by objects in the mouth.

Children that have good memory and listening skills are the children that will make the best progress. This is particularly relevant in the classroom.

How can you help your child to improve their Memory and Listening Skills?

- Kim's game. (Items on a tray covered by a cloth.) Increase number of items on a tray, show for 1 min, cover then recall what they have seen. Or remove one item. What is missing? Etc.
- Send children on errands increasing number of instructions –e.g.
 - Go to your bedroom and get a toy.
 - Go to your bedroom and get your yellow teddy.
 - Go to your bedroom and get your yellow teddy and put it on the sofa.
 - Go to your bedroom and get your yellow teddy and Thomas train.
 - Go to your bedroom and get your yellow teddy and Thomas train then put the teddy on the sofa and Thomas under the cushion.

How ready is your child for reading?

You may think that means:

- ★ Do they recognise the letters of the alphabet?
- ★ Can they find their own name from a group of similar names?
- ★ They can recognise signs on shop fronts and words like 'strawberries' on road-side notices.

These are some of the skills that your children will have developed but they are not the key to a child that is ready to read.

How can you help your child to be ready to read?

Helping them to learn as many nursery rhymes as they can by heart. This gives them a good grounding in rhyming and develops their memory retention.

Play lots of games like eye spy, go on a sound hunt to find objects around the house that begin with the same initial sound as (*Their own name is a good starting point*) to help them begin to recognise that there are lots of words that begin with the same sounds.

Share lots of different types of books - ensure that this always done in a safe, relaxed and comfortable place to help develop a love of books. Talk about the stories and play games where you take turns to retell favourite stories. This will ensure that your child has a good knowledge and vocabulary to express what they know about stories prior to reading the words on the page.

How ready is your child for writing?

You may think that this means:

- Do they know their alphabet?
- Can they write letter shapes?
- Can they write their name? etc.

In actual fact we mean are they physically ready to write.

To be physically ready for writing your child needs to have:

- **Core Stability** - this means:
 - Being able to balance your body when sitting, kneeling, standing, balancing on one knee and one foot, and being able to reach out for items without falling over. Without good core stability a child will find it very difficult to write.
 - Writing requires us to be able to sit up straight in a chair, with both feet on the floor and to support ourselves without using our arms to balance. If a child requires their hands and arms to support themselves they will not be able to use them appropriately when having a go at writing.
- **Fine motor control** – this means:
 - Being able to use their hand and wrist movements without the need to move their whole arm.
 - Being able to move their fingers independently
 - Being able to hold a writing implement effectively to trace over lines, colour within lines and to be able to vary the pressure they use to produce the required effect on a variety of different mediums e.g. paper, chalkboards, white boards, shiny paper, rough paper, cardboard, tracing paper etc. using pencils, wax crayons, fibre tipped pens, chalk, white board pens etc.

Core Stability and **Fine motor control** develop when we have good **Gross Motor control** and **balance**. These are the keys to being able to write and they are the skills that your child will have developed since being born. The ability to hold their heads up when they were on their tummies, the ability to sit up without support, the ability to crawl, the ability to walk, the ability to stretch out to reach their toys, the ability to post shapes into boxes, hammer pegs through holes the list is endless. All of these activities will have developed your child's muscles and as a result their ability to control their large movements and balance.

It is these areas of **Gross motor control, core stability and fine motor control**, along with **hand/eye co-ordination**, and **perception** that will be assessed during their first weeks at school and will enable us to implement a range of activities that will help those that have a need, to develop their readiness for writing.

What can you do to help your child at home?

Strengthen upper body:

- Commando style crawling
- Climbing ladders
- Swinging on monkey bars

Develop hand/eye coordination:

- Threading
- Jigsaws
- Throwing and catching games
- Target games

Develop balance through:

- Hopping, skipping, jumping, kicking
- climbing up and down steps, stilts
- riding scooters, tricycles,

Develop powers of perception:

If you cannot see the difference between b, d, p, q, n, h, l, i, j, how will you be able to recognise them when you are reading and writing.

- Self help skills such as putting shoes on correct feet, trousers the right way round, clothes not inside out
- Spot the difference pictures
- Simple wooden jigsaws – matching cut out shapes to objects.

Develop fine motor control:

- Self help skills such as doing up and undoing buttons, zips on coats.
- Cutting with scissors
- Threading activities – both hands
- Using tongs and tweezers to pick up large and small items – both hands
- Building and taking apart construction kit models e.g. duplo, stickle bricks

It must be emphasised that:

All children learn and develop skills at their own rate. Some children are physically ready for writing when they start school. Some may not be ready to physically write until they are in year one. What you can be assured of is that each child will be exposed to a rich learning environment which will enable them to make progress through developing the transferable skills that they will need for lifelong learning.