

Guidance for practitioner's

This document has been put together for Early Years professionals in the Black Country area, based on practitioner's views and experiences of what school readiness entails. In 2020, a survey was sent to community practitioners, schools, nurseries, parents and health professionals to delve into what a child needs to be 'ready' for school. These themes and ideas have been incorporated into the below guidance and definitions for us all to make reference to and use in our work, wherever we appear in a child's journey to school readiness.

Please use this guidance in conjunction with parent's story book '*Little Chick Starts School*' to support children and families.

What is "being school ready"?

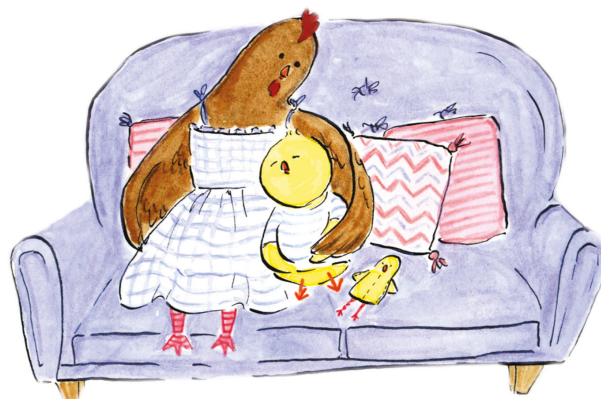
Being "school ready" means that a child is emotionally, socially and physically ready to cope with learning in a classroom. Within their early years, they have developed;

- Emotional and social independence that allow them to leave their parent for the school day, socialise with other children and communicate their feelings and needs, asking others for help when they need to.
- Language and communication skills that allow them to communicate with others, listen to and understand others and follow instructions.
- Physical independence which means they can go to the toilet by themselves, use tools like pencils or paint brushes, dress themselves and feed themselves.

To help them learn and develop at school, we want our children to be "school ready" by the time they leave their Reception Year and go in to Year 1. However, the journey to school readiness really starts long before this point, when our children are babies and continues all the way through to the age of 5. There is lots of preparation that must happen from birth to mean that a child is ready to begin school.

Our roles

As we know, parental support and a child's home learning environment are both crucial in preparing a child to be school ready. Professionals also have a key part to play in supporting both parent and child on this journey. Midwives, health visitors, community groups, EYFS practitioners, nurseries and schools all hold important roles in guiding and supporting both parents and children with school readiness. Having a shared idea and vision of school readiness is important and will ensure that we, as professionals, are providing positive touchpoints for families at each stage that work to the same goal.



Working with families

Working together with families is key. Our goal is to construct a space where all parents and families feel comfortable and supported. We can work sensitively to break down barriers that may be there and provide information – and make it clear that parents are central to the whole process and we are there to support them. The book *'Little Chick Starts School'* may be helpful to open up discussions with families around school readiness and their role in supporting their baby or toddler's development.

In these discussions, we can share our knowledge and provide information to parents on what a developmentally friendly home learning environment looks like, which would include: singing songs and nursery rhymes; playing with water, sand, mud, leaves, ice and other interesting natural objects; making marks, using chalk, crayons, paint and brushes; using playdough, scissors and Lego; attending a nursery, preschool or childminding setting; reading to them every day; visiting the library; and joining in pretend play with their child.

When should we expect children to be school ready?

We want children to have finished their school readiness journey by the time they leave reception and enter Year 1. The year children start Reception is seen by many parents as the landmark for their child officially starting school. However, it is important to acknowledge that children do not need to be completely ready by this point. Reception is the last stage in the school readiness journey. It's the year that children must practice school life, finessing and learning how to apply all the communication, social, emotional and physical skills they've developed to help them thrive at school. Having this important practice time will equip them for life in Year 1.

What needs to happen when?

The most important message practitioners can convey to families is that their child's school readiness journey starts from birth. The many developmental milestones that children achieve in their first five years support this journey. Our children need to be nurtured and guided along this pathway. It is helpful to refer to the Characteristics of Effective Learning to assist with this process. From birth to five, children learn to relate to people and things through the Characteristics of Effective Learning, which are:

- Playing and exploring (finding out and exploring; playing with what they know; being willing to 'have a go')
- Active learning (being involved and concentrating; Continuous attempts to 'have a go'; enjoying achieving what they set out to do)
- Creating and thinking critically (having their own ideas; making links; choosing ways to do things)

Children need opportunities to develop in these areas in settings and through the home learning environment prior reaching their Reception Year to have the foundations of being school ready firmly in place. They can then complete their year of practice, building on top of these foundations to help them to be ready for life in Year 1.



Emotional and social independence

To be school ready we want children;

- To come from families that adopt healthy ways of validating children's emotions, regularly discuss feelings and what they mean through stories, song and experiences.
- To have had a broad range of social experiences before school, through playgroups, song and story sessions, libraries and experiences with friends and family members.
- To have the confidence to leave their primary caregiver easily for the school day.
- To be able to express and label theirs and others emotions and feelings and to begin to think about how they could find a solution.
- To have the confidence to ask the teacher for help when they need it and get resources and equipment that they need.
- To be able to play with and alongside other children, sit next to other children, say hello and goodbye to other children and be kind to others when they feel sad.
- To be independent in showing preferences in play and food and confident enough to have a go at new activities, even if they have not done these before.



To help children and families, take opportunities through your environment and whilst working with families and children to promote an emotionally healthy approach, supporting children to understand their own and others feelings by:

- Labelling their emotions as they feel them, as well as scaffolding their understanding through story, song and circle time discussion.
- Modelling to families' healthy ways of labelling and validating children's emotions, supporting them to find a solution. Encourage families to discuss feelings and what they mean regularly through stories, song and experiences.
- Encouraging families to expand their child's social experiences through playgroups, library classes and friends and family members.
- Looking at feeling faces to recognise emotions, singing songs and reading stories about feelings.
- Supporting children to form friendships, modelling how to use kind hands and feet, recognise others feelings and taking turns and sharing toys.
- Encouraging children's independence through supporting them to make decisions e.g., "Would you like apple or pear?" or "Are you going to choose to play in the water or the sand?"

Language and communication skills

To be school ready, we want children;

- To have the language to be able to communicate (verbally and/or non-verbally) with others, participate in learning and play and ask for help when they need it.
- To be able to listen and to follow simple instructions.
- To understand and use a wide range of vocabulary.

To give children the best possible chance of developing language and communication skills that allow them to communicate with others, listen to and understand others and follow instructions, you need to become a communication advocate in your practice.

Take opportunities through your environment and whilst working with families and children to encourage communication skills by;

- Introducing new vocabulary through singing songs, reading books, labelling and repetition.
- Supporting listening skills through listening games e.g. by playing with musical instruments, singing songs and listening for sounds outside.
- Making eye contact and getting down to a child's level.
- Modelling how to help children to ask for help, using a sentence like "Please help me", or modelling non-verbal methods alongside your words, such as signing "help" or showing the Makaton symbol for help.
- Using simple language, minimising questions and labelling objects instead (a commenting approach).
- Using visual timelines, real objects, puppets and sensory play to scaffold language development.
- Not allowing technology to replace language and discussion opportunities.
- Following children's interests to provide communication opportunities.
- A communication friendly environment, using books, new vocabulary opportunities and scaffolding children's language within the learning environment.
- Families with children who speak English as an Additional Language or who do not speak English should be advised of the importance of using their mother tongue at home and reassured that most children are likely to begin to understand and use English within the setting when they begin school. Use National Literacy Trust's helpful bi-lingual tips and FAQs to help support parents.
- Familiarising yourself with the difference between English as an Additional Language vs a Speech, Language and Communication Need, when working with bi-lingual or multi-lingual children developing English.



Physical development

To be school ready we want children to;

- Go to the toilet by themselves and be able to flush the toilet and wash their hands.
- Use tools within the classroom like pencils, scissors or paint brushes.
- Dress themselves.
- Feed themselves in a culturally appropriate way.



To give children the best possible chance of developing the physical skills they need to start school, take opportunities through your environment and whilst working with families and children to encourage;

- Practicing buttons and zips, getting dressed and undressed and putting shoes on.
- Advising parents to think about clothes and shoes that will be easier to get on and off and allowing extra time in the mornings or when going out.
- Talking about good toilet habits, sign posting parents to toilet training support if needed.
- Providing lots of opportunities to use different tools, such as chalk, brushes, sponges, paints, pencils, mud, sand, pegs and tweezers to promote fine motor skills, either by advising families of activities they may want to try or through the environment in your setting.
- Modelling good eating habits and exploring new foods together at snack and lunch times.
- Talking about healthy foods, fruits and vegetables.



Additional information and resources for practitioners

Communication and language resources:

Organisation	Resource	Organisation	Resource
National Literacy Trust	Learning to talk around the world Two year olds: Communication, Language and Literacy	ICAN	Resources for supporting children's speech, language and communication development in the early years
Bookstart	Bookstart for early years settings	NCT Research	NCT Research overview: Parent-child communication is important from birth
The Communication Trust	Universally Speaking. The ages and stages of communication development from birth to 5 Online course: introducing supporting children's speech, language and communication Misunderstood: advice and guidance for supporting children with speech, language and communication needs	Nottinghamshire	Language for life: Nottinghamshire: What do we mean by speech, language and communication Resources for practitioners
Oxfordshire County Council	My Space: Creating enabling environments for young children	National Literacy Trust	Using digital technology in the early years: enabling environments video

PACEY	Spotlight on creating enabling environments	ICAN	Resource shop: Babbling babies Toddler Talk Chatting with children Learning to Talk, Talking to Learn Working with Under 5's toolkit
OFSTED	Study of early education and development: good practice in the early years January 2017		
Community Playthings	A good place to be Two: Developing quality environments indoors and out. Spaces: Room layout for 0 – 5's.	ITERS & ECERS	ITERS & ECERS Infant and Toddler and Early Childhood environment rating scales

Physical development resources

National Literacy Trust	Smudge lines and scribbles: the early markings of a good writer	Foundation Years	What to expect, when? Guidance to your child's learning and development in the early years foundation stage. Mark Making Matters: Young children making meaning in all areas of learning and development
Eric	Additional support with toilet training can be found at Eric at https://www.eric.org.uk/		
Cbeebies	Learning to write – Cbeebies	Early Education	Making their mark – Children's early writing

Additional information and resources for practitioners

Social and emotional development books

Book	Description
<i>What is a child</i> by Beatrice Alemagna	
<i>Starting school</i> by Janet and Alan Alberg	
<i>Ruby's Worry</i> by Tom Percival	Ruby loves being Ruby. Until, one day, she finds a worry. This story helps children understand how to talk about their worries.
<i>The Invisible String</i> by Patrice Karst and Joanne Lew	The book offers a very simple approach to overcoming loneliness, separation, or loss with an imaginative twist that children easily understand and embrace, and delivers a particularly compelling message in today's uncertain times.
<i>Ravi's Roar</i> by Tom Percival	A clever and engaging book about temper tantrums, dealing with emotions and learning to express and understand your feelings.
<i>I Feel Angry</i> by Brian Moses	A book to help children cope with anger. It also provides notes for practitioners and parents to extend the learning and vocabulary around the feeling of anger. The author has also written books on feeling sad, jealous, and frightened.
<i>Have You Filled a Bucket Today?</i> By Carol McCloud	This book encourages positive behaviour as children see how rewarding it is to express daily kindness, appreciation, and love. Bucket filling and dipping are effective metaphors for understanding the effects of our actions and words on the well-being of others and ourselves.
<i>When I feel Angry</i> by Cornelia Maude Spelma	A good book for a child as young as a toddler to help them understand what anger feels like and how to choose an appropriate way to handle anger.

Foundation Years Guidance – Supporting children learning EAL

This document is designed to support practitioners to ensure that their provision matches the development and learning needs of all their children, including those who are learning English as an Additional Language. This advice and guidance booklet is drawn from existing good practice developed by practitioners working with babies, young children and their families.

[Supporting children learning English as an additional language – Guidance for practitioners in the Early Years Foundation stage.](#)