

Transition to school

The main focus of this article is the transition to big school and how you, as a parent, can help to make this transition as easy as possible for your child.

Bear in mind that your child does not have to start school until the term after the one in which they are five. Some parents decide to defer the start date for one or two terms, as they feel that their child will benefit from more time in the nursery setting. You can also now request a school outside your catchment area, selecting one in Brighton and Hove, or in East or West Sussex if there are spaces available.

Your child will be excited about going to big school, but may also be somewhat apprehensive as the time approaches to leave the Nursery setting, where they feel very settled and secure. The Nursery setting will be preparing your child for the next exciting step, but there is a lot that you can do to help too.

A local teacher explained that the main requirements for entering school from her point of view were that a child should be able to:-

- use the toilet completely independently
- blow their nose and do so as and when necessary, using tissues in their pocket
- recognise their name
- hang their coat on their peg
- change their shoes
- undress and dress themselves for PE lessons leaving their clothes tidily

In essence, this teacher believes that in the early days at school, social skills and independence skills are the most important. With a large class and often just one teaching assistant, good independence skills help enormously. The support of parents to achieve these skills prior to starting school is crucial. How can you help your child?

Rather than doing things for your child, allow them time to do them independently. Children love to be able to put on their own shoes, do them up, put on their coat and do up the zip. It gives them a real sense of achievement and boosts their self-esteem. I recognise that this takes more time in the early stages, but it is well worth persevering. Buy shoes and coats which are easy for children to manage themselves. Put big hooks on their coats so that they can easily hang their coats on their peg and label everything that could possibly get lost, so that the children easily learn to recognise their own name. Rub soap or candle wax along a closed zip to make it easier to open and close. Give your child lots of praise and celebrate each small step to independence. Success breeds success. As your child succeeds in doing something new, they will be spurred on to do something else, growing in independence.

In my nursery school, we encourage parents to support us not only with independence skills, but also in teaching children the basics. We learn to count, we learn to sing the alphabet, we start to learn phonics and recognize the names of the letters. The children recognize and start to write their name in a variety of situations. We have fun with emergent writing in the sandpit, in water play, in the mud, with sticks, paint, crayon and pencils. We have fun cooking, looking at numbers, weighing, mixing and getting the mixture ready for baking. We learn the days of the week and we start to tell the time. We encourage good listening skills and concentration skills. We sing nursery rhymes and action songs and these become familiar friends. We read lots of stories and they too become very familiar to the children. We also encourage the children to play lots of sport and to explore and discover the natural world. These are all skills and situations that the children will find in their new school and which can be mirrored at home. With your help in supporting the learning and preparation that is going on in the nursery, your child will be well prepared for the next step.

Try to take your child to the 'Storytime' sessions that the school organises for new children. However, September is still a long way away in the mind of a child: there are lots of sleeps between now and then. Spend as much time as you can with your child between now and when they start school. They might mention things that are troubling them about starting school and you will be able to reassure them.

When the great day comes, try to relax and be positive. Let your child know who will be taking them home after school. When you meet up again at the end of the day, ask them excitedly about their day, but don't be too surprised if they say, "Nothing!"

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