

Preparing Your Child for Primary School Helpful Guidance

When your child reaches an age between two and a half and three years the question arises of which school you wish him/her to attend.

In many areas there are very few schools so the obvious choice will be the school nearest home. However in some areas, there are several schools in the locality and then a choice has to be made.

It is usually wise to find out from the local education authorities when a child's name must be put down on a list for school. This can vary from area to area.

They will also be able to suggest a short list of schools. Once you have a few schools to consider, make an appointment to talk to the Headteachers and visit the various schools. It probably isn't appropriate to take your child to visit at this point.

On the visit, keep your eyes open and ask questions while you are there. This will enable you to make an informed choice on what you have seen of the school and the adults and children who make up the school community.

Points to consider

Schools at a distance from home:

Can you get your child to school in all weathers and on time?

If you are relying on a car to transport your child what happens:

- If the weather is really bad?
- If you are ill, yourself?
- If brothers or sisters are ill?
- The car breaks down.

Small children frequently become ill when they first start school. This often means their being absent, in addition to missing school for other reasons.

Do you really want to have to take your child to school every day until they leave Primary School at eleven years?

Your child will want to play with their school friends when they are not in school. This is very difficult if your child is attending a school miles from home.

Looking at schools

You will have two main requirements from the school you choose:

1. that your child will be happy there
2. that the school will provide your child with an education, broad in its scope and suitable for your child's needs and interests so that he/she will acquire the knowledge, skills, understanding and enthusiasm to make progress to the very limits of their ability.

Both the above are necessary if the child is to have a successful experience during the Primary Years. It is possible for more emphasis to be placed on one to the exclusion of the other. A balance is very necessary in these most important early stages.

When you visit a school

- Are you made welcome when you visit with or without your child?
- Are the staff and children friendly?
- When can you visit? At least one visit should be possible for you alone and another for you with your child before he/she start school.
- Are all the children busily occupied when you visit?
- Are they really interested in what they are doing so that they carry on without the teacher's constant attention.
- Is there a wide curriculum? Is there Music, Art, P.E, Environmental Studies, Science Religious Education as well as Basic Skills teaching in Mathematics and English?
- Are all the rooms and shared areas bright and attractive? Is there work done by various ability groups of children displayed. Remember that children learn and mature at different rates. Obviously it should not be only the work of the brightest/more mature children on show!
- What equipment is available for the children to use? The best school is not necessarily the one with the newest building or the most exotic equipment.
- How does everyone talk to each other? Headteacher to parents and staff, Teachers to parents, Teacher to children, Children to teacher, Children to each other.

- What is the behaviour like:
 - i) in the classroom?
 - ii) around the school?
 - iii) in the playground?
- What is the policy on discipline?
- Check on uniform requirements, if any, and where you can buy uniform items.

When you have made your choice of school:

Check that the school will be prepared to take your child and when.

Check if you are in the catchment area.

Check that the school will take younger brothers and sisters when the time comes.

Check on any religious requirements if it is a church school.

Preparing your child for school

Your child may be one of a class of up to 30 children. It will make starting school much easier and happier, if they are independent and can do many things for themselves.

Can he/she:

- Dress and undress themselves for school and particularly P.E.
- Take him/herself to the toilet and ask to go there in a recognisable way.
- Recognise his/her own clothes. Do mark every thing likely to be taken off, with his/her name. (This includes socks and shoes)
- Recognise his or her own name. Tell the teacher if the name is abbreviated in any way. This is particularly important, if the name is an unusual one.
- Feed himself/herself if staying for school or packed lunch.
- Share toys and equipment.

- Listen well and follow instructions "I don't want to do that!" is not acceptable in school. Get them used to doing what you want, even if they don't always want to do it.

Before they start school

What you can do:

Make them as independent as possible even if it takes far longer to get ready.

Get them used to leaving you or being left with another adult (perhaps practice with friends).

Talk to them all the time, naming familiar things and discussing what they see around them.

Give them as many varied experiences as possible:

drawing	painting
cooking	making models
singing	playing games.

This is very important for children not at playgroup or nursery.

Get them used to using:

pencils	felt pens
crayons	chalks
paints	plasticine.

Read to them and share books with them.

Count every thing and share things out.

Use lots of one to one correspondence:

Cup, plate, knife, spoon, for each person.

Clothes put out for tomorrow.

Straw for each drink etc.

Clearing up after themselves:

Even if it takes twice as long, train the child to pack up after him/herself (toys, clothes, after meals etc.).

Take them shopping:

Tell them what everything is called.

Let them pay for what you buy so they recognise coins etc.

Watch workpeople and discuss what they are doing.

Most important of all, get them used to a routine of reasonably early to bed and up early enough for you and your child to have a stress-free time to get ready for school.

Never threaten them with school Do not say: "Wait till you go to school they will do..... to you if you do that"

Be positive about school. Show it to them as an enjoyable experience.

If possible visit the school at playtime, assembly-time and lunch-time before they start, as these can be the times which children find difficult.

Once they start school

Always arrive at school on time. A sensitive child will be embarrassed to have to walk in late. He/she will also be very worried if you are late coming to collect them. Always telephone the school if you are unavoidably delayed.

Don't allow your child to take sweets or toys to school. It puts pressure on less well-off parents, who can't compete. This also applies to jewellery which can cause an accident to the child and may become lost or broken.

Shoes should be low heeled, well-fitting and securely fastened with Velcro fasteners which are easier for them to do up than buckles or laces.

You will probably become very tired of "My teacher says....."
Do not believe implicitly, what your child tells you is happening at school. Remember they may also tell the teacher hairy tales about what is happening at home.

Be willing to listen when your child wants to talk about what they have done at school, but don't question them too much as they will usually talk when they are ready.

Remember - your child will tell you stories about other children or the teacher, which are edited to show them in a good light. A useful question to ask is "What did you do?" They are not always the innocent bystander they would have you believe. By all means go in and ask if you are concerned. You may not know the whole story.

Never criticise the school or the teacher in front of your child. They often delight in repeating your remarks in school which does not endear either you or your child to the

adult concerned.

Do not go in to chat to the teacher when he/she is trying to settle the children down at the beginning of the school day. It may be your child who gets hurt while the teacher is talking to you or another parent. Visit at the end of the day if you need to discuss anything.

A word of advice

Beware of the parent who tells you worrying stories about things they say are going on at the school. It may well be that they are 'loading guns for you to fire' when you do not know the full facts. It is easy to fall into the trap of being the one who constantly complains while others step back and let you get into trouble with the school authorities.

On the first day at school

Arrive on time.

Leave cheerfully.

Don't linger about looking in windows.

Don't go to the fence at break times as it could upset your child and make them feel insecure.

Finally, enjoy your child's time at school. It is a very valuable period in their life and will soon pass all too quickly. It will also help you to make friends with other parents.