

Parents guide to School Readiness

School readiness, what is all the fuss about?

There seems to be an endless stream of boxes that need ticking when it comes to our children, their care and our parenting. Another one of these is school readiness. We all want our children to be ready to enter school, equipped with all the essential skills required to self-care, think like a responsible little person and behave like an angel. The reality is very different.

While the government is clearly focused on school readiness for children from deprived or vulnerable backgrounds as evidenced in the Allen Report which encouraged promotion of early intervention schemes to ensure that all children are ready to start school by age 5. It is important to note on that basis, that all children are at risk of not being 'school ready' by age five, for one reason or another and through no fault of the child or parent.

This may be age related, one child may have only just turned four whereas his classmate is about to turn five. There is a wide gap in abilities in that fact alone. Your child will be ready in their own time, all children develop at their own pace and as long as parents and carer's are supporting them in their work towards responsible self-care and self-regulation, that is the best that can be done. The rest will come in time. Here are some issues to consider around school readiness and your child.

It would be fair to say that there is huge professional debate surrounding the term 'school readiness' as this is based very much on the performance indicators and outcomes logged by organisations such as children's centres or similar providers of early intervention programmes.

So what does 'school readiness' mean? Again, there is much debate surrounding this term but to parents, the direct translation is something along the lines of 'is my child ready to start school'. Again, depending on

the pedagogical approach used in early childhood education curriculums such as those used in nursery or pre-school settings will have an impact on how 'ready' a child is by a particular age. Below is an outline of what could be deemed logical 'school readiness' in real terms.

School readiness:

- ✓ Between the ages of four and five, children should be prepared to be separated from their parent or main carer.
- ✓ Children should be able to clearly demonstrate their ability to listen and follow age appropriate instructions
- ✓ Children should show an interest in a variety of subjects, paying attention to the subject or activity they are taking part in
- ✓ Children should have enough of a range of vocabulary and language to express their needs, feelings, thoughts or ideas
- ✓ Children should be able to identify themselves by name, age, state factors in their life, name family members etc...
- ✓ To be able to interact in an age appropriate way with another child or adult
- ✓ Children should be able to interact, share and play, taking responsibility for their actions, understanding repercussions for their actions
- ✓ Focus on and also show interest in the work they are undertaking
- ✓ To be able to observe, notice, discuss and ask questions about their environment and experiences
- ✓ To be able to engage with books, have some understanding of words and language
- ✓ Respond to boundary setting

✓ Vocalise their needs such as toileting, thirst, hunger illness etc...

As a parent, you would hope that your child has all of these abilities. In reality, for many children the above list is a work in progress. There are obvious issues such the need for being toilet ready and no longer needing naps during the day and there is support available to address all of these issues in time for school. On the other hand, schools will also work with parents, enabling a coordinated response to needs as they arise, supporting children and their families as they work on issues that can hamper school readiness.

Parents who feel they have a child who is behind or struggling to meet some of the 'school readiness' markers should contact their health visitor, GP or children's centre. All of whom are well placed to provide the early intervention required to support parents and children through the transition from toddlerhood, pre-school years and on into later childhood.

Looking further ahead:

It is important to consider each child as an individual. Their social, emotional and behavioural needs also need to be considered. Some children may have developmental delays in these areas and again, this can be supported through early intervention programmes and packages of support to address the issues.

You can also consider your child's physical development. Do they have age appropriate fine motor skills and the ability to care for themselves in dressing, toileting and eating and drinking. This then goes further into activities such as ball kicking, riding a trike, scooter or using other interactive toys.

As a parent, you can encourage good communication through modelling language, explaining things, questioning, showing, encouraging and providing interactive play and engagement throughout the day.

For children who attend a nursery, pre-school or childminder setting

where the Early Years Foundation Stage or similar is implemented, there is ample opportunity for children to learn, grow and thrive. These settings also provide the ideal environment for identifying any potential issues that may take longer to resolve or may require professional input in order for a child to become 'school ready'.

It could be argued that it is not only down to the child to be 'school ready' but it is also the responsibility of the parents and school setting to be ready to support the child through their transition from home or other childcare setting, into the school environment which is far more structured than any other form of prior childcare.

There is strong evidence to suggest that children who attend good quality, structured childcare settings where the early years foundations stage is delivered by qualified childcare providers, have an increased chance of settling well into school life, equipped with the social and emotional skills necessary to be 'school ready'. It is also important that the childcare providers work closely with parents and carers to ensure that what is being taught in an early childhood setting is being echoed at home. This level of continuity will ensure that children have a solid foundation on which to build their skills, giving them the best possible chance of being ready for school when the time comes.