



SHOOTING STARS

NURSERIES

Introduction to School Readiness

As children enter our Preschool room, naturally many parents start to consider whether their child is ready for school soon. This 'Introduction to School Readiness' document will provide some further information about our approach to school readiness at Shooting Stars, how we support the children and families with their transition to school and key skills your child should ideally have mastered before starting school. We have also included some useful ways you can help your child to get ready to start school.

Please do not worry about whether your child is 'ticking every box' for school readiness. We don't put pressure on the children to be at a set point when they start school, and every child is different. Your child will make progress with their school readiness skills and build foundations for learning, both at nursery and at home. Helping your child to feel happy and supported when taking their next big step is the most important thing, and so is having fun!

If you have any questions, concerns or worries please do not hesitate to get in touch with your child's key person or the nursery manager.

Our approach to school readiness

Here in Preschool at Shooting Stars, we focus on supporting the children in all of the skills they need to be independent and ready to learn when they join Reception. We aim to support our Preschool children to be ready to join the classroom and willing to participate in all aspects of school life both inside and outside of the classroom.

Director of Children's Services Catherine Driscoll says, "Starting school is a huge milestone for families. Making sure children are ready to join class means they can get the most out of the experience. Some reception age children have difficulties starting school because of not being toilet trained, being unable to sit still and not being able to be separated from their parents".

When children start school without the ability to go to the toilet, wash their hands, use cutlery/open a lunchbox/feed themselves or undress and dress themselves without help, this places more pressure on teachers and slows learning down in the first few key weeks of Reception. Feedback from teachers, our learning from training courses and experience has taught us that ensuring children are able to manage their own self-care, are independent, able to listen and pay attention and have a desire to learn are some of the most important factors in ensuring a smooth school transition.

Children who have been well prepared for school in this way are highly likely to transition smoothly into Reception where they 'hit the ground running'. The children then quickly pick up phonics and other formal methods because they are ready to learn with a positive and eager attitude, giving them a fantastic start to their school career.

Do we teach Phonics in Preschool?

In Preschool, we introduce Letters and Sounds (Phase 1) to develop the children's speaking and listening skills in order to lay strong foundations for Phonics work (Phase 2) in Reception when they get to school. We focus more on laying good Letters and Sounds foundations than on a child being able to write their name or formally knowing their Phonics. Feedback from teachers, our learning from training courses and experience has guided this focus on development of pre-writing skills and introduction of letters and sounds in Preschool. For further information, please see the section about the Letters and Sounds (Phase 1), later on in this document.

How do we prepare for your child's transition to School?

Once you know which school your child will be attending please let us know. This will enable us to make contact with your child's school and start preparing for their transition. We can then also determine which children from Preschool will be going to the same school and facilitate friendships and connections between these children.

- We share relevant information with your child's school regarding their progress and development so that your child's teacher will know how they're getting on.
- We invite Reception teachers to visit the children at nursery, or arrange virtual contact so the children can meet their teacher.
- We request information and photos about the school so that the children can familiarise themselves.
- We encourage the children to talk about school with each other and with us, discussing any worries and supporting them to feel positive and excited about taking the next step to 'Big School'.
- We share regular updates and observations on eyLog with parents/carers regarding their child's progress and development, and how they are getting on with school readiness.
- Towards the end of the summer term we will host Graduation and Sports Day events to make the children feel really special and celebrate their efforts and achievements throughout their time at nursery.

How do we help the children to get ready for school in Preschool?

- We increasingly utilise daily routines such as taking the register, snack time, story time, use of a coat peg and bag etc to prepare the children for the routines of the school day.
- We provide daily opportunities to enjoy a wide variety of mark making resources and activities.
- We gather the children to participate in small and large group activities, story and song time to promote their listening skills, participation and attention.
- We encourage the children to dress and undress themselves. This includes encouraging the children to practice how to put clothes and shoes on the correct way around independently, doing up the zip on their coat and the Velcro on their shoes by themselves and helping them to feel confident doing this with plenty of practice. In the summer term especially, we may ask parents to provide a basic 'PE kit' (top, shorts, socks and trainers) so that the children can experience getting changed into and out of PE kit independently too.
- We encourage and support the children to use cutlery properly and ensure they have practice in opening food packaging and a lunch box independently.
- We encourage self-service during mealtimes to promote choice and independence.
- We take part in lots of malleable activities such as playdough and gloop, which helps to strengthen the muscles in the children's hands and fingers in preparation for pencil control. (Developing strong foundations in pre-writing skills are far more important than knowing how to write their name or the alphabet).
- We enjoy lots of outdoor play, challenge, variety and exploration, giving the children opportunities to take interest in and learn about the natural world, to build their physical skills and experience the benefits of being active.
- We set up the role play area to offer the children the opportunity to explore the classroom scenario.
- We encourage the children to be inquisitive and curious by asking lots of questions, helping them to become creative and reflective thinkers and promoting the desire to learn.
- We set appropriate boundaries for behaviour and encourage turn taking, sharing, kindness and respect for others. We always give lots of praise and positive reinforcement of these qualities and behaviours.
- The very fact that they attend nursery means that Preschool children are comfortable separating from their parents or main carers to spend a period of time happily in another environment with other children and in the care of other adults.

Our top tips for Preschool parents/carers

1. Talk to your child positively about school! Tell them that you are looking forward to it too and that they will make lots of new friends, learn so much and have lots of fun there.
2. Make time for lots of story and song times. Encourage your child to tell a story using pictures or puppets to aid them. Ask questions when sharing a story together and encourage them to handle the book and turn the pages. There are books available to borrow from Preschool that are very similar to the books the children will have at school. Please let us know if you would like to borrow one to help your child become more familiar with the format.
3. Family board games, card games and ball games are a great way of encouraging turn taking and co-operative play.

4. Involving your child in preparing meals, cooking and baking will help them to develop their cutting skills and use of one-handed tools, and following a recipe and measuring ingredients support early literacy and mathematical skills.
5. Making playdough or gloop (cornflour mixed with water) at home are fun activities you could try to help support the development of your child's fine motor skills and strengthen the muscles in their hands and fingers in preparation for writing.
6. Encourage your child to go to the toilet by themselves and support them with maintaining good hygiene independently.
7. Make sure your child is getting plenty of sleep and eating a well-balanced breakfast to set them up for the day.
8. Practise getting up and dressed to leave the house at a set time so your child can get used to the school morning routine.

Phase 1 – Introduction to Letters and Sounds

Phase 1 of Letters and Sounds concentrates on developing children's speaking and listening skills and lays the foundations for the phonic work which starts in Phase 2. The emphasis during Phase 1 is to get children attuned to the sounds around them and ready to begin developing oral blending and segmenting skills.

Phase 1 is divided into seven aspects. Each aspect contains 3 strands:

1. Tuning into sounds (auditory discrimination)
2. Listening and remembering sounds (auditory memory and sequencing)
3. Talking about sounds (developing vocabulary and language comprehension).

It is intended that each of the first 6 aspects should be dipped into, rather than going through them in any order, with a balance of activities. Aspect 7 will usually come later, when children have had plenty of opportunity to develop their sounds discrimination skills.

Activities within the 7 aspects are designed to help children:

1. listen attentively;
2. enlarge their vocabulary;
3. speak confidently to adults and other children;
4. discriminate phonemes;
5. reproduce audibly the phonemes they hear, in order, all through the word;
6. use sound-talk to segment words into phonemes.

The 7 aspects in Phase 1 are as follows:

Aspect 1: General sound discrimination – environmental sounds

The aim of this aspect is to raise children's awareness of the sounds around them and to develop their listening skills. Activities suggested in the guidance include going on a listening walk, drumming on difference items outside and comparing sounds, playing a sounds lotto game and making shakers.

Aspect 2: General sound discrimination – instrumental sounds

This aspect aims to develop children’s awareness of sounds made by various instruments and noise makers. Activities include comparing and matching sound makers, playing instruments alongside a story and making loud and quiet sounds.

Aspect 3: General sound discrimination – body percussion

The aim of this aspect is to develop children awareness of sounds and rhythms. Activities include singing songs and action rhymes, listening to music and developing a sounds vocabulary.

Aspect 4: Rhythm and rhyme

This aspect aims to develop children’s appreciation and experiences of rhythm and rhyme in speech. Activities include rhyming stories, rhyming bingo, clapping out the syllables in words and odd one out.

Aspect 5: Alliteration

The focus is on initial sounds of words, with activities including I-Spy type games and matching objects which begin with the same sound.

Aspect 6: Voice sounds (Reception class at school)

The aim is to distinguish between different vocal sounds and to begin oral blending and segmenting.

Aspect 7: Oral blending and segmenting

In this aspect, the main aim is to develop oral blending and segmenting skills.

While there is considerable overlap between these aspects, the overarching aim is for children to experience regular, planned opportunities to listen carefully and talk extensively about what they hear, see and do. The boundaries between each strand are flexible and not fixed: practitioners plan to integrate the activities according to the developing abilities and interests of the children they are working with.

Final note

If you have any questions about our approach to Letters and Sounds, or any other aspect of school readiness, please do not hesitate to get in touch with your child’s key person or the nursery manager. Please remember that every child is different and not to worry about whether your child is ‘ticking every box’ for school readiness. The most important thing is that they feel happy, supported and eager to learn when they take their next big step on their journey through childhood. We would like to wish you all the very best of luck and don’t forget to send us a photo on their first day in their school uniform!