



Getting ready for a successful start at school

As you look forward with a mixture of excitement and nerves to your child starting school in September, here are some practical tips to help ensure that your child has a happy and successful start.

Forming links

Most schools now offer settling in days or part days for their youngest pupils. These can be very helpful and a good chance for you to put names to faces. As well as the all-important class teacher, I recommend getting to know the teaching assistant, Head, school secretary, and parents who are a part of the PTA. All of these will be key in helping both you and your child settle into new routines. It can also be handy to work out which other parents live near to you and who might be moving from the same nursery or preschool. Also involve anyone else who might be involved in your weekly routines - grandparents or child-minders so that they too have made some connections ahead of the start of term. I know of one friend who held a name labelling party in order to meet some other friendly looking parents - this is certainly one way to get to know each other and get the dreaded name labels sewn into as many items as you possibly can. Name everything!



Understanding expectations and routines

It seems obvious but make sure you have all of the essential information early on. Some schools have phased starts which begin with mornings only or alternate full days. This is certainly important to plan ahead particularly if your child starting school coincides with you returning to full-time work. Arrangements for drop off and pick up and what to look out for in terms of communication from the school whether that be weekly memos or newsletter or via the school's website are also key. Getting dates into your diary for parents' evenings, nativity plays and other things you won't want to miss is also important.

Encouraging independence and self-help skills over the summer holidays is far more important than trying to teach your child letters and numbers. Can they dress themselves? If not, start to practise that as soon as possible.

Family logistics

Whether this is your first child to start school or a younger sibling, there will be an impact on all of your family. Consider the school run and daily family routines carefully in order to ensure that things run as smoothly as possible.

Similarly play dates and sleep overs can be very tempting but less is most definitely more in term one.

Extra-curricular activities and playdates

Even for those who have been used to a full day at nursery and a number of extra-curricular activities each week beware of signing up to any additional activities in

your child's first term. They will be learning in a whole new way at school and need time to rest each day when they get home, as will you! Similarly play dates and sleep overs can be very tempting but less is most definitely more in term one.

Younger pupils

Parents with younger aged children, those with summer

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birthdays in particular, can be anxious about their child being school ready. Trust the school to make the necessary adjustments and remember that age and stage of development can be different for each child.

The first day of term

Stay calm, allow additional time for the school run and cherish the moment - enjoy the photo on the front doorstep marking the occasion and don't linger too long over the goodbyes. There is a very small window in which to see your child settled and interested in their new surroundings. If you linger and need further reassurance it is likely your child will pick up on that in a split second of doubt and have a wobble. So make a dash for the door as soon as you are able. Many children will have already been used to nursery school and playgroups so remember that you have left them before and all was well. You will have chosen a school you have confidence in and the staff will be able to reassure your child and make sure that the first day is a positive one. If you are the one whose child clings or cries, do not be embarrassed. They will settle once you have gone and the school will contact you to let you know that is the case. Have a plan for what you are then going to do next whether it be return to work or head for a strong coffee with a friend. The day will be one full of excitement for your child.

As your child settles

Remember that day one might feel like Christmas day, full of

excitement but that as the weeks go on your child will become tired. The calmer and more prepared you feel as a parent, the more likely your child will also feel ready and willing to skip into school.

Hence, I recommend:

- Talking positively about going to school.
- Helping your child into the routine of managing their own clothing, school book bag and so on.
- Make sure your child gets a good night's sleep.
- Getting into good habits of arriving in good time for the start of school.
- Listening to your child tell you about the school day but avoiding 20 questions.
- Trusting the school and their experience - they will allow your child space to grow and develop and it is important that you support them in that.
- Talking to your child's teacher if you feel uncertain or unsure - communication with the school is vital and building relationships with school staff (admin, teachers and teaching assistants) is really important.

Good luck! 

St Catherine's Prep School, Bramley extends a warm welcome to parents who would like to visit the school.

Open Mornings: Wednesday 25th September and Thursday 17th October.

Please contact Sally Manhire, Prep School Registrar, on 01483 899665. www.stcatherines.info

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