

*Friendships made can be at the heart of your child's experience at school*



## NEW BEGINNINGS

*NAOMI BARTHOLOMEW, head of St Catherine's Prep School, explains how to ensure your child has the best possible start at pre-prep*

**A**s children settle into pre-prep, it's helpful to keep things as simple as possible, to ensure they're confident in their new environment. My advice is to use the '3Rs' to help create a successful first term.

The first of these 'Rs' stands for 'rules'. Children adapt to a number of rules in their new classrooms, which are there to guide them through a busy day with a class of fellow pupils they've often only just met. It's important children are independent in terms of getting dressed, knowing where to place their own things, and what's expected of them when they first arrive. They may well be learning to share with more children than they're used to at home or in smaller nursery classes.

Each classroom will have its own rules, and it's helpful for parents to understand the basics. Are personal items, like small toys, allowed, or should they stay at home? Are parents encouraged into the classroom in the mornings or afternoon, or does the teacher prefer for you to drop and go? Back

the staff's decisions and aim for consistency behind home and school.

The second 'R' stands for 'routines'. Every school term brings with it a whole set of new routines, and the school run, extra-curricular activities, and additional events like harvest festivals and nativities seem to come at lightning speed in the first year. By half term, a clear routine should be in place, and time should be built in for reading, including any books from school. It's advised that you continue to read to your child as much as you can, as research shows that those children who are read to throughout their primary years are more likely to achieve academically and read for pleasure themselves.

Establishing routines when it comes to kit and equipment, and knowing which day your child needs their PE kit or when special events are happening helps for a smooth start. Beware of WhatsApp groups among parents, as you can find yourself inundated with comments on lost blazers and speculations as to when the next 'dressing up' day is. Instead, rely on information from the school or

calendar apps, and find out whether there's a class rep system or newsletter.

The third 'R' relates to 'relationships'. We need to remember that these can be at the heart of your child's experience at school. There'll be friendships negotiated, numerous names to learn, and a chance to play and learn alongside a whole range of different personalities. Relationships with the class teacher and teaching assistant are key for both your child and you, but don't worry if you're not able to be at the school for the daily drop-off or collection. Instead, try to make time for a handshake and quick chat at some point, and attend parents' evening, where you can meet other staff from the school.

Here at St Catherine's, we use a TAG system, which is particularly useful at breaktimes, when children are playing with new friends. This encourages every child to 'Talk' and 'Ask' for what they need or want, and 'Get' help if they're still unsure or happy. It's a very effective tool, and I recommend it for use at home, as well as those times when there's upset or uncertainty. **1**