



Classlist

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STARTING PRIMARY SCHOOL



A guide for parents

Moving up into primary school is a huge step for your child.

They're leaving nursery and other primary carers behind and starting their formal education. And then there are lessons, new classrooms and new people to get used to. But it needn't be scary.

This guide is designed to help parents make the first few weeks of primary school easier for their children. And hopefully for themselves, too.

Read on for our starting school tips including advice from mums who have been there and done it, a handy checklist, a weekly planner for your fridge door and an interview with a primary school teacher.



IT'S ALL ABOUT...

Settling-in sessions

Primary schools hold sessions for pre-schoolers. Help your child to familiarise themselves with their new school by signing them up for these sessions and arranging other visits as necessary.

They especially need to know where their new classroom is, how to get to the toilets, where they can play at break time and where they'll be having their lunch.

Some schools send teachers on home visits. This is another great way to help your child grow in confidence before the start of term.

Introducing uniform

Suddenly having to wear a uniform is a big change for a little person. From memory, we weren't too keen on it ourselves. Try to make the idea of uniform fun – maybe plan your shopping trip and an activity afterwards to celebrate this new chapter.

Parent tips: Things to buy

“If you need shorts, buy them early. By September, the shops are full of long trousers, but it's often still sunny when term starts.” **Louise**

“Schools often have second hand uniform for sale, which is useful for things like school branded jumpers, which you can't get in a supermarket. You'll need plenty of uniform backup because it always comes home covered in lunch.” **Amy**

“Buy school shoes in the last week of holidays to avoid growth spurt dramas. And steer clear of lace-ups – teachers will thank you for it.” **Verity**

“Buy generic school uniform when it goes on sale in the summer. Supermarkets have offers, but be quick because the smaller sizes go quickly.” **Helen**

Practising skills

Encourage your child to try and put their shoes on independently and get themselves dressed - this will really help at school when they need to get changed for P.E. If they are inclined, practice a bit of drawing, a bit of counting and share books together. Being armed with a few of these skills can make them feel a bit more grown up at big school.

Teacher tips: Teach them to get dressed

“By the time they start school most children can cope with pulling on their skirt or their trousers,” says Emma. “Where they sometimes struggle is turning clothes the right way round. They do need to get changed for PE, so while this isn’t a priority skill, teaching them how to get dressed and deal with inside out uniform will help to build their confidence in school.” **Emma, KS1 Teacher**

Preparatory playdates

Whether it’s a one-off meeting over the summer holidays or regular playdates, making friends first can help children settle into their reception year. Not to mention the support parents can give each other as they watch their little ones take that new step together.

Help your child to practice social skills like sharing and taking turns with the other kids.

Getting organised

It’s not just up to you to run the joint now. Your child is ready to help organise themselves (sort of). Get them into good habits by choosing and laying out uniform and getting the school bag ready. Make it part of the new bedtime routine.

Your mornings will need a new routine too. Try getting everyone dressed and fed before there’s any playtime or cartoons. Keep a checklist on the fridge door so you can’t forget the lunch box, coat, PE kit...



Parent tips: Additions to your routine

“Apply eight-hour sunscreen before you leave the house. Also, keep an eye out for nits by doing a weekly comb through in front of the TV.” **Nadine**

“Be organised. You can’t expect a four or five-year-old to remember their PE kit or reading folder. I have a list on the fridge for each kid for each term.”

Louise

“Schools (unlike nursery) have strict timings for drop off and pick up. Mornings were stressful for us until I started getting the shoes and bags lined up the night before and even laying the breakfast table.” **Verity**

“I prepare everything the night before, sometimes even putting all the bags in the car too. I’ve also used a reward chart for my daughter for getting dressed independently as soon as she wakes up.”

Charlotte

“This is one I use every day: count to five to check the packed lunch is ready. 1. Fruit 2. Drink 3. Sandwich 4. Yoghurt 5. Treat/Snack.” **Louise**



Not projecting

If your memories of school are predominantly negative, now’s not the time to talk about it. Being positive about school and all its benefits is the best way to get your child off to a great start. Showing an interest in what your child is learning also helps them to engage.

The big day

You can do this. More importantly, your child can do this.

Say hello to the other parents at the school gate – you’ll probably end up leaning on each other a lot over the coming years. Why not set up Classlist for your child’s class? Use it as an excuse to talk to the other new parents; and help to connect the parents in your child’s class or year.

Parent tips: First day advice and extra help for settling in

“I know we all want that first day photo, but try to make it a normal day without too much fuss.” **Lisa**

“Don’t bring other relations with you on day one – it’s already hectic without extra people tagging along.” **Rowan**

“If a little one is having problems separating at drop off, ask the teacher to give them a job to do as soon as they arrive. It really helped my son Joseph to be the ‘handy helper’ on arrival. Being given a job by the teacher is distracting and also makes the child feel important. Depending on what the school rules are, it can help some children to bring their special teddy or toy with them and leave it on the teacher’s desk for the day.” **Charlotte**

“If you haven’t already, introduce your child to the prospect of other families with different setups, such as two Mums, two Dads, or two different homes at different times of the week. If your family doesn’t conform to the norm, consider meeting the class or headteacher beforehand – it may reduce awkward moments later on.” **Helen**

Celebrating small wins

Rejoice! You all got through the first day. Plan a treat to celebrate. And maybe have another one at the end of week one. You’ll have an over-tired, potentially grumpy kid on your hands for the first few weeks. Be patient – they’re learning a lot.

Balancing school and job

One in 3 families has both parents in full time work and the average mother is working nearly 30 hours a week (Source: Modern Fatherhood Project). So, if you’re juggling family life, your job and a new school routine, you’re not alone. Make use of the breakfast and after-school clubs. Let your employer know well in advance that you’ve got primary school on the horizon. You may need to swap some stuff around or take time off to drop off and pick up around settling-in sessions.

Tackling the PANTS chat

Lots of parents have found the NSPCC PANTS method helpful when addressing the sensitive issue of private parts and inappropriate behaviour from others. There’s a colourful cartoon and song for the little ones and plenty of guidance for parents, carers and teachers. Click the link below for more.

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/underwear-rule/>



Parent tips: Dealing with tiredness

“Never underestimate how tired your children will be when they come home. Don’t plan anything in the evenings after school at first – just an early supper and an unhurried bedtime routine.”

Heidi

“Don’t bombard them with questions as soon as you pick them up. You can ask away later.” **Louise**

“Bring snacks at pick up time. Sometimes kids need a little energy boost just to get home.” **Phoebe**

Keeping safe on the way to school

Nearly two fifths of parents surveyed by Sus trans in 2013 said that their child had had a near-miss traffic accident on the school run. That’s why it’s so important to introduce road safety as soon as possible. Consider arming your child with reflective strips on darker winter days. Check out the parent resources on the Think road safety website for more advice on how to make the school run safer by clicking the link below.

<https://www.think.gov.uk/education/>

START OF TERM CHECKLIST FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL

Preparation

- ✓ Make sure your child attends any school inductions or settling-in sessions
- ✓ Fill in all the school paperwork well before term starts
- ✓ Get in touch with other parents in the same position (you can remind each other what colour socks you're supposed to buy)
- ✓ Arrange play dates with other new starters over the summer
- ✓ Practise the new school run together to check the timings and get your child used to the route
- ✓ Get the doctor, dentist and hair appointments out of the way
- ✓ Stock the fridge with energy-giving snacks and favourite meals

Equipment

- ✓ Get all the gear – school bag, uniform and PE kit
- ✓ Practise packing the school bag together
- ✓ Stick the radio on and label everything in sight, starting with the most expensive items

STARTING SCHOOL GLOSSARY

Mufti day	A non-school-uniform day, usually in aid of charity
PTA	Parent teacher association (also known as 'Friends of [school name]' or just Parents Association). They organise events to raise money for the school and bring the school community together
Governors	Appointed people who oversee the running of a school, in terms of strategy, performance and budget
Inset day	A teacher training day (there are five of these a year)
SATs	Statutory national assessments taken by pupils
SEN	Special educational needs
Reception class	The entry class at primary school
Key Stage 1	Ages 5 -7 / Years 1-2
Key Stage 2	Ages 7 - 11 / Years 3-6
TA	Teaching Assistant



A TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

How to...Get your child ready for school

Emma Thomas is a KS1 teacher from Abergavenny, in Mid Wales. Here are her top tips on helping your child get the most from school...

BEFORE SCHOOL STARTS

- **Explain key words**

Some words and phrases seem so commonplace to us that we forget they mean nothing to small children: phrases like taking the register, or going to assembly.

'Children often start school with no idea what these things mean,' says Emma. 'Parents can really help to orientate their child by explaining what a register is; what happens in assembly; what a headteacher does and even what school dinners and play time are.' To make it even easier to understand, try having a school role play with your child and his soft toys – sitting on the carpet, taking the register and going to assembly.

- **Read all about it!**

'One of the simplest ways to get kids excited and prepared for school is to read them picture books about what school is like,' says Emma. There are loads out there, including:

Starting School by Janet & Allan Ahlberg (£6.99, Puffin)

Splat the Cat by Rob Scotton (£6.99, Harper Collins)

I am TOO absolutely small for school by Lauren Child (£6.99, Orchard Books)

Topsy and Tim: Start School by Jean Adamson (£4.99, Ladybird)

Usborne First Experiences: Going to School by Anna Civardi (£4.99, Usborne Publishing)

The Wolf Who Wouldn't Go to School by Caryl Hart (£6.99, Orchard Books).

- **Let them choose the lunchbox**

'Children get very excited about their bags and their lunchboxes and their bottles,' says Emma. 'So letting them choose their own is an easy way to get them feeling positive about school.' If you want to stick to a budget we advise giving your child a choice between three appropriate options!

- **Practise 'please'!**

'The social side of school is really important,' says Emma. 'When children understand concepts like saying 'please' and

‘thank you’, sharing, taking turns – that helps them build positive relationships. All children need reminders about this – but it definitely helps when parents model friendly, social behaviour, praise their children for being well-mannered and play games that teach them about turn taking.’

Three books that help kids discuss behaviour

Temper, temper

by Norman Silver (deals with tantrums). £7.99, Worth Publishing.

Little Rabbit Foo Foo

by Michael Rosen (deals with behaviour and consequences). £6.99, Walker Books.

How are you feeling today?

By Molly Potter (teaches children about different emotions) £9.99, Featherstone Education

- **Give the school a heads up**

If there is an issue that your child struggles with and you think it’s something that might affect them at school, it’s always worth having a chat with the teachers before term starts.

‘This doesn’t have to be anything “major”,’ says Emma. ‘It’s useful to know simple things – for example, maybe your child struggles when it’s very noisy or is having trouble pronouncing certain letters (“th” is a common one). If we know, we can put in place things to help them.’

- **Make sure they’re toilet-trained**

‘By the time they start school children need to be able to go to the loo by themselves,’ says Emma. ‘Reception classes usually have one teacher and one teaching assistant (TA) to around 30 children. We simply don’t have the resources to take children to the loo.’

- **Build a love of books**

‘If there’s one thing that will kick start your child’s learning, it’s coming to school with a love of stories,’ says Emma. ‘Loving books encourages children to learn to read and to write. It builds their creativity and encourages skills like empathy and conversation. Nothing beats a daily bedtime story. If it’s possible, try and make sure that children are being read to by both parents – boys in particular are encouraged to value reading when they see their dad doing it, as well as their mum.’

- **Buy paints, chalks and ribbons**

‘Children don’t need to be able to write when they start school,’ says Emma, ‘but it does help if they’re used to the motions we make when we write – moving our arms, wrists, hands and shoulders. So get them outside, swooshing ribbons around or daubing paint on big sheets of A3 – or drawing with chalk on the pavement.’



- **Think lower case letters**

‘It’s brilliant when children are keen to try writing,’ says Emma, ‘but two common problems for Reception teachers are children who can only write using capitals and children who form their letters incorrectly. It’s easier to start teaching these skills from scratch than it is to correct a habit that a child has already got into. If your child is keen to get going with a pencil, please teach them lower case letters first, and please make sure that they’re forming the letters properly (starting in the right place).’

‘But children don’t need to be able to write when they start school,’ says Emma. ‘And some children simply won’t be able to. Being able to hold a pencil requires reaching a particular developmental stage – and so does forming some letters – you can’t force it. All children reach that developmental stage in their own time.’

- **Limit background noise**

Homes tend to be noisy places these days – people talking, tellies on, music playing, devices bleeping. ‘All this noise teaches kids how to tune out,’ says Emma. ‘And that ability to tune out makes it harder for them to learn the useful skill of listening! So, to boost your child’s listening skills it’s good to have direct conversations with them, making eye contact and exchanging ideas. It’s also useful to turn off any sources of noise that they aren’t engaging with, so that background hubbub is limited.’

- **Teach them to count backwards**

‘There are lots of opportunities to count,’ says Emma. ‘Going upstairs, putting cutlery on the table, counting toys. Children don’t need to be able to do it when they get to school – but if they can it gives them confidence (and helps them learn to add up). And if you can teach them to count back-

wards too, you’ll make it easy for them to learn subtraction!’

AT SCHOOL

- **Get to know the school**

The more embedded you feel in the school, the better you’ll feel about how hard the teachers work, how committed all the staff are and just how much is going on to support the children and give them the best possible start. ‘Volunteer to do reading or to join the PTA,’ says Emma. ‘Come on a class trip. Go to a coffee morning to get to know other parents. It is hard when you’re working, but there are ways to get involved – like coming along to the Summer Fair, which is usually held on a weekend – or just suggesting an evening meet with parents in your child’s class.’

- **Reinforce the school pattern**

‘Some children can’t get their heads around the fact that school isn’t a one-off,’ says Emma. ‘They’re excited about the first day – but they’re less excited when they realise they have to go to school every day. It’s helpful just to keep reminding them that they go to school on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday – and stay at home Saturday and Sunday.’

- **Talk to the teacher**

‘If you have any worries at all, come and talk to the teacher,’ says Emma. ‘Children can say things that make you feel anxious – but the teacher can help you get to the bottom of what’s going on. As an example, I had a parent come and see me because her child was worried about boy in an older year. She thought her daughter was being bullied. I promised to keep an eye out and I realised that this child was scared of the older boy – not because he was doing an-

othing to her – but because he was a boisterous lad. So, I called them both over, introduced them and told the older child that the younger one was feeling worried by him and that he needed to look out for her. He promised he would and from then on, he was really gentle near her – and everything was fine. It's always worth talking to the teacher, just to get another perspective.'

- **Ask specific questions**

'Parents want to know what their kids get up to in school, but so much happens for children during the day that a questions like, 'What did you do today?' can feel overwhelming,' says Emma. 'It's best to ask something specific like, 'What did you learn

in maths today?' or, 'What was the funniest thing you did today?' And if you want a coherent answer, don't ask anything until your child has had a rest!'

- **Build resilience**

'Children do come across difficult situations in school,' says Emma. 'Like, falling out with friends, or dealing with children they find tricky. The best thing that you can do when your child is going through this is to help them learn resilience. Remind them, 'If someone doesn't make you feel good, don't play with them. Your friends make you feel good.' And again, always talk to the teacher if you're worried.



THE PRIMARY PLANNER

Get primary school off to a great start with this weekly planner. Complete it together and stick it on your fridge. Tip: draw pictures if you want your child to use the checklist too.

<p>My school is called:</p>	
<p>My class is:</p>	
<p>Before I leave home I: (have breakfast / brush my teeth / put my uniform on / put my shoes on)</p>	
<p>Things I have to take every day (book bag / lunch box / sun hat)</p>	
<p>Things I have to take just some days (e.g. P.E. kit on Monday)</p>	

Need support for starting primary school?

We've got just the thing.

Classlist is an award-winning online platform and mobile app designed to make life easier for parents like you. It's great for helping you talk to each other, share the school run, sell off unwanted bikes – like a problem-solving network that's specific to your child's school. Keep your personal Facebook profile separate and avoid rambling WhatsApp chats – this is a dedicated space for parents connected to your child's school. And it's brilliant.

Feel part of your school community from day one:

- Message other parents
- Make friends (big and small)
- Share the school run
- Organise social events
- Send party invitations
- Sell unwanted stuff
- Rehome lost property
- Set up play dates

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Available on the App Store and Google Play.



A photograph of two young women outdoors, smiling and looking at a smartphone. The woman on the left has brown hair and is wearing a blue and white striped zip-up top. The woman on the right has blonde hair in a bun and is wearing a bright pink tank top. She is holding a clear plastic water bottle. The background is a blurred green field with trees.

Sophie used
Classlist to make
a new bunch of
Mum friends.

Get to know other parents,
take up a hobby,
have some fun.



Classlist