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2016

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**FIRST YEAR  
AT SCHOOL**

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OXFORD

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## Author biography

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## Introduction

Starting primary school is a major milestone for you and your child, both exciting and probably slightly nerve-wracking. As parents, we want our children to make the best possible start to school life, so what can we do to make sure those first few weeks go smoothly?

This handy guide has been written to bring together all of the important information and practical advice you need, supported by the free resources available on Oxford Owl: [www.oxfordowl.co.uk/starting-school](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/starting-school).

As well as help with understanding the school curriculum and sharing activities to support your child's learning, the guide includes advice on preparing for the first day and negotiating your first parents' evening.

We hope the first few weeks of school go well for you and your child – good luck!

### Note:

We realise that there are many different people involved in the care of children, from foster carers to grandparents. We have used the term 'parents' in this guide as a shorthand for all these different carers.

Let's get them flying!



# Preparing for School

There's plenty you can do to help your child get ready for school, so all they'll have to concentrate on is learning something new and enjoying themselves with their new friends.

## Thinking about school

Even the most confident child can get butterflies when presented with an unfamiliar situation, so it can help if your child knows what to expect in their classroom and is thinking about school in a positive way. You could help by:

- ★ **Talking about school** Especially all of the fun things that will happen at school. If you've been on a settling-in morning, then there might be something they particularly enjoyed playing with (the dinosaurs, the paints, the climbing frame). Older siblings or cousins could be enlisted to share all the things they enjoy about school (as long as they're thoroughly briefed not to share any things they're not so keen on!).
- ★ **Remembering the staff** You probably will have met the teacher and some of the staff in your child's class at a home-visit or settling-in session. Reminding your child about their names and how nice they are can be helpful. Practising what to say in key situations (such as 'Please may I go to the toilet?') will give children confidence.
- ★ **Practising the routine** It can be helpful to do a practice journey before the big day, looking for interesting things on the way.
- ★ **Reading books** There are lots of wonderful children's books about starting school that can help to answer children's questions and explain how the school day works. There is a good list on the Oxford Owl website: [www.oxfordowl.co.uk/starting-school](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/starting-school)

## Practical skills for school

There's a whole range of practical skills that will come in handy during a busy school day. If children have practised each of these before they start school, it can help them to be independent and feel confident:

- ★ **Recognising their name** It's handy if your child can find their space in the cloakroom and their clothes and belongings. Labelling their clothes

### Top tip

Not all children develop at the same pace. If your child can't do all these things perfectly before they start school, don't panic, as they will get there in the end with your help and encouragement. Do let the school staff know about any concerns and that way they'll be ready to help.

will help both your child and school staff to keep track of their belongings. Don't forget to label bags, hats, scarfs, gloves and shoes. If it can be taken off and lost, label it.

- ★ **Going to the loo on their own** Being able to use the loo and wash their hands afterwards will help your child to feel independent and reduce the chances of an accident.
- ★ **Dressing** Being able to dress and undress independently will help your child when it comes to changing in and out of their PE kit. When choosing shoes (velcro!) and clothes (easily washable!), try to make sure that they are easy to take off and put back on. School staff will help with fiddly zips or buttons but the more your child can do on their own, the more independent they'll be.
- ★ **Eating** Whether it's a school or a packed lunch, useful lunchtime skills include: being able to use a knife and fork, opening their own lunchbox and being able to open everything in their lunchbox.
- ★ **Role play** It may sound a bit silly, but role play is an ideal way to model language and experiences for your child. Make it fun by changing roles so that you are the child and they are the teacher, or that you are another child. Find out the names of the adults in the class and practice key situations, e.g. 'Good morning, Mrs \*\*\*\*\*!' or 'I haven't got anyone to play with, please will you play with me?'

## Resources on Oxford Owl

- 250 free eBooks to read with your child
- Storytelling videos
- Activity sheets and games to develop early maths skills

[www.oxfordowl.co.uk/starting-school](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/starting-school)



## First Day at School

Every school organises the first day slightly differently and it's unlikely that the whole class will all start at the same time. You may find that your child begins with shorter days that gradually increase, or that they may not be at school every day during the first week as different groups of children have their first day.

However your school organises things, there's lots you can do to help make the first day successful.

### The night before

- ★ **Get everything ready** Double-check that all clothes and bags are labelled, lay out your child's uniform and have bags packed and ready for the morning. This will leave time for any last-minute talks or perhaps a special breakfast.
- ★ **Talk about the exciting day ahead** Remind your child about the fun things waiting for them at school, but also talk them through what to do if they aren't sure about anything or have any worries (and go over what to do if they need the loo *again*).

### Going to school

- ★ **Leave plenty of time to get there** Rushing to get everyone ready and out of the door in the morning is part of being a parent, but getting there nice and early on the first day will help it to be an enjoyable experience for you and your child.
- ★ **Take a photo** Well, it's their first day at school.
- ★ **Say a (quick) goodbye** It's probably best to keep the goodbye as quick and free from drama as possible. Remind them that you'll pick them up using language they'll remember ('just after you've had lunch' or 'after story time') and tell them to enjoy themselves. If your child does become upset, try to remain calm. Stay for a short

time and then slip away quietly. The staff will be very experienced at dealing with upset children, and will soon have your child distracted and busy doing something exciting. The school will always contact you if they remain upset.

- ★ **Say hello to other parents** You might know some of the other parents in the playground already, but if not, do go and say hello. Getting to know other parents can be a great support and depending on who your child makes friends with, you might be seeing a lot of each other over the next few years.

### After school

- ★ **Plan something to do** If you don't have to rush off to work, it can be a good idea to have something planned to distract you from worrying about how things are going. Your child will be having a great time, but you may not.
- ★ **Be prepared for a very tired child!** Even if your child is used to a long day at nursery, a school day can be exhausting. It's a good idea not to plan too many activities for after school for the first few weeks. If your child seems really tired, you might want to bring bedtime forward for a few weeks until they adjust.
- ★ **Check their book bag** While lots of schools communicate with parents by email or using special apps, important letters and forms from school are still sent home regularly. You might also find wrappers, discarded fruit and glitter-covered works of art lurking at the bottom of their bag.
- ★ **Organise play-dates** Over the next few weeks try to arrange opportunities to meet up and play with a wide range of children from the class (if your child feels up to it). One-to-one playtime can help to develop lasting friendships and is particularly important if your child is a little shy or takes longer to settle. It can also be a good opportunity to get to know other parents.

# The Curriculum

When they first start school, children follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum. This sets the standards for the learning, development and care of your child. The things your child will learn in Reception have been organised into three prime areas of learning:

- ★ **Communication and Language**
- ★ **Physical Development**
- ★ **Personal Social and Emotional Development**

and four specific areas of learning:

- ★ **Literacy**
- ★ **Mathematics**
- ★ **Understanding the World**
- ★ **Expressive Arts and Design**

## Top tip

Use our Jargon Buster to keep up to speed with common teaching terms and phrases used in schools today:

[www.oxfordowl.co.uk/starting-school](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/starting-school)

In the EYFS, play is a very important part of your child's development and most learning will be introduced through a mixture of carefully planned opportunities for play and some adult-led focused activities. There will also be opportunities for your child to choose activities that appeal to them, following their own particular interests.

As the Reception year progresses, the learning may start to become more formal, ready for Year 1 and the National Curriculum.

## Assessment

Throughout your child's time at school, they will be assessed regularly. This is to check their progress and identify the next steps in their learning. The school may carry out a baseline assessment when your child starts to find out what they can do already. This is nothing to worry about – it isn't a test and it's unlikely your child will even know it's happening.

At the end of Reception, your child's teacher will assess again and it is likely they will complete an EYFS Profile. This assessment is carried out by the Reception teacher and is based on what they, and other staff caring for your child, have observed over a period of time. All of the information collected is then used to assess where your child is currently in the seven areas of learning. The school will give you a report of your child's progress, including information from their EYFS Profile.

## Note:

Each country within the UK has its own curriculum. In this guide, we've focused on the curriculum in England, but you can find out about your specific curriculum on the following websites:

- **England:** The National Curriculum 2014 – [bit.ly/1DZm1pl](http://bit.ly/1DZm1pl)
- **Wales:** Foundation Phase and National Curriculum – [bit.ly/1WIU5wu](http://bit.ly/1WIU5wu)
- **Scotland:** Curriculum for Excellence – [bit.ly/1K9S1IU](http://bit.ly/1K9S1IU)
- **Northern Ireland:** Northern Ireland Curriculum – [nicurriculum.org.uk](http://nicurriculum.org.uk)



# Reading at School

Reading is one of the most important things your child will learn to do at school. Being able to read and developing a love of books and reading can have a hugely positive impact on your child's education, as well as bringing them lots of enjoyment.

## Reading in Reception

There are two aspects to reading that your child will develop in Reception: phonics and comprehension. All of the teaching and activities around reading that the school puts in place will be aimed at supporting these two elements.

## Phonics

In England, children are taught to read the words on the page using phonics. Phonics is an approach to reading that focuses on building words from sounds. A sound might be represented by a letter (such as 's' or 'm') or a group of letters (like 'ch' or 'igh'). In Reception, children will start by learning the letters and the sounds they make, and how to put them together to read simple words. For example, once they know the individual sounds for 's', 'a' and 't' they can blend them together to form the word 'sat'. You can find a useful audio guide to phonics on Oxford Owl: [www.oxfordowl.co.uk/starting-school](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/starting-school)

## Comprehension

Good comprehension skills are vital in reading as they help children understand the meaning of the words, as well as supporting their vocabulary and knowledge of the world. In Reception, it is likely that children will be able to understand books and stories that are much more complicated than the books they can read by themselves, so most comprehension teaching will focus on children listening to books that are read to them and then talking about them.

## Books at school

The books your child reads at school and brings home to read with you will depend on whether the school uses a reading scheme or not. Reading schemes, like the Oxford Reading Tree, are structured, levelled sets of books that grow gradually more challenging over time. Children begin reading on a particular book band or level and once they are ready, they move up to the next book level. There are many reading schemes available to schools and some schools use one exclusively, while others use books drawn from more than one. Most schemes are very phonics-based at the beginning.

A common approach to reading in Reception is to send two books home each week – one from a reading scheme for your child to read to you and one chosen by the child for you to read aloud to them. Whether your child's school uses a reading scheme or not, asking your child's teacher for more information about the books they're using will help you better support your child's reading at home.

If your school uses levelled books, try not to compare the book level your child is on with those of their classmates. We wouldn't expect all children to be the same height when they start school, so neither should we expect them to read at the same level straightaway. If you're concerned about the progress your child is making, make an appointment to talk to the teacher about it. Above all, your child needs to know that you value their efforts. Children learn to read gradually over time, not suddenly over night and it can take lots of practice and support from parents and teachers to become fluent. Remember to praise your child whatever level they are at.





## 💡 Tips to support reading at home

- 1 Make the time** Life is busy, but even ten minutes of reading with your child each day is one of the best ways you can support their education and help them to become a strong reader.
- 2 Take turns to read** Often you'll want to listen to your child read aloud – reading to an adult is the most important thing children in the early stages of learning to read can do to develop their reading. But don't stop reading aloud to them. It's a great way of building their understanding, showing them what expressive reading sounds like and letting them enjoy a story.
- 3 Make reading relevant** Just like adults, if a book is about something that interests your child, they'll be more likely to want to read it. Look at fiction, non-fiction, comics and children's newspapers to show your child how reading allows us to explore our interests and the world.
- 4 Talk about the book** Asking your child questions or asking for their opinion can be an important way of helping them to think about what they're reading. As a rule, open questions that begin with 'how' and 'why' tend to be more engaging rather than simple recall questions ('How do you think Winnie is feeling on this page?' might work better than 'What is Winnie afraid of?').
- 5 Pay attention to the language** When reading we can often take children's understanding of words or phrases for granted. By checking they're following, explaining the meaning or even looking up unfamiliar words and phrases together, you can widen your child's vocabulary and support them to make wider sense of the story.
- 6 Enjoy reading time** Making time to read with your child can have great educational benefits, but it can also be ten minutes of respite from hectic family life to curl up, read and talk together. By all means ask questions and discuss vocabulary, but don't be afraid to lose yourselves in a good story too.



## Resources on Oxford Owl

- 250 free eBooks to read with your child
  - Teaching methods explained
- [www.oxfordowl.co.uk/starting-school](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/starting-school)



## Maths in School

Maths is another key subject and it is central to your child's education. An interest in maths, numbers, and problem solving can be encouraged early in a child's life through games and fun activities.

The EYFS Framework says that by the end of Reception, children should be able to:

- ★ Count reliably with numbers from one to 20, place them in order and say which number is one more or one less than a given number.
- ★ Use quantities and objects to add and subtract two single-digit numbers and count on or back to find the answer.
- ★ Solve problems, including doubling, halving and sharing.
- ★ Use everyday language to talk about size, weight, capacity, position, distance, time and money to compare quantities and objects and to solve problems.
- ★ Recognise, create and describe patterns.
- ★ Explore characteristics of everyday objects and shapes and use mathematical language to describe them.

(Source: Early years outcomes, Department of Education, September 2013: [bit.ly/1kpmnLy](http://bit.ly/1kpmnLy))

### Top tip

Use our Maths Language Jargon Buster to decipher some of the common terms and phrases used in maths today:  
[www.oxfordowl.co.uk/starting-school](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/starting-school)

## Maths in Reception

The methods and approaches to teaching maths at school have changed over time, so the work your child does in Reception might look very different from your experience of maths as a child. To best support your child, it's important to try and use the same methods that your child is learning at school. For more help with this, take a look at the parent-friendly 'Maths in School' videos and booklets on Oxford Owl, which are designed specifically to help parents understand the maths methods schools currently use: [www.oxfordowl.co.uk/starting-school](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/starting-school)

In Reception, often maths will be linked to real-life contexts. Children will use resources such as counters, beads and blocks to work out a calculation. For example:

**Teacher:** *How many counters do you have?*

**Child:** *Seven.*

**Teacher:** *If you take away five counters, how many do you have left?*

Child physically takes five counters away

**Child:** *Two.*





Working in this way helps children to build an understanding of an abstract mathematical idea, in this case subtraction, which wouldn't be possible if they only used numbers or tried to work out the problem in their head.

Frequently, mathematics will also be worked into other things that your child will be doing. In most Reception classes, the teacher will take advantage of opportunities to teach maths in other areas of the curriculum. For example, if your child bakes a cake at school, your child's teacher will use this as a chance to teach about weights and measures. They might also cover simple problem-solving, for example: 'We have enough mixture for 10 muffins. If we wanted to make 20 muffins, how much flour would we need?'

## Tips to support maths at home

### At home:

- ★ **Playing games** There are lots of ways games can be helpful in supporting children's maths, whether it's identifying the numbers on a card or counting their way round a board. Building things with bricks is a good way of developing maths skills through solving problems ('How many red bricks?', 'How many blue bricks?' and 'How many altogether?') and practising using the language of maths ('Hmm, I wonder which is the longest brick?' or 'Could you pass me the cube over there').
- ★ **Time** Talking about the time at which different things happen and looking at the clock together during the day is a great way of learning about time.



## Resources on Oxford Owl

- Maths teaching methods explained
  - Expert videos to help learning at home
  - Fun maths games to play with your child
- [www.oxfordowl.co.uk/starting-school](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/starting-school)

- ★ **Using objects at home** Finding the same number of different items can help your child to understand what numbers represent, for example finding six pegs, six spoons of paint powder or six segments of orange. It's also good to practise making patterns with objects too, putting things in order of size, height or weight.

## Out and about:

- ★ **Money** This is a useful way to introduce children to simple maths. At the shops, you could ask them to guess how much two items might cost. Give them small amounts and see what can they buy, or talk about the items you buy: which are cheaper and which are more expensive?
- ★ **Counting everything** 'How many buses / lamp posts / squirrels have we seen?'
- ★ **Going on a shape hunt** 'How many circles / triangles / squares / rectangles can you see between here and home?', 'Are they 2D or 3D?'

# Working with School

Both you and your child's teacher want the same thing – a happy, confident child who enjoys going to school and loves learning. By building an effective home/school partnership, both you and your child's teacher can achieve this aim together.

## Get involved

The best way you can support your child's school is by being an active parent:

- ★ Attending meetings for parents about the curriculum or other aspects of school life
- ★ Helping your child with their homework
- ★ Listening to them read
- ★ Making sure they're at school on time every day
- ★ Being available for meetings
- ★ Responding to messages from the school
- ★ Communicating with the school if there are any problems

If parents manage to do all of these things consistently, then schools will value their contribution immensely.

For parents who have more time, schools are always keen for parents to be involved. You could:

- ★ **Join the Parents' Association** This is a great way to meet other parents and support the school through fundraising ventures.
- ★ **Volunteer at school** Schools are often looking for volunteers to run clubs or hear readers during the school day.
- ★ **Become a school governor** School governors work with headteachers to decide policies, oversee management and create the ethos of the school.

## Parents' evening

Most schools hold parents' evenings every term, and they're a very important part of the relationship you develop with your child's school and their teacher. If this is your first experience of a parents' evening, you don't need to feel apprehensive. Here are some ideas on how to get the most out of meeting with your child's teacher:

- ★ Check whether you should take your child with you, as this varies from school to school.
- ★ You may not see your child's work at every parents' evening. Very often the first meeting of the year is all about meeting for the first time and discussing aims and targets for the year.
- ★ Talk to your child and ask how things are going at school. Ask them what they would like you to ask the teacher. Afterwards, tell them how the meeting went.
- ★ Try to come away from the meeting with some positive steps that you, your child, and the teachers will take to help your child succeed.

### Here are some ideas for questions to ask at your first parents' evening:

- 'Do they get along with other children and have strong friendship groups?'
- 'Do they contribute to class discussions?'
- 'Which area of learning is their strongest and which do they seem to enjoy most?'
- 'Are they making good progress?'
- 'What can we do at home to help?'
- 'Are there any areas where they are not making the progress you'd expect and what additional support are they receiving?'



# The Wider Curriculum

There are lots of ways you can support your child to access the wider EYFS curriculum at home. These include:

- ★ **Help them be active** Young children should be active for as much of the day as possible. This might mean the usual rough and tumble of being a 4-year-old, or it could mean specific activities such as going for a walk, dancing, playing football or climbing.
- ★ **Work on their fine-motor skills** Drawing, colouring, playing with blocks, threading beads, making things – any activity that helps to develop your child’s hand-eye coordination will be useful in school life.
- ★ **Support their concentration** Developing your child’s ability to listen, be quiet and concentrate for a short time will really help with classroom life. Good ways to do this, include: sitting and reading, drawing, and doing structured activities like puzzles, painting, or cooking.
- ★ **Share and take turns** Games and activities that help children to practise taking turns and sharing are useful for school, where these skills will be used when working as part of a group.

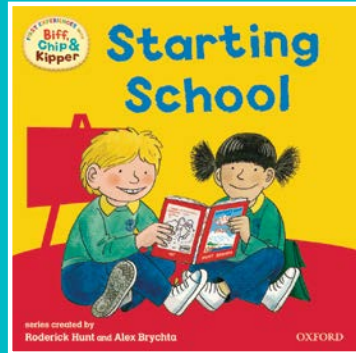
- ★ **Talk lots** As well as being an important skill in itself, this is the foundation of reading and writing. Telling family stories, asking your child lots of questions, asking them to recount things that they have done in the day, and encouraging them to tell you what they think or feel can all lead to good conversations.
- ★ **Use technology together** Tablets and computers give us access to fascinating films, sites and games. The real benefit of these are when they aren’t just used as a time-filler, but are something you can share with your child, talking and helping them to learn about something new.
- ★ **Enjoy imaginative play** This might include role-play and dressing up or using toys to act out stories or adventures. Play is crucial to how young children learn and make sense of the world. Your child will have their own favourite games, but acting out situations like starting school can help them to prepare for the unknown.



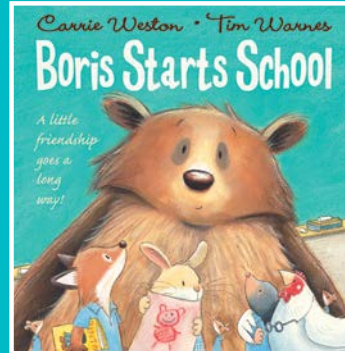
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for starting school

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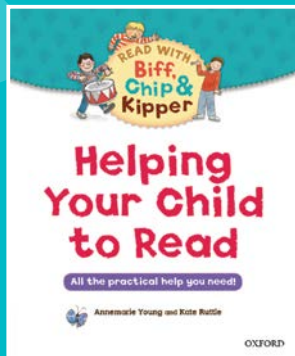
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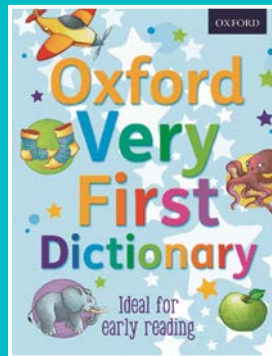
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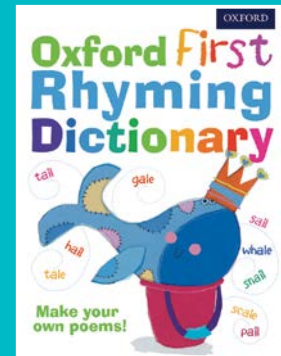
## ADVICE FOR PARENTS



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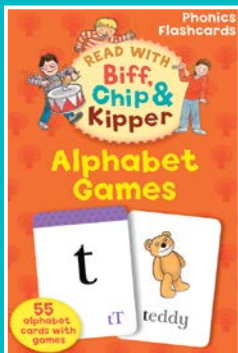


Oxford Very First Dictionary **£6.99**



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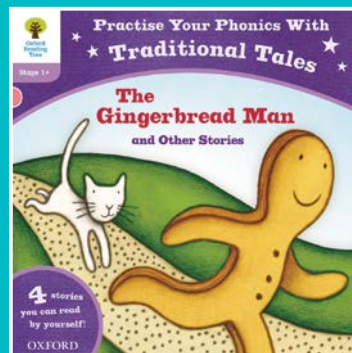
## PHONICS



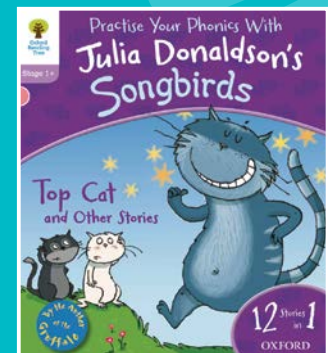
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