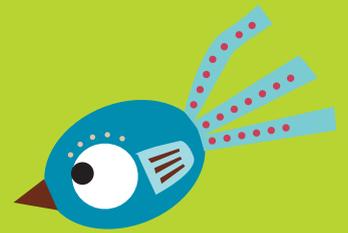




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# Your Child's First Year At School

– a guide



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## Introduction

**Starting Primary school is a major milestone in you and your child's life. From negotiating the first day to understanding what your child will be learning at school, there are a lot of new challenges ahead for you both – some exciting, others perhaps a little bit more nerve-wracking.**

In this guide we've looked to combine information about what your child will be doing in the classroom with lots of practical advice about what you can do to support your child's learning at home, all supported by the free resources available on Oxford Owl: [www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home).

As well as help with understanding the Reception curriculum and activities to support your child's learning, we've also included advice on those other aspects of school life that can have a big impact during your child's first year of school, including parents' evening and the home/school partnership.

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

## Author biography

**Tish Keech** has worked for over thirty years in teaching, spending fifteen years as Headteacher of a Primary school in Wolverhampton. During that time, she also worked extensively for Oxford University Press writing one of the original Teacher's Guides for Oxford Reading Tree, three Teacher's Guides for the Wolf Hill series for reluctant readers, as well as working as an education consultant.

Having now retired from teaching, Tish continues to work as an educational consultant, supporting other Headteachers by representing them at a local and national level and, very importantly, looks after her grandchildren, one of whom is 'getting ready for school' this September!

### 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 are many things that you can do to help your child prepare for those first few weeks. The suggestions below are aimed at helping your child adjust to this new environment, as well as developing some of the skills school life will require.

★ **Dressing** Being able to dress and undress independently will help your child when it comes to changing in and out of PE kits, putting on coats for playtime, etc. When choosing shoes and uniform/clothes, try to make sure that they are easy to put on and take off. Practice will help – make it fun by turning it into a game.

★ **Keeping track of clothes and belongings** Labelling their clothes will help both your child and school staff keep track of their belongings. Iron on labels are easy to use and don't forget to also label bags, hats, scarfs, gloves and shoes. Distinguishing between left and right shoes can be tricky for some children, so try drawing two halves of a smiley face in their shoes to make a complete smiley face when the shoes are placed together correctly.

★ **Toileting and personal hygiene** Teaching your child to go to the lavatory independently, before they start school, is invaluable and will help them feel confident in this new environment.

★ **Recognising their own name** Recognising their name when seeing it written down is a skill needed regularly throughout the school day. The school will write it with both upper (capital letters) and lower case letters like this – JOHN SMITH and John Smith.

★ **Concentration** Developing your child's ability to sit and concentrate for a period of time will really help. This can be challenging for very young children, but sitting and reading, drawing, and doing structured activities like puzzles, painting, or cooking will all help develop their concentration skills.

## Resources on Oxford Owl

- Read with your child using the 250 free eBooks on Oxford Owl: [www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/library-page](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/library-page)
- Play fun maths games and use our activity sheets to develop your child's early maths skills: [www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/fun-activities](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/fun-activities)

## Top tip

Don't worry if your child hasn't perfected all these skills – a happy, independent, confident child is 'school ready' and will enjoy it!

★ **Lunchtime** Whether having a school or a sandwich lunch, helping your child prepare for lunchtime is very beneficial. 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 – some yoghurt tubes and drink cartons can be quite tricky so checking at home beforehand is a good idea.

★ **Reading** Reading together is a special time enjoyed by many parents and children. Enjoying story books and non-fiction books together will help develop language and pre-reading skills, as well as a love of reading and books.

★ **Early maths skills** Have fun counting everyday objects and sorting them into groups. Number rhymes and games help with recognition up to 20.

★ **Writing** Encourage your child to do lots of drawing and pretend or real writing, in addition to painting, cutting and sticking. These help with the early stages of writing development as they help develop your child's fine motor skills.

★ **Role play** You might feel a bit silly at first, 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 Smith', 'Please can I go to the toilet, Mr Jones?' or 'I haven't got anyone to play with, please will you play with me?'

★ **Praise** 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.

# First Day at School

The first day will vary depending on your child's school. Many schools stagger the intake so that all thirty children do not start on the same day. Some schools plan for children to do half days and gradually extend the day over a number of weeks, whilst others start full-time straightaway. Whatever the arrangements at your school, these tips might help.

## The night before

- Check that all clothes and bags are labelled.
- Talk about the exciting day ahead.
- Hang up uniform and have bags packed and ready for the morning.
- Try to keep to bedtime routines and make this bedtime a peaceful, relaxing one.

## The morning

- Ensure that you arrive in plenty of time and that the first morning is not a rushed one.
- Don't forget any forms that need to be returned. If you've moved house or changed mobile phone over the summer, make sure you update your contact details with the school.

### Top tip

This may be your first experience of a child starting school, but the school staff have been through this many times before and understand how you feel and know how to support your child in this exciting next step.



- British weather is a changeable thing! You might be dropping them off in sunshine with sunhats and sun cream but pack a coat ready for those sudden showers!
- If your child becomes upset, try to remain calm. Stay for a short time and then slip away quietly as a big goodbye could trigger more upset. You can feel assured that the school will always contact you if they remain distressed.
- If you do not have to get to work, have something planned to distract you from clock-watching or worrying about how things are going.
- Check bags for letters and forms from school.
- Be ready for tears and tantrums. It doesn't necessarily mean that there's a problem, it's just that all the excitement coupled with tiredness may mean that they need some extra attention and reassurance for a while.
- Over the next few weeks invite a wide range of children back to play at home or in the park. One-on-one playtime can help to develop lasting friendships. This is particularly important if your child is a little shy or takes longer to settle.
- Why not start a 'My First Year of School' scrapbook, which you and your child could write in together? They can add more of their own writing and drawing as their abilities develop, which would be a great record of achievement. Add photos of them on their first day and finish off with another on their last day. They will have grown so much and it will be a wonderful keepsake of this very special time in their life!

## The afternoon

- You may already know some of the other parents at the school but if not, be brave and approach them! These friendships can be a great support over the next few years.
- Be prepared for a very tired child!
- If your child does seem really tired bring bedtime forward by half an hour for a few weeks until they adjust.

# Curriculum

There are two curricula followed by Primary schools in England.

- **Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)** followed from birth to 5 years.
- **The Primary National Curriculum** from 5 to 11.

Your child's school will give you information on the areas to be covered each year and the topics covered each term so that you can support their learning at home.

## Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

The Early Years Foundation Stage sets standards for the learning, development and care of your child from birth to 5 years old. This is the curriculum your child will follow through nursery and Reception.

The areas of learning are:

- communication and language
- physical development
- personal, social and emotional development
- literacy
- mathematics
- understanding the world
- expressive arts and design

Play is a very important part of your child's development and most learning is introduced through play and carefully planned activities. Don't be concerned if your child says that they have been playing all day – it just means that they have been lucky enough to have experienced staff who have made their learning fun and enjoyable! As the Reception year progresses, the learning gradually becomes more formal in preparation for Year 1 and the National Curriculum.



**Assessment** Throughout your child's time in school, they will be assessed regularly. This is done to check progress and identify next steps in their learning. At the end of Reception, your child's teacher will assess again and complete an EYFS Profile. This assessment uses the early learning goals, which can be found in the Early Years framework: [bit.ly/1hHoE5A](https://bit.ly/1hHoE5A)

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 how your child is doing in the 7 areas of learning and development. Finding out at this stage how your child is doing will mean that your child's teacher in Year 1 will know what your child really enjoys doing and does well, as well as helping them decide if your child needs a little extra support and what that support should be. The school will give you a report of your child's progress, including information from his or her EYFS Profile.

### Top tip

Access the Jargon Buster in Oxford Owl to understand some of the common terms and phrases used in schools today:  
[www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/jargon-buster--2](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/jargon-buster--2)

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

# Reading at School

Reading is a key skill and central to your child's development. The love of books and reading starts early in a child's life with the sharing of picture books and story time.

## Key approaches to developing reading skills

### Phonics

This is the approach currently used in schools in England. Phonics focuses on building words from sounds. Once children learn a few initial sounds, they can then start to read words by blending (or 'synthesising') the sounds together to make a word, e.g. if you child learns 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/phonics-made-easy](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/phonics-made-easy)**

At school, you will probably hear teachers talking about '**blending**', but you might also hear them refer to '**sounding out**' or '**Fred Talk**' too, depending on which phonic scheme your child's school is using. All these terms focus on the same point – **synthesising sounds**.

### Comprehension

Comprehension skills are vital in reading as they help children understand the meaning of the words, as well as building their vocabulary. Children are also encouraged to draw on their own experiences (the language and stories they know), the setting of the story and the pictures to help them understand what they are reading about.



## What books will your child read and how are they chosen?

What your child will read at school will depend in large part on whether they're using a reading scheme or not. Reading schemes are a structured, levelled set of books written specifically to ensure that your child takes steady and progressive steps towards reading success. There are many reading schemes available to schools and some schools use one exclusively at least for the first few years, whilst others use more than one. Most schemes are very **phonic-based** at the beginning. If your child's school does not use a reading scheme, they will inform you as to what approach they're taking and the books they will read in school.

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.

### Different ways of reading

There are many different ways of teaching and practising reading and your child will probably experience most, if not all, of these each week. They include:

- 1 **Shared reading** is when the teacher reads and discusses a text with the whole class, demonstrating how to be a good reader.
- 2 **Guided reading** is a group of about 6 children, grouped by reading ability, reading aloud from the same book at the same time whilst the teacher listens in and draws out teaching points.
- 3 **Group reading** is similar to guided reading, but children take it in turns to read aloud from the same book whilst the teacher listens and supports.
- 4 **Individual reading** is reading with one child and one adult.
- 5 **Quiet reading** is children reading by themselves for a short time.
- 6 **Buddy reading** is children reading in pairs. The buddy is often an older child.
- 7 **Story time** is the teacher reading a story aloud to the whole class.
- 8 **Read at home/take home books** is when your child brings books home to practise reading with you.



## Resources on Oxford Owl

- Read with your child using the 250 free eBooks on Oxford Owl: [www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/library-page](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/library-page)
- See our list of the 12 all-time picture book classics: [www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/picture-books](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/picture-books)
- Find out everything you need to know about learning to read with phonics on our 'Phonics made easy' page: [www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/phonics-made-easy](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/phonics-made-easy)
- Develop your child's comprehension skills with our activities for 4-5 year olds: [www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/age-4-5--2](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/age-4-5--2)
- Learn more about how reading is taught in schools on our 'Reading at school' page: [www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/at-school](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/at-school)

## Tips to help your child enjoy reading

- **Talking** This is the foundation of reading. Tell family stories, ask your child lots of questions and ask them to recount things that they have done in the day, encourage them to tell you what they think or feel and sing songs, recite rhymes and riddles and just have fun with language.
- **Read every day (if possible!)** Children love routine, and reading is something that you and your child can look forward to every day.
- **Lead by example** If your child sees you reading, for pleasure or information, they will understand that reading is a worthwhile activity. Let them see the pleasure to be found in being engrossed in a good book, newspaper or magazine!
- **Make reading fun** Reading aloud can be a lot of fun, not just for parents but for all family members. You can use different voices for different characters in the story, use your child's name instead of a character's name, and read stories that have repetitive parts and encourage your child to join in.
- **Listen to your child read** As your child learns to read, listen to them read aloud. Reading to you gives your child a chance to practise and to improve their reading skills. Give your child time to figure out tricky words, and show your child how they can learn from mistakes.
- **Talk about books** Discussing a book with your child helps them understand it, as well as helping to enrich their vocabulary. Encourage your child to ask questions and to comment on the story and pictures in a book – before, during and after reading it.
- **Make reading relevant** If the book is about something that interests them, your child will be happier to read it. This is just as important as choosing books for their level. Look at both fiction and non-fiction books to show your child how reading allows us to explore our interests and the world.
- **Don't push too hard** It may be tempting to try to move your child up a level (and you may be sure that they are ready), but this can damage their confidence if they find it too difficult. At home, give your child books that you feel are a little bit too easy for them as this will give them a feeling of achievement. As well as encouraging them to read on their own, it will reinforce the fact that they can read, and read well.
- **Give praise** Remember, your child needs to know that you value their efforts. Children learn to read over time, with lots of practice and support from parents and teachers. Give praise whatever level your child is at, and remind yourself that they're doing amazingly well. Think of how far they have come in the last few months and how little they knew this time last year!

# Maths at School

As with reading, maths is another key skill and is central to your child's development. The love of maths, number and problem solving starts early in a child's life with the sharing of games and everyday activities.

As a parent, you give your child their first experiences of maths. Even if you don't feel confident with maths, yourself, you can still make a big difference to your child's numeracy confidence and ability. You can help by:

- Pointing out the maths in everyday life and including your child in activities involving maths, such as using money, cooking and travelling.
- Being positive about maths – avoid saying things like 'I can't do maths' or 'I hated maths at school'.

## Maths in school

By the end of Reception children will 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.

### Top tip

Access the Maths Language Jargon Buster in **Oxford Owl** to help you keep up to speed with some of the common terms and phrases used in maths today: [www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/maths-in-school](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/maths-in-school)

- 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](https://bit.ly/1kpmnLy))

## The way maths is taught in Reception

The maths work your child is doing at school may look very different from the kind of 'sums' you remember. Unfamiliar methods such as number bonds and number grids can be tricky to get to grips with at first, but it's important to try and use the same methods that your child is learning at school so that they don't get confused by competing approaches. 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/for-home/maths-in-school](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/maths-in-school).

In Reception, the focus is on linking maths to real-life contexts. Children will use concrete apparatus such as counters, beads and building blocks to perform a variety of different calculations, e.g:

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

**Child:** 'Five.'

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

*Child physically takes two counters away*

**Child:** 'Three.'

Working in this way helps children build up a 'picture' of the different mathematical calculations helping them to build a strong, understanding of foundational mathematical concepts.

Frequently, mathematics will also be worked into other things that your child will be doing. For example, if your child bakes something at school, your child's teacher will use this as an opportunity to talk about weights and measures, as well as time. Simple problem-solving could also be worked in, e.g. 'We have enough mixture for 10 muffins. If we wanted to make 20 muffins, how much flour would we need?'

At this stage, the focus is very much on developing strong calculation skills. This will form the foundation of your child's mathematical development so that, in time, they can rapidly recall mathematical facts when using informal and formal written methods later in school.

## Maths at home

At home, one of the best things you can do to support your child's early mathematical development is to bring out the connection between everyday activities and the maths that underpins them, e.g. when paying for things in a shop, try and talk to your child about subtraction. Whenever you can, point out to your child

that you're doing maths so that they understand that maths is all around them.

Here are some ideas for different ways you can develop your child's maths skills at home:

### At home:

- Measure ingredients and set the timer together when you are cooking. Use egg timers to time activities (a great incentive for getting dressed!).
- Find the same amount of different items to help your child understand what numbers mean e.g. find 3 shoes, 3 pegs, or 3 socks.
- Play with things like shells and beads. Compare them and make patterns with them too, putting things in order of size, height or weight.
- Talk about the size of objects and ask questions like: 'Please pass me the biggest brick', or 'Which is the smallest spoon?'
- Make patterns with objects and solve problems by working out: 'How many red bricks?', 'How many blue bricks?', and 'How many altogether?'

### Money:

Money is a great way to start doing some simple maths with young children:

- **At the shops** Ask them to guess how much a couple of items will cost. Give them small amounts e.g. 30p, – what can they buy? Talk about the items you buy – which are more expensive, which are cheaper?
- **Play shops** Make some pretend money for your play shop and use items from all over the house as shop items.



### Out and about:

You don't have to be inside to practise maths skills!

- **Look for numbers** Look on doors, cars, signs, buses, shops and talk about what the numbers mean.
- **Count everything!** How many buses/ lamp posts/ blue cars, etc.?'
- **Talk about time** 'How long does it take to walk to school or the shops?'
- **Go on a shape hunt** 'How many circles/ triangles/ squares/ rectangles can you find?' 'Are they 2D or 3D?'
- **Play games that use counting** Such as hopscotch and hide and seek.
- **Sports** These offer a great chance to talk about speed, scores and time.

### Games

- **Play with cards and bricks** 'How many bricks can we build without them falling down?'
- **Play 'I spy'** But with shapes or numbers instead.

### Resources on Oxford Owl

- Find lots of great ideas for developing your child's maths skills on our 'Top Tips' page: [www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/top-tips--2](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/top-tips--2)
- Learn about how maths is taught in schools today with our 'Maths in School' videos and guides: [www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/maths-in-school](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/maths-in-school)
- Watch our 'Maths at home' videos and learn some great activities to try at home, including games to practice times tables: [www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/andrew-jeffrey](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/andrew-jeffrey)
- Play games! Use our maths games to make maths fun: [www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/age-3-5--2](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/age-3-5--2)

- **Play with containers** 'Which container holds the most water/ sand?'
- **Board games** These are also good for developing maths skills.

# Home/School Partnership

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** Schools are always very keen for parents to get involved and there are many different ways that you can help your child's school:

- **Join the Parents' Association** This is a great way to meet other parents and support the school through fundraising ventures.
- **Volunteer in the classroom** Teachers really value this sort of involvement and skills in gardening, art, DIY, etc. are all valued.
- **Help from home** If you can't go in to the school to help, ask if there is something you could do at home to help, e.g. fixing broken resources.
- **Become a school governor** School governors work with Headteachers to decide policies, oversee management and create the ethos of the school.
- **Attend curriculum meetings** These are a great way of understating exactly how your child learns at **their** school and will be packed with useful information on how you can help your child at home.

## 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, then they can feel quite intimidating. 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.
- Share with the teacher some of your child's interests outside school. This helps them to understand more about your child.
- 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.
- If you have received a written report and want clarification on some areas – take it along to the meeting with you.

You'll normally have a 10-15 minute slot, which usually flies by! Having a list of questions prepared can help make sure you don't miss anything vital. Here are some questions you could 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 subject is their strongest and which do they get the most enjoyment out of?'
- 'Are they making steady progress?'
- 'What can we do at home to help?'
- 'Are they at the expected level for their age group?' (If performing below their expected level) 'What areas need to be worked on and what additional help are they receiving?'

# Wellbeing at School

Happy and secure children achieve their potential much more readily and you will find that your child's wellbeing is seen as a matter of vital importance to their school. If you have any concerns about your child's wellbeing, let your child's teacher know so that they can help find solutions to any problems.

## Behaviour

From their first days in nursery, schools do a great deal of work to teach children about behaviour and its positive and negative impact. Most schools and classes have a set of rules or codes of conduct which are very often created by the children themselves. Ask for a copy from your child's school and chat about it at home using examples.

## Illness

In the early years of nursery and school, it is common for children to go down with a number of ailments as they build up their immune systems. Here, we've offered some general advice as to what to do if your child is unwell and you are unsure whether they should go to school. However, for further advice, please do also speak to your child's school about their policy on sickness and absence.

- **Do** send your child if you think they are well enough to carry out the activities of the school day. A minor cold, sore throat or headache should not prevent them from coping at school.
- **Do** make sure that your school has up to date contact numbers for you so that they contact you if your child is unwell.
- **Do** make sure that you have someone who can pick your child up from school if they are unwell and you are unable to.
- **Do** let the school know if your child has an infectious disease. It helps them to be aware of the possibility of other children going down with the same ailment.
- **Don't** send your child to school if they have a temperature, are suffering from vomiting or diarrhoea or have an unexplained rash. Most schools have a policy of keeping staff and children off for 48 hours from when they were last sick or had diarrhoea to limit infection.
- **Don't** be worried that your child may be missing out on some work while they're absent from school. Chat with their teacher about what the class has been doing and see if there's some catch-up work you can do at home if they're feeling up to it.

## Attendance

This is a subject that often causes parents a lot of confusion when their child first starts school. To help you with this, your child's school will outline their exact policy on attendance. Although school's policies on attendance do vary, it's still worth understanding the basics of the current situation regarding attendance in schools.

## School's responsibility

All schools have a duty to monitor attendance and they in turn are monitored by the Local Authority and Ofsted to check that they are doing everything possible to maximise attendance. Schools will have their own policies on absence and it's worth discussing

with your child's teacher or Local Authority if you are unsure whether or not you can take your child out of school.

## Parent's responsibility

If your child is of compulsory school age\* and is registered at school, then you have a legal duty to ensure your child regularly attends school.

**Authorised absences** This is where the school has given approval in advance of an absence or has accepted the explanation offered afterwards. Schools will usually only authorise absences due to: illness, medical appointments, and other special circumstances approved by the school, such as bad weather conditions, religious observances, funerals, etc.

**Unauthorised absences** These are absences that have not been approved by the school. Typically, this includes term-time holidays and unexplained absences, but exactly how they are defined is at the discretion of the school.

\*This is a phrase you might see elsewhere and it can seem confusing at first. Essentially, it means that in England your child is of 'compulsory school age' on the 1st January, 1st April or 1st September following their 5th birthday. In practice, most children start school at the beginning of the term in which they turn five, whilst children born between 1st April to 31st August do not need to start school until the September after their 5th birthday.

# And finally...

★ **Keep a balance** Your child will naturally be very tired when they first start school and all children take a while to adapt to this new routine. If your child is finding school very tiring, it might be helpful to take a step back from their normal routine of after-school activities for a few weeks, gradually re-introducing them as your child adapts to full-time education.

★ **Don't be worried** It's quite common, after a few weeks of skipping happily to school, for children to suddenly become a little bit reluctant to go to school. Once the novelty wears off and they realise they'll be going to school every day for the foreseeable future, even the most enthusiastic child can start to question why!

★ **Keep reading** However busy life becomes (and it will!) please do try and make time for reading and enjoying books together. You will need to spend time listening to your child read, but don't lose those precious bedtime stories or time spent cuddled up on the sofa sharing stories together. Reading can be a challenge for children at times and you will need to keep the love of books and reading alive!

★ **Look further** If you are reading this you will probably be the parent of a child just starting school. Try and take some time to explore **Oxford Owl** further as you will find resources, activities, support and free eBooks for *all* your children.



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