

Sweet Valley Primary

Excel today to lead tomorrow

Starting School – A guide for parents



Compiled by Liana Browne

Is my child ready for school?

Ask yourself the following questions:

Language Skills

- Can your child converse confidently with adults and other children?
- Can he answer basic questions like why, what's next etc?
- Can she listen to others and follow instructions, reacting and responding appropriately?
- Can he describe recent experiences?
- Is her speech clear and understood by people outside the immediate family?

Social Skills

- Is your child able to socialise well with others?
- Can your child share/wait his turn?
- Can he stand up for himself?

Personal Skills

- Can she dress herself/tie shoelaces/do up buttons etc.
- Can he take care of his own belongings?
- Is she able to go to the toilet on her own and does she know about personal hygiene?
- Does he know his personal details?

Physical Skills

- Does she have good balance?
- Can he catch a large ball, throw, run, climb, swing etc.?
- Can she manipulate writing tools efficiently, cut accurately with a pair of scissors, colour in neatly etc?

Intellectual Skills

- Can she write and recognise her name?
- Is he able to count to 20 and recognise numbers up to 10?
- Can she work independently on a task?
- Can he sort objects into groups?
- Is she able to remain focused in a group situation?
- Can he draw a recognisable picture of himself?
- Does he know his basic shapes?
- Does she know her right from her left?

Emotional Skills

- Can she separate from you confidently?
- Has he got reasonable control over his emotions?



The abovementioned skills are indicators of school readiness. Some children will take longer than others to master all of these skills. However, they will be able to cope a lot more easily with the demands of “Big School” once they have developed all these skills.

Is my child EMOTIONALLY ready for school?

Frank A. Clark said: *“The most important thing that parents can teach their children is how to get along **without** them.”*

Teaching your child **independence** is one of the greatest gifts any parent can give a child. Here are some of the ways in which you can guide him/her towards independence:

- ❖ Let him **pack his own bag** the night before school – you can supervise the process
- ❖ Encourage her to **carry her own bag** to and from school
- ❖ **Say good-bye confidently** and tell him that you will return once school is over. It may be hard at first but try not to linger or draw out the process. He needs to know that YOU are confident in leaving him behind and that YOU trust the person he is being left with. This will make him feel more secure.
- ❖ **Arrive a bit earlier to collect** her for the first while. Being only a few minutes late can feel like an eternity for a little one. She will only start showing signs of independence once she feels confident in her school surroundings. You play a crucial role in this.
- ❖ Make sure you are **ALWAYS on time** to drop him off and to collect him. Leave before the bell rings to signal the start of the school day.
- ❖ If after a few weeks this process is still not going smoothly, discuss it with your child’s teacher.
- ❖ After the first few days, **start collecting and dropping her** off at a designated place. This is a great leap in the direction of independence.
- ❖ Show that you are **happy to see him** after school and enquire about his day. Ask specific questions as “How was your day?” will just amount to “Fine!”. Ask specific questions like:

- What stories did you read?
- What interesting activities did you do?
- What did you do in Gym/Art/Music etc.
- Who did you play with?



- ❖ Let your child **unpack her own bag** in the afternoon-lunchbox in the kitchen, homework folder and messages in a specific place so that you have a set routine when she arrives home. Even if you work outside the home and need to start supper as you arrive home, give her the responsibility of unpacking all her things while you start preparing supper. Routine at school and home is **VITAL**.
- ❖ Even if your child attends aftercare you should still **go through his homework** with him every day. Even if you just do his reading again, he will feel confident in returning to school the next day, that his homework was done. Take time to sign his homework book/reading marker **EVERY DAY**. A child who goes to school **PREPARED** is more likely to be a confident child. This is part of becoming more independent.
- ❖ **Mark all your child’s belongings**-every individual pencil, crayon and piece of clothing. Check each term that her name is still on each of her belongings.

Children need boundaries. Boundaries make them feel safe and secure and encourage them to develop independence. They must know what the rules are and that you are going to enforce them. Children need their parents to take charge even though they may not like to admit it. They feel safe knowing that they are being cared for.

How can I make sure my child has a good day at school?

- ≈ **Routine** is vital especially during the week.
- ≈ Make sure your child gets **enough sleep**. She needs to be in bed by 19:30 to be asleep by 20:00 at the latest. Make this your priority. This is very difficult in this day and age where most parents get home so late and families only eat at 19:00. Try your best. You may have to change your routine so that the children bath while supper is being prepared. Talk to other parents about what works for them.
- ≈ It is **VITAL** that your child starts his day with a **good breakfast**. If your child can't stand the sight of food in the morning, let him take a snack in the car or something more substantial to eat at the 9:20 "brain snack" time in class each day. Try to avoid sugary cereals or cereals. Try something like "Weetbix, Jungle Oats" or add banana to the meal to keep his brain and body nourished until break-time (10:35 – 10:55).
- ≈ Pack a **nutritious** lunch/snack. Fruit, yoghurt, grated cheese, whole wheat bread, vital snack, cereal/jungle oats bars, water and fruit juices are all good choices. Don't send anything you would usually find at a kiddies birthday party eg. chips, sweets fizzy cool-drinks etc. Grade 1's are not permitted to visit the tuck-shop as they waste the entire break standing in the queue.
- ≈ **Get to school before the bell rings**. It's terribly sad to see how unsettled a child can remain for most of the day if she was late for school. Please do everything you can to help the day start happily and smoothly.
- ≈ Make sure you have **checked** your child's entire **homework folder** for messages, and have signed his homework book or card.
- ≈ **Send her to school prepared**. Keep a copy of the weekly routine on the fridge, in her room and at the front door. This way you know your child will always have the correct kit for sport or gym etc.



The year ahead-how can you help to make it a good one?



Preparing for school

- Take her to the school so that she can know where it is in relation to home
- Read him stories about starting school
- Find out who your child's new school friends will be and arrange for some play dates ahead of time

Once at school

- **INVOLVEMENT** . Become involved in your child's school as much as possible. Show your interest by attending meetings, volunteering for events, attending open days etc.
- **Support the school's decisions.** Respect the opinions and rules of the school. The parents and teacher must work together for the good of the child.
- **Mutual respect is crucial.** DON'T believe everything your child tells you at home. If you are really concerned, don't act upon it until you clarify it with the relevant teacher first.
- **Instill pride in your child** for his school and uniform. You may not mind your child's fashionable hairstyle but he or she will suffer the consequences if it doesn't fall within the acceptable norms for the school.
- **Encourage your child to participate in after school activities,** both extra-murals and fun events. She must be encouraged to socialise with children her own age in areas outside of the classroom.

A few extra Hints

- Remember to introduce yourself every time you meet your child's new teacher - at least for the first part of the year. Teachers are still trying to learn childrens' names and it can be daunting to remember which parent belongs to which child.
- Communicate **REGULARLY** with teachers via notes in the homework book and make sure you check the message book for messages every day.
- Make an appointment to see the teacher. Avoid spontaneously "popping in" to see her before, during or after school.

Reminders

- Starting school is a big step for children – give them time and all the help they need to adjust
- Children automatically work harder at school when their parents and teachers support one another
- Let the teacher know if there are changes happening at home. The teacher would like to know when she should be giving your child extra TLC.
- Give credit where it is due and tell the teacher or school when you are pleased with the job they are doing.



Homework



How can you keep it fun?

- **Know** what needs doing. Is there a list of things to do in the week? Make sure you understand the homework expectations for your child's grade.
- **Check your child's homework** diary/message book EVERY DAY! Check for additional notices and sign to indicate that you have read a notice from the teacher.
- Don't allow your **own feelings** about homework to spoil this wonderful, new experience for your child. Try to remain positive and enthusiastic.
- MAKE TIME to do your child's **reading** with her. This can be very difficult for busy parents. Try to set aside a few minutes to listen to her reading, even if it is for only 10 minutes or even every 2nd day. Find someone reliable to help you out on the other days.
- Find out **how long** your child should be spending on homework. If you are concerned about the amount of homework, make an appointment to discuss this with the teacher.
- Recognize **your role** is **helper** not doer. As parents we may get carried away and start providing too much help. Make sure he's doing the work--not you!
- **Praise his efforts** and not just the "end product." Children need to learn the importance of hard work and effort and homework provides a great opportunity for you to reinforce his perseverance.
- Consider involving a **tutor** if your child is struggling or needs extra input which you are unable to provide, or talk to the teacher about extra lessons.
- **Break** the homework time up into more manageable "chunks". It may be easier for your child to take a break between doing his reading and practising his spelling.



Learning to READ

“Reading with your children is a gift that gives for a lifetime”.

Inspiring your child to read could be the single most important thing you can do to help him succeed in school. Stories are an excellent way to stimulate the mind, develop a good vocabulary and nurture an active imagination.



Here are some tips to develop a proficient reader

- Read together every day
- Have your child read to you
- Show how much you love to read - join a library and borrow books regularly
- Know when to stop. Reading should be fun time
- Point out words everywhere (eg in the shops, along the road, when walking around the school)

Follow the above tips and watch your child develop a strong vocabulary and passion for the written word. The importance of reading with your child/ren cannot be over emphasized.

Reading is a wonderful way to **bond** with your children and provides memories they will carry with them all their lives. Proficiency in reading, more than any other skill, **increases** their **potential** for **success** in school and as an adult.

General tips:

- Always reinforce that we read from **left to right**
- Many schools send **flash cards** home to practise. Play games with these cards. Your child needs to quickly recognise the “sight words” (was, is, this etc.) which will be sent home .
- **Spread** the words out. Ask your child to call out a particular word.
- Make 2 sets of the same words-play **snap** or matching games
- **Stepping stones:** let your child read the words as he walks over them
- **Password:** display the words your child finds tricky around the house.
- Help your child to **track the words** by running his finger under the words as he reads them

How can I develop my child’s reading comprehension?

Before reading: Look at the title, pictures and storyline to predict what is going to happen in the story

During reading: Encourage your child to use the pictures to help them “read” the story and predict the ending. Ask questions about the text once your child has completed a page

After reading: Discuss the story/characters; sequence the main events in the story; compare the story to other stories



What is Paired Reading?

Paired reading is a way to increase your child's exposure to words and provide a good reading model. It gives your child the opportunity to read any book which interests him and not just those on his current level.

- **Choose any book** from home / the library which your child wants to read - no matter what level it is
- Find a **good, comfortable spot** to read-you must both be able to see the text.
- Start reading together - you lead the process
- **Point to the words** as you read them
- When ready your **child can indicate when** they are **able to read** a particular word by giving you some kind of sign - a push or nudge
- She keeps reading **until she gets stuck** again
- **You** immediately pick the reading up from here and **continue reading for him until** he indicates **he can manage** a word/phrase on his own.
- **Praise** her efforts



My child is struggling - what can I do?

- Read every day including weekends
- Reading time must be enjoyable
- Encourage your child to read other books/reading materials/labels/instructions etc
- Vary your methods-if your child is losing interest or struggling, read some of the text for him
- Practise her "sight words" daily
- Talk to your child's teacher!
- Use Paired Reading

What other skills can help my child succeed at school?

The following skills are essential for success in Grade One and YOU play a very important role in your child's mastery of these skills:

- Physical Skills
- Language and Listening Skills
- Mathematical Skills



***Physical skills**

Your children can never get enough **PLAY**. Encourage them to play games, be it indoor or outdoor, as often as possible and try to avoid them sitting in front of the TV or computer.

Gross-motor activities: eg hopping, skipping, balancing, sit-ups, walking forwards and backwards, climbing over/under/into objects, playing on the jungle gym etc.

Fine-motor activities: eg colouring in, cutting out, sticking, drawing, painting, tearing paper, knitting, tracing etc.

Body image activities: eg pointing out parts of her body, playing "Simon Says", making a model of herself out of clay, etc

Directionality activities: eg give your child directions to follow using left and right, play games like "Twister" , etc

Visual Motor activities: eg playing throwing and catching games, playing any ball game, etc.

***Language and Listening Skills**

- Listen to your **child**
- **Keep eye contact** when she is speaking to you and insist on the same thing when you are talking to her
- Speak to your child using **full sentences** and good vocabulary. Don't allow your child to use "baby language"
- Talk to your child **ALL** the time when you are with him
- Play memory games with her (eg. memorising items on the shopping list)
- Give you child age appropriate chores to do, responsibilities and a few tasks to remember
- Read to your child



***Mathematical Skills**

The teaching of Mathematics has **changed** a lot in recent years. Our school has adopted the **problem -solving approach** which allows children to develop a sound number concept rather than just being taught rote “methods” and “quick tricks”.



The children start by working in a very **concrete** way and later move toward working with more **abstract** concepts of numbers. They are encouraged to use counters or their fingers to work out Mathematical problems.

Some ways you can help your child further develop Maths understanding are:

- Start using Maths vocabulary through the day, eg. tall and short, near and far, first and last, few and many, same and different, more and less, group, names of coins etc .
- Help develop their rote counting skills using number rhymes, counting rhymes, counting games (eg counting any object at any time of the day)
- Classify, sort, compare and share objects based on various criteria.
- Say the days of the month and months of the year
- Help her memorise a sequence of numbers
- Give him simple problems to solve
- Count backwards
- Let your child write numbers
- Let her discover the South African coins
- Give him opportunities to measure eg. Play in the bath with cups or spoons
- Talk to him about the time eg. long, short periods of time, after, before, yesterday, today, tomorrow, o'clock etc.

Please do NOT teach your child sums at home ahead of time! It is vital that (s)he establishes a good, sound number concept first before (s)he is exposed to abstract concepts.



Summary

- Your child's **feelings** about school are directly related to your **attitude** towards school.
- This is your **child's opportunity** to have a wonderful experience at school - do EVERYTHING you can to support him / her.
- Work hard at your **relationship with the teacher**.
- If you have any **problems**, approach the TEACHER CONCERNED directly.
- Don't always believe everything your child tells you about the teacher (and the teacher won't believe everything she hears about you!)

In conclusion

It must be remembered that the purpose of education is not to fill the minds of students with facts. It is to teach them to think, if that is possible, and always to think for themselves.

-- Robert Hutchins

You can teach a student a lesson for a day; but if you can teach him to learn by creating curiosity, he will continue the learning process as long as he lives.

-- Clay P. Bedford

"I continue to believe that if children are given the necessary tools to succeed, they will succeed beyond their wildest dreams!"

-- David Vitter, U.S. Senator

Welcome to the Sweet Valley family.

We know you and your child are going to treasure the memories you make here.

