

A perfect fit?

Being a child-ready school means meeting the needs of new starters. **Tamsin Grimmer** offers some advice for schools in this extract from her new book on the subject

Many schools attempt to make the transition into Reception as smooth as possible and consider the move from the child's perspective. However, for some children, learning how to be at school actually requires them to learn to be a different person.

School requires a child to interact, act and react in ways that could be alien to them prior to starting. Some people have even suggested that schools are institutionalising children, therefore we need to be sensitive to this and try to accept children as they are, without expecting them to fit into this school-shaped mould.

HOW TO BE CHILDREN-READY

- Trust the information shared by early years settings – they know their children very well. Remember that most children will regress slightly on transition and after a long break, and this does not mean that the transfer information was inaccurate.
- Provide a welcoming environment and increase your adult:child ratios for the autumn term.
- Include all adults who will work with the children in any training sessions – teachers, teaching assistants, mid-day supervisors, students – and ensure they understand the unique role that YR plays within the school.
- Review school readiness in the light of very young children and individual differences; for example, allow flexibility on uniform issues or a unisex uniform, or allow transitional objects to support children to settle in.
- Accept each child as they are and ensure that they know that they are valued and loved.



- Attend training on issues such as high anxiety, autism, gender confusion, dyspraxia and communication and language disorders and keep early identification high on the agenda.
- Keep children's interests and fascinations central to your activities, resources and learning environment.
- Prior to any sedentary activities, engage in some very physical activity.
- Allow plenty of time for playing and exploring and active learning.
- Create an ethos that values attitudes to learning and thinking.
- Maintain a consistent routine and share a visual timetable with the children.
- Introduce children to school routines gradually over the year; for example, playtime in the large playground and assemblies.
- Keep everything active with short teaching sessions and have lots of wriggle time! Include songs like 'Move like me' or 'Shake your sillies out'.
- Make story times interactive with props/actions/puppets/voices and pictures.
- Invite parents from your current Reception year to attend a new parents' evening/session to alleviate concerns.
- Allocate a class representative for

other parents to be in touch with – if possible, choose an experienced parent who has children higher up in the school.

- Pair up the new children with buddies from older year groups to look after them when introducing whole-school playtimes.
- Plan in some 1:1 time with each new child and value their uniqueness!

TOP TIPS FOR TEACHERS

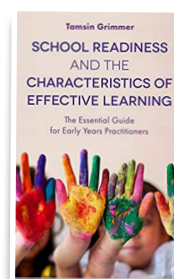
I thought I'd give the last word to the children themselves. I asked several children for their top tips for teachers who are going to help new children settle in to school life. I have recorded the children's words verbatim:

- 'Make sure lessons are fun and happy.'
- 'Give the children good advice like what to do when the bell rings.'
- 'Tell them it doesn't matter if they can read or write or not because that's what they'll learn.'
- 'Be really encouraging.'
- 'Give them time to rest and sometimes listen to relaxing music and let them take deep breaths in and deep breaths out.'
- 'Read books to them.'
- 'Be nice and be kind and make them feel at home and be fun and good and helpful.'
- 'Share cuddles and help us little ones as it is a little scary as my mummy and daddy and nanny cannot come with me.'



SCHOOL READINESS

- *School Readiness and the Characteristics of Effective Learning: The essential guide for early years practitioners* by Tamsin Grimmer explores the concept of 'school readiness' and how it can be defined in the context of the Characteristics of Effective Learning (CoEL). Included are ideas on how to plan learning experiences that will promote the CoEL, how early years settings can ease children's transition to school and how schools can be 'ready' for young children.
- To order a copy, visit: www.jkp.com



→ This is an edited extract from Chapter 8 of *School Readiness and the Characteristics of Effective Learning* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, £14.99)