Growing Independence & Being Ready for School

A practical guide for parents and carers • St Mary’s Primary School

“Let your light shine… as you grow.”

What do we mean by ‘school ready’?

School readiness is about confidence, relationships and everyday life skills — not being ‘perfect’.

Connect

Talk, listen, share books and enjoy conversations.

Communicate

Tell an adult what they need, how they feel and when they need help.

Manage themselves

Toilet, handwashing, dressing, eating and belongings — with support where needed.

Join in

Play with others, take turns, share, listen and follow simple instructions.

Have a go

Try, make mistakes, keep going and feel proud of small successes.

Be curious

Want to explore, ask questions, play and learn.

The big idea: don’t do for them what they can do for themselves

Independence grows through repeated opportunities to try.

1

Pause

Give your child time. We often step in because it is quicker.

2

Prompt

Use a simple reminder: “What do you need to do next?”

3

Praise effort

Notice persistence: “You kept trying even when it was tricky.”

4

Let them fix

Spills, forgotten items and small mistakes are opportunities to learn.

Self-care: the everyday skills that make school easier

Getting dressed

- Put on and take off coat, jumper and shoes.
- Practise zips, Velcro and simple fastenings.
- Get changed into PE kit with increasing independence.
- Label clothing and belongings.

Toileting & hygiene

- Use the toilet independently where possible.
- Wipe/clean themselves and wash hands.
- Blow/wipe their own nose and put tissues in the bin.
- Know how to tell an adult when they need help.

Belongings

- Carry their own book bag or school bag.
- Put belongings in the right place.
- Help pack and check what they need.
- Take responsibility for small jobs at home.

Communication: one of the best things you can practise at home

Talk, talk, talk

Have real conversations. Ask questions, listen to the answer and introduce new words.

Help them express needs

Practise saying/signing/using whatever communication works: “I need help”, “I’m worried”, “I need the toilet”.

Listen & follow

Give simple one- or two-step instructions: “Get your shoes and put them by the door.”

Build vocabulary through life

Cooking, shopping, walks, stories and play are opportunities to explain, describe and wonder together.

Social & emotional readiness

Children do not need to manage every feeling perfectly. They need adults who help them practise.

- Practise taking turns, sharing and playing fairly.
- Help your child name feelings: happy, cross, worried, disappointed, excited.
- Model what to do when things go wrong: stop, breathe, talk, try again.
- Encourage them to ask for help rather than giving up or becoming overwhelmed.
- Talk about kindness, friendship, listening and respecting other people.
- Play games where winning and losing are normal — and model good sportsmanship.

Routines build confidence

The more predictable the routine, the less energy your child needs to spend working out what happens next.

Morning

- Get up with enough time — avoid rushing.
- Use a simple visual/checklist if helpful.
- Get dressed, wash, eat breakfast and manage belongings.
- Build in time to walk or travel calmly to school.

After school

- Give time to decompress.
- Offer a snack and drink if needed.
- Talk about the day without turning it into an interrogation.
- Keep reading and play part of family life.

Evening

- Prepare clothes and school items together.
- Check the book bag together.
- Keep a consistent bedtime routine.
- Read together and allow time to wind down.

Food, drink & lunch: practise the practical bits

Eat independently

- Use a spoon and fork confidently.
- Sit at a table for meals.
- Try a range of foods without pressure.
- Help prepare simple food.

Open it yourself

- Practise lunchboxes, packets, wrappers and cartons.
- Put rubbish in the bin.
- Learn to open and close their water bottle.
- Expect a few spills — that is part of learning.

Healthy habits

- Make water the normal drink.
- Build active play into everyday life.
- Keep regular mealtimes and sleep routines.
- Talk positively about trying new foods.

Reading: you do not need to ‘teach school’ at home

The most valuable things you can do are simple, frequent and enjoyable.

Read to them

- Share stories, poems, non-fiction and comics.
- Talk about pictures and what might happen next.
- Ask what they notice and wonder about.
- Let them see you enjoying reading.

If they are learning phonics

- Practise the sounds and words the school has taught.
- Use the decodable books provided by school.
- Keep practice short, positive and regular.
- Ask school if you are unsure how to help.

Build language

- Explain new words.
- Tell stories together.
- Sing nursery rhymes and songs.
- Talk about everyday experiences.

Independence is built through small jobs

Give your child real responsibility — not just pretend responsibility.

At home

Put dirty clothes in basket • tidy toys • help set table

Getting ready

Choose between two outfits • pack bag • find shoes

At school

Carry bag • hang coat • put books away • look after belongings

In the community

Hold your own handrail • carry a small item • order politely • say thank you

School confidence: what parents can do

Talk positively about school

Focus on facts and what your child can look forward to. Listen to worries before trying to solve them.

Goodbyes: warm and brief

A consistent goodbye helps. If your child is upset, stay calm and follow the school's approach.

Practise the routine

Walk the route, talk through drop-off/pick-up and make the new routine familiar.

Attendance matters

Regular attendance helps children settle into routines, relationships and learning. Talk to school early if something is making attendance difficult.

A simple challenge for this week

Choose one thing. Practise it every day. Then move on to the next.

1

1. Choose

One independence skill your child currently needs help with.

2

2. Step back

Give them more time and fewer prompts.

3

3. Notice

Praise the effort, not just whether they got it right.

4

4. Repeat

Small, repeated opportunities create confidence.

“I can have a go.” “I can ask for help.” “I can keep trying.”

Remember: school readiness is a journey

Every child develops at a different pace. Confidence, curiosity, communication and independence matter.

- Do not compare your child with other children.
- Focus on the next small step they can make.
- Adapt expectations and support where your child has additional needs.
- Please talk to us if you have concerns — partnership between home and school matters.
- Above all: enjoy your child. Everyday conversations, play, stories and shared experiences are powerful learning.

Useful guidance for parents and carers

- Department for Education (2026): Getting children ready for Reception / Supporting a smooth transition into Reception.
- Best Start in Life (2026): Preparing for school — communication, independence, social & emotional development, physical development and healthy routines.
- NHS: Sleep and young children; healthy eating and physical activity advice.
- St Mary's original Parent & Carers Little Wandle Early Reading and Phonics & Encouraging Independence and Responsibility Workshop (2022).

Key message: school readiness is about everyday life skills and positive relationships — not about getting children to 'do