



WOODLANDS
Infant School

Be the Best Me You Can Be

Getting Ready for Reception

A guide for parents and carers

Welcome

Starting Reception is an exciting step for children and families. At Woodlands, we know that every child develops at their own pace and arrives with different strengths and experiences. Some children may have attended our school nursery, a private nursery or no previous setting. Children do not need to be “school ready” in every way before they begin. Reception is where they will continue to learn, practise and grow in confidence. This guide shares skills to keep building at home and answers common questions to help you and your child feel confident, settled and ready to start Reception at Woodlands.



Please remember

This is not a test or checklist your child must pass. It is a guide to help you support your child with confidence.



The skills below are not a test or a checklist your child must pass. They are practical next steps for children moving into Reception. They focus on growing independence, confidence, communication, full-day routines and early learning behaviours. We will continue to teach and support these skills every day in school.



Personal independence and self-care



Reception children are usually ready to take more responsibility for their belongings, toileting and clothing, with adult reminders and support when needed.

Skill to begin practising	Why it helps	Where to get support	
Use the toilet independently, including wiping, flushing and washing hands	Helps children feel confident, comfortable and able to manage the school day.	ERIC: Toilets and school readiness  BBC The Getting Ready Badge  Leicestershire NHS Dressing Skills Guide 	Conquering Kindergarten  BBC Bitesize: starting Primary school  NHS advice on handwashing 
Tell an adult if they have had an accident, feel unwell or need help	Helps staff support your child quickly, calmly and sensitively.		
Put on and take off their coat, jumper and shoes with increasing independence	Supports outdoor learning, lunchtime, PE and home-time routines.		
Begin to manage simple fastenings such as zips, buttons, Velcro and elasticated clothing	Builds independence and reduces frustration during busy transitions.		
Recognise and look after their own coat, bag, water bottle and book bag	Helps children take responsibility for their things and settle into routines.		
Tidy away something they have used with a reminder	Supports responsibility and care for the classroom environment.		
Use the toilet independently, including wiping, flushing and washing hands	Helps children feel confident, comfortable and able to manage the school day.		

2 Eating, drinking and lunchtime confidence

Reception children have a longer day and usually eat lunch at school. Practising small lunchtime routines at home can make the first weeks feel easier.

Skill to begin practising	Why it helps	Where to get support	
Eat a packed lunch or school dinner with growing independence	Helps children manage the lunchtime routine and feel comfortable in the dinner hall.	NHS Wales: Drinking from a cup 	NHS Healthier Families: Food facts 
Use a fork and spoon, and begin to use a knife for simple foods	Supports independence and confidence at mealtimes.	NHS Recipe and Meal ideas 	Raising Children: Nutrition and Fitness 
Open simple containers, packets and wrappers, asking for help when needed	Helps lunchtime feel calmer and gives children more time to eat.	NHS Healthier lunchbox ideas 	Packed lunch guidance 
Drink from a named water bottle and know when to ask for a refill	Helps children stay hydrated throughout the day.		
Try new foods without pressure	Builds confidence and helps children manage school meals or packed lunches.		
Know any important food rules, allergies or foods they must not eat	Helps children stay safe, with adult support and clear information from families.		

3 Communication, language and listening

In Reception, children take part in longer conversations, group times, stories, songs and instructions. They are still learning, and adults will model and support language every day.

Skill to begin practising	Why it helps	Where to get support	
Speak, gesture or show clearly when they need help	Helps adults understand and support your child quickly.	BBC Tiny Happy People: Talking tips	BookTrust: Getting ready to start school
Listen to a short story, song, rhyme or explanation as part of a group	Builds attention, vocabulary and confidence for whole-class learning.		
Follow a simple two-part instruction, such as "put your coat on and line up"	Helps children manage routines and transitions more independently.	NHS Start for Life: Activities for toddlers	BBC Tiny Happy People
Join in with conversations by taking turns to speak and listen	Supports friendships, play and speaking confidence.		
Talk about something they have done, made, seen or enjoyed	Builds vocabulary, memory, confidence and storytelling.	Speech and Language UK	
Use home language, signs, gestures or visuals where this helps communication	All communication is valued and helps children feel understood and included.		

4 Emotional wellbeing, friendships and resilience

Reception children are developing a stronger sense of self. They are learning how to manage feelings, friendships, choices and small challenges with support.

Skill to begin practising	Why it helps	Where to get support	
Separate from their main adult after a clear, positive goodbye routine	Supports settling and helps children feel safe at the start of the day.	NHS Top Tips for Building Resilience in Young people	BBC Tiny Happy People
Play with, alongside and near other children, sharing ideas and resources	Supports friendships and collaborative play.		
Take turns, share and wait for a short time with adult support	Helps children manage games, group activities and classroom routines.	BBC Talking to your child about emotions	

Name or show feelings such as happy, sad, worried, cross, excited or tired	Helps adults support emotional regulation and wellbeing.		Action for Children: Feelings and behaviour 
Ask for help, comfort or reassurance from school adults	Helps children feel safe and build trusting relationships.		
Keep trying when something is tricky, with encouragement	Builds resilience and a positive attitude to learning.		

Physical development and full-day stamina

Reception children need time, space and practise to build strength, coordination and stamina for a full school day. Movement and play remain central to learning.

Skill to begin practising	Why it helps	Where to get support	
Run, jump, climb, balance and move safely in different spaces	Supports outdoor learning, confidence and safe play.	Tiny Happy People 	Active together: Active tots 
Use scissors, glue, paintbrushes, playdough tools and construction toys safely	Builds hand strength, coordination and control.	Leicestershire healthy tots 	NHS physical activity guidance for under 5s 
Begin to hold a pencil or writing tool comfortably for drawing and mark-making	Supports early writing without expecting perfect letter formation.		
Carry their own bag, water bottle or lunchbox for short distances	Builds independence and confidence around the school.		
Manage the journey to school and a busy school day with rest at home	Helps children cope with new routines and longer days.		
Use the toilet, wash hands and manage clothing after outdoor play or PE	Supports hygiene, independence and smooth transitions.		

6 Early learning behaviours



Reception children learn through play, high-quality interactions, stories, songs, adult-led teaching and child-led exploration. The aim is confidence, curiosity and enjoyment.

Skill to begin practising	Why it helps	Where to get support	
Enjoy sharing books, talking about pictures and joining in with repeated phrases	Builds vocabulary, comprehension and early reading confidence.	BookTrust: Getting ready to start school	NHS Start for Life: Activities for toddlers
Recognise their own name or begin to notice the letters in it	Helps children find belongings and begin to connect print with meaning.		
Join in with songs, rhymes, clapping rhythms and listening games	Supports phonological awareness, speech, memory and early phonics.	BBC Tiny Happy People: Songs and rhymes	PACEY: School readiness information for parents
Make marks, draw pictures and begin to talk about what they have made	Builds early writing confidence and fine motor control.		
Notice and talk about numbers, amounts, shapes, patterns and measures in daily life	Builds curiosity and early mathematical thinking.		
Choose an activity, stay with it for a short time and tidy up with support	Builds concentration, independence and positive learning habits.		

Starting Reception: parent FAQ

What is Reception like?

Reception is the first year of school. Children learn through a careful balance of play, adult-led teaching, stories, songs, routines, outdoor learning and opportunities to explore. The classroom is set up to help children build independence, curiosity, language, friendships and early learning skills.

In Reception, your child will...



What will my child's first day be like? What will they do?

Your child's first day will be calm, welcoming and focused on helping them feel safe and settled. They will be greeted by the Reception adults, shown where to put their coat, bag and water bottle and helped to find something to play with.

The first few days are about relationships, routines and confidence. There will be plenty to explore and adults will support children to play with each other and begin to build friendships. In addition to play, children will listen to stories, sing songs and begin to learn simple routines such as snack time, tidy-up time and sitting together for a short carpet session.

What does a typical day in Reception look like?

A typical Reception day includes a balance of whole-class routines, small-group teaching, child-led play, outdoor learning, story time, phonics, maths, lunch and time to learn with friends. Children will practise putting belongings away, choosing activities, tidying up, listening together, using resources safely and becoming more independent.

Much of children's learning in Reception happens through play. Adults join children in their play, introduce new vocabulary, model language, support social skills and help children develop confidence and independence.

What are the key learning areas covered during the week?

Reception follows the Early Years Foundation Stage. This means children learn through seven areas of learning and development.

Area of learning	What this may look like in Reception
Communication and Language	Listening carefully to stories and instructions, learning and using new vocabulary, joining in with songs and rhymes, talking with adults and friends, asking and answering questions and beginning to explain ideas in full sentences.
Personal, Social and Emotional Development	Settling into full-time school, building relationships with adults and friends, learning classroom routines, sharing, taking turns, managing feelings, developing independence and building confidence as part of a class.
Physical Development	Developing strength, balance and coordination through indoor and outdoor play, using tools safely, building hand strength for writing, practising pencil control, managing coats, shoes and belongings and becoming increasingly independent with toileting, handwashing and lunchtime routines.
Literacy	Sharing and discussing stories, joining in with rhymes and poems, recognising sounds, learning phonics, beginning to read simple words and sentences and developing writing through drawing, mark-making, letter formation and early sentence writing.
Mathematics	Counting, recognising numbers, comparing amounts, exploring patterns, sorting and matching, learning about shapes and measures and beginning to solve simple problems through practical activities and play.
Understanding the World	Talking about families, communities and celebrations, exploring the local area, learning about nature and seasonal change, using simple technology and asking questions about people, places and the world around them.
Expressive Arts and Design	Drawing, painting, singing, dancing, music, role play, construction, imaginative play and exploring materials, colour, texture and design to create and express ideas.

Children do not experience these as separate “lessons” in the way older children might. In Reception, much of this is woven through play, routines, stories, songs, outdoor learning and adult interactions.

Will my child need to be able to do everything before they start Reception?

No. Children do not need to be able to do everything before they start. Reception is where children continue to learn, practise and grow in confidence. It helps if they have begun to practise some independence and communication skills at home, but every child develops at their own pace.

What are the most important things to practise before Reception?

The most helpful things to practise are:

- using the toilet and washing hands with increasing independence
- putting on and taking off a coat and jumper
- recognising their own belongings
- asking for help when they need it
- sitting for a short story, meal or group time
- opening lunchboxes, bottles and simple packaging
- sharing books, songs and rhymes
- playing with other children and taking turns with support
- saying goodbye after a short, positive routine

Does my child need to be toilet trained?

Most children are working towards using the toilet independently by Reception. We know that some children may still need support because of medical, developmental or individual needs. Please speak to us before your child starts if your child is not fully toilet trained, has accidents, needs changing or needs a care plan. We will work with you sensitively.

For advice, parents may find these links useful:

[ERIC: Toilets and school readiness](#)

[Starting Reception: Potty-training](#)

What if my child has accidents?

Please do not worry. Accidents can still happen, especially when children are settling into a new routine or concentrating on play. We will support your child calmly and kindly. Please make sure your child has spare clothes in school, including underwear, socks and trousers or leggings.

What should my child wear in Reception?

Reception children should wear school uniform, as listed in the Parents and Carers section on the school website. Please choose clothing that is comfortable, practical and easy for your child to manage. Velcro shoes, elasticated waistbands and simple fastenings can make a big difference. Children will be busy painting, building, climbing, digging, exploring outside and learning actively.

Does everything need to be named?

Yes, please. It is very helpful if all clothing and belongings are clearly named, including coats, jumpers, cardigans, shoes, bags, lunchboxes and water bottles. This helps children recognise their own things and supports independence.

What should my child bring to Reception?

Your child will need:

- a named water bottle
- a named book bag
- a named coat suitable for the weather
- spare clothes in a named bag (this will be kept in school in case your child needs changing).
- optional piece of fruit for a snack
- lunch if your child is not having a school dinner

Please avoid sending in toys from home unless this has been agreed with the Reception team.

Can my child bring a comfort toy or special item?

We understand that starting Reception can feel emotional. If your child has a comfort item that helps them settle, please speak to us. We will work with you to help your child feel secure while gradually building confidence and independence.

What if my child cries when I leave?

This is common. A calm, positive and brief goodbye usually helps children settle more quickly. Staff are experienced in supporting children who feel upset at drop-off. We will comfort your child, help them find something to do and let you know if we have any concerns about how they are settling. Staff are always available to speak with at pick up.

How can I help my child with separation?

Practise short separations before they start, such as staying with a trusted adult for a short time. Talk positively about Reception and reassure your child that you will come back. A simple goodbye routine can help, for example:

“Have a lovely time. I will come back after Reception. The grown-ups will look after you.”

Try not to sneak away, as this can make children feel more anxious.

What if my child is very shy or quiet?

That is okay. Some children need time to watch, listen and feel safe before joining in. We will not force children to speak or join in before they are ready. We will build warm relationships, offer gentle encouragement and help them find activities they enjoy.

What if my child does not speak clearly yet?

Children develop speech and language at different rates. Please let us know if you have any concerns. You can support your child by talking together, sharing books, singing rhymes and giving them time to respond.

Useful support can be found here: [BBC Tiny Happy People](#)

What if my child uses gestures, signs or another language?

That is absolutely fine. Children communicate in different ways. Please share any words, signs, gestures or phrases your child uses at home so we can understand and support them. It is also helpful to tell us key words your child may use in another language, especially for toileting, food, comfort and family members.

Does my child need to know letters and numbers before Reception?

No. Children do not need to be reading, writing or doing formal maths before they start. The best preparation is talking, playing, singing, sharing stories, noticing the world around them, counting everyday objects, comparing amounts, spotting shapes and enjoying mark-making.

Will my child learn phonics in Reception?

Yes. Reception children are taught phonics in school. You can help at home by sharing books, singing rhymes, listening for sounds in words, playing “I spy” with sounds, clapping syllables and enjoying language together. There is no need to teach formal phonics before your child starts. Your child’s teacher will communicate regularly about the sounds and letters they are learning in school, so you can support with this at home. We also ask that you celebrate your child’s reading with them when we send home the book they have been reading in school.

How can I help my child love books?

Share books little and often. Your child does not need to sit for a long story. Looking at pictures, talking about what you can see, joining in with repeated phrases and choosing favourite books are all valuable.

Useful support can be found here: [BookTrust: Getting ready to start school](#)

Will my child have snack or lunch?

Children have a piece of fruit and milk provided for them every day. Your child is welcome to bring in their own fruit for snack if they wish.

Reception children stay for the full school day and have lunch at school. They may have a school dinner or bring a packed lunch. It helps if your child can sit for a meal, drink from a water bottle, use cutlery and ask for help opening containers or packets.

What if my child is a fussy eater?

Please let us know if your child has particular food preferences, allergies or anxieties around food. We will encourage children gently and positively. We will never force children to eat. Likewise, we will never let a child go hungry. If we have concerns about the amount your child wishes to eat at lunchtimes, we will speak with you.

For healthy eating advice, parents may find this useful: [NHS Healthier Families: Food facts](#)

How much sleep does my child need?

Young children need good sleep routines to help them manage busy Reception sessions. A consistent bedtime, calm evening routine and regular morning routine can make a big difference to how settled and ready children feel. For a 4-5 year old, the usual guidance is around 10-13 hours of sleep in a 24 hour period.

Further information around sleep for little ones [can be found here](#).

What if my child still gets tired?

That is very common. Reception is a big change and many children are tired at first. Quiet evenings, early nights and simple after-school routines can help. Please speak to us if you are worried about how tired your child seems.

What if my child has allergies, medical needs or additional needs?

Please tell us as soon as possible. We will work with you to understand your child's needs and make sure the right support is in place. This may include medical information, care plans, allergy plans, individual support or additional transition arrangements.

How will you help my child settle?

We will build warm relationships, help children learn routines, support them with play, encourage independence and give them time to feel safe. Some children settle quickly and others need longer. Both are completely normal.

How can I prepare my child over the summer?

You can help by:

- talking positively about Reception and Woodlands
- practising the journey to school
- walk past school and point out their new classroom to get them excited
- sharing stories, songs and rhymes
- practising putting on coats, jumpers and shoes
- using a water bottle and lunchbox
- trying short separations with trusted adults
- encouraging your child to carry their own small bag
- giving them small jobs at home , such as putting shoes by the door, hanging coats up or tidying away their toys.
- visiting parks, libraries or playgroups to build confidence around other children

What if I am worried about my child starting Reception?

Please speak to us. No worry is too small. We would much rather know if you are concerned so that we can work together and support your child from the very beginning.

What is the most important thing for parents to remember?

Your child does not need to be “ready” in every way. The most important things are that they feel safe, loved, encouraged and positive about starting Reception. We will work with you to help them settle, grow in confidence and enjoy learning.