



July 2020

## **William Stukeley Church of England Primary School**

### **New Reception Parents (Virtual) Induction Session**

On Friday 10<sup>th</sup> July 2020, the school held a virtual presentation for our new Reception parents with children starting school during September 2020.

This is a short written account of that meeting. The school announced:

We are delighted that parents had chosen and accepted a place at William Stukeley CE Primary School. On behalf of the staff, governors, children and parents, it gives us great pleasure to welcome parents and their families to the school.

Everyone will do their very best to make parents and children feel safe and secure and with the help of the parents, we aim to provide the children with the best possible education.

Starting school should be a happy and exciting time and we hope everyone is looking forward to September – even at this crazy time!

It's not the start any of us would have wanted, but we'll deal with what we are presented with. The school has not closed over the whole of the lockdown period. During this time, we have acquired new skills and organisation including planning for the children to enter the school safely, to be in and around school safely and to leave for home safely.

September will bring us similar challenges and, even though the science tells us that the risk is minimal in schools, we'll still be observing COVID safe guidance.

In previous years, children have experienced a programme of induction. Obviously, this has not been possible this year. Because of this, the first two days - Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> September and Friday 4<sup>th</sup> September - will be short days. Children will leave for home at lunch time, but in the afternoon Mrs Coote will supply some (virtual) guidance around phonics and the use of the Tapestry program. Details on all the timings will be forwarded.

During the presentation, Mrs Coote offered her ***New Reception Top Ten Tips*** to prepare your child to start at Big School:

As grown-ups we need to remember that, although starting school is very exciting, it can also seem very scary to our little ones. Even if they are used to going to nursery/pre-school or childcare, school is a whole new unknown experience, especially for those children that haven't any familiarity. Add to this the whole scenario of Covid, and we need to do all we can to try to support them with the beginning school.

As adults we are used to going to new places and knowing at the end of the day we will return home, but a child's view is quite different; parents take them to this strange new place and leave them there! Even though you say you are coming back, they have no guarantee that will happen. Experience reassures them, but we have to get there first. So it is very important to acknowledge that this is a very anxious time for children. The most important thing that we all want when your child starts school is that they are happy, but also try these tips to make transition to school as smooth as we can.

### 1. Toileting

It might surprise you to know that quite a number of children start school not being able to use the toilet independently. It is a very important job for parents to train independent toileting. We do have Teaching Assistants, but their main job is to support other learning. Of course, accidents will happen and we will help your child to clean up and get changed, but accidents happening daily or multiple times a day have to be minimised and you can support this by regularly practicing these steps:

Helping them recognise when they need to go

Deal with clothing (zips, belts, skirts pants)

Sit on/stand and use the loo (some boys have never encountered a urinal before coming to school so if possible familiarise them with them)

Wipe own bottom and dispose of paper in the loo

Flush the loo

Wash and dry own hands

Time spent at home helping your child with this will stop so much anxiety that we know can result if your child is not familiar with the basic toilet skills.

### 2. Labelling

Make sure that **everything** your child has in school is labelled (jumpers, shirts, dresses, skirts, vests, coats, scarves, hats, gloves, PE kit, plimsolls, trainers, shoes, wellies, bags, snack boxes, drink bottles – basically, anything that could possibly leave their possession).

Use a permanent marker pen or sew/iron in labels. Check them regularly as they can fade or come off in the laundry.

Again, time spent labelling is most definitely not wasted as children get very anxious when they lose their things or can't identify theirs from 30 other identical items.

Things are not cheap these days so avoid the frustration of shelling out for lovely school kit only to never see it again after the first week because no one can identify it.

It also prevents those infuriating moments when you are in a hurry to get away from school at the end of the day but you have to spend an age going through lost property because we haven't been able to match up items to their owners.

### 3. Supplies

Ensure that you have everything your child needs for when they start school. You will find it listed in the welcome pack, which you should have picked up a while back. This includes uniform, appropriate school shoes, bag, indoor and outdoor PE kit and wellies. Not only is it important to be properly equipped, but to the child it is so exciting to get all this unfamiliar new kit. We have known children who are so thrilled with having the bits of uniform that they have wanted to wear it long before actually starting school! Also, remember to send them every day with suitable outer wear. British weather can be so changeable, so a lightweight raincoat in their bag, sunhat during summer months and a warm scarf, hat and gloves/mittens in winter will reassure your child that they are ready for it all. It can be easy to forget a coat, especially if you have to travel to school by car; it's better to have them and not need them than the other way around.

### 4. Practice dressing/undressing independently

If your child is unable to do this, they need to learn before they start. Teaching these skills at home rather than in school, where there are potentially 30 others in need of the same support, is so much less stressful for all. Being able to put on and zip up their own coat is a super skill when everyone is eager to get outdoors. Getting in and out of PE kit and uniform is equally as important to practice as we usually have a couple of PE sessions a week. Putting on wellies and waterproof overalls is important for our forest school sessions, so please take the time and prepare them for this. We know that some fastenings and items of clothing can be more challenging, but don't always avoid them and just go for the easy option of Velcro because they will need to negotiate the other things at some point. Equally, don't give them too many unnecessary challenges; we want to spend time doing the fun activities not with such dull necessities.

### 5. Using a knife and fork

Free school meals are available for all Reception children and are provided at our school by Boston-based farmers, Willoughby Foods. There are both hot and cold options. If you choose a hot meal for your child, they will need to be able to use a knife and fork. We are lucky in that we have one dinner lady assigned to our class, but that is still 30 plates of dinners to cut up and feed to the children. If they can only use their hands or a spoon at the moment, take time to practice using a knife and fork both with real meals and with playdough so that they can negotiate using them independently. These skills develop with time and practice, so if they begin school just using a fork to feed themselves, that's a start. They should be able to feed themselves as an absolute minimum.

If your child is going to bring a packed lunch, then it is also important that they are able to independently access their food, so practice undoing the lunch bag/boxes and

drink bottles. Think carefully about the packaging of items in their lunch; are they easy to open? If not, is there an alternative?

Pre-empting these challenges will give your child confidence and minimise anxieties around lunchtimes. I know from years of experience that this can be one of the scariest times of their day if time hasn't been taken over these seemingly trivial tasks.

6. Rehearse the morning routine

This is especially important for children not used to getting up and having to leave the house in the morning. A week or so before school actually begins, start practising the early morning routine:

Waking and getting up at the time you think is necessary

Getting breakfast

Washing, teeth cleaning and dressing (with as much independence as possible)

All this will establish good routines, allowing you to see if you have enough time for a start to the day that is as stress-free as possible.

7. Walking to school

Linked to the previous point, have a couple of dry runs to see how much time is needed to arrive at school on time. Little legs can take a lot longer than we adults might think to cover the same amount of ground, particularly when everything is so unfamiliar and distracting along the way. If you practice the walk and familiarise your child with what to expect when it happens for real, another stress point can be avoided.

Arriving at school late can definitely raise stress and anxiety and can result in them missing important parts of the classroom morning routines, making settling in more difficult.

8. Get them used to sharing

Most probably, your child has never had to share so much as they will when they start reception and it can be a little overwhelming if they are not properly prepared for it. At the age of four, hopefully they are just about getting used to the idea that the entire world does not just revolve around them and that the needs of others are just as important. If you are lucky enough to have siblings in the same household, this task is much easier. If not, emphasise it when they are playing with you. If it's possible under Covid conditions, try to arrange for cousins or a play-date with a friend to give them the opportunity to practice the skills. It can be as simple as collaborating on a painting, but only having one paint brush available that you both have to share. Playing board games is fantastic for promoting the skills involved in turn taking. Use

meal times/treats to give them the idea of fairness. Ask them things like, "If one person receives more than their fair share of the ice cream, then someone ends up feeling upset. That's not right, so what must we do?"

Through these experiences, your child will learn to be more sociable and altogether happier with the school environment.

9. Start to talk about starting big school

It is really important to talk about coming to school so that they don't feel as if they are being thrown in at the deep end on that first day. There are some good children's books that cover the subject of starting school and many of them also featuring as videos on YouTube:

'Topsy and Tim Start School' by Jean Adamson

'Starting School' by Janet and Allan Ahlberg

'Harry and the Dinosaurs go to School' by Ian Whybrow

'Spot Goes to School' by Eric Hill

'I am absolutely too small for school' by Lauren Child

Sharing any of these will naturally bring up the topic and can help to ease some of the anxieties that they may be having. Try to not over-do it and avoid negative questions/statements like:

"But mummy is going to have to leave you there, isn't she?"

"But you don't know anyone there, do you?"

"but are you worried about starting school?"

This can promote anxieties that were not there before. Children look to their adults for guidance on how they should be/behave so if you are projecting anxieties it can easily transmit to them. Turn those negatives into positives:

"I am going to feel so excited to pick you up at the end of the school day and hear about what you have been doing!"

"you will be making lots of new friends, you are so good at making friends, just like you did when we went to ..."

Tell them how exciting you think it is going to be, but if they do express worries themselves, don't brush it away with a comment like, "oh don't worry." It is really important that you listen to them and help them to rethink the problem positively.

10. Meet up with other parents

Support yourself and each other by meeting up / getting to know the other parents (the best you can) of children that are starting school with your child in September. This way, your children are given the chance to get to know each other better and you can share useful ideas, especially as some of you have already experienced your children starting the school and others haven't.