

## Ready, Steady, Go...



### Guidance on School Readiness

*“School readiness involves more than just children. School readiness in the broadest sense is about children, families, early environments, schools and communities. Children are not innately “ready” or “not ready” for school. Their skills and development are strongly influenced by their families and through their interactions with other people and environments before coming to school.”* Maxwell and Clifford 2004

## Introduction

Despite the term ‘School Readiness’ being widely used, there is no clearly agreed national definition. This potentially leads to an inconsistent approach to supporting children to be “ready” for school. For example there is debate about whether school readiness refers to the child being ready for transition into Year One, or into the Reception year (YR). In this guidance, developed by a working party from Bath & North East Somerset Children’s Centre and Early Years Services, school readiness refers to transition into YR.

## Aims

It is hoped that this guidance will help to:

- Promote a shared understanding of what school readiness means
- Guide reflection on effective provision for promoting school readiness
- Inspire professionals across the early years sector to work together to achieve effective processes and practices which support school readiness
- Ensure that all children in Bath & North East Somerset start school with confidence and with the competencies and dispositions to support them to be successful life-long learners.

## Supporting documents

Public Health’s **“Health matters: giving every child the best start in life”** (May 2016) recognises that what is important in the formative years before school starts is a loving, secure and reliable relationship with a parent or carer. This supports a child’s:

- ✓ Emotional wellbeing
- ✓ Brain development
- ✓ Language development and ability to learn
- ✓ Capacity to form and maintain positive relationships with others



**The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) 2017** sets out the standards that all early years providers must meet in order to provide the “broad range of skills, knowledge and attitudes children need as foundations for good future progress.” p5

***“ It promotes teaching and learning to ensure children’s ‘school readiness’ and gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life.”*** p5

**'Are you ready?'** (2014), **Ofsted's** thematic report on school readiness, identifies that *"There is no nationally agreed definition"* (2014:6). However it highlights some areas which it deems important in ensuring children are ready for school. These include:

- Early intervention
- Accurate, clear baseline assessment of needs
- Strong inclusive practice.
- Parental engagement in children's learning and development
- Children's communication skills
- Children's personal, social and emotional development
- Physical development
- Preparing children and parents to transition into school

In addition to the key documents above, this guidance has drawn on **UNICEF's** report **'School Readiness: A Conceptual Framework'** (2012) which usefully describes three dimensions of school readiness. Each dimension has its own 'fundamental question' as follows:

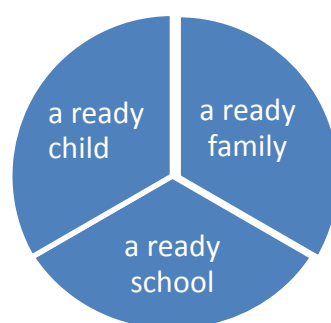
1. **Children's readiness for school:** Are all children entering school with the social and cognitive skills and competencies needed to achieve in school?
2. **Schools' readiness for children:** Are schools equipped and ready to provide optimal learning environments for all children?
3. **Families' and communities' readiness for school:** Are families and communities ready to help their children make a smooth transition into school?

## What is school readiness?

Based on these key documents, this guidance adopts the following construct of school readiness:

**School Readiness = a ready child + a ready family + a ready school** working together with shared understanding, so all children are supported to develop the confidence, competencies and dispositions they need to thrive through school and beyond.

The statements which follow describe some of the contributory factors enabling children to be confident, lifelong learners.



### A ready child:

- ✓ Is self-confident
- ✓ Is curious, adventurous and motivated to explore the world around them
- ✓ Regulates their emotions and behaviours in an age-appropriate way
- ✓ Feels safe and secure about change
- ✓ Is open and confident to have a go at new things
- ✓ Bounces back from difficulties and look for solutions to problems
- ✓ Recognises and respects similarities and differences between people they meet
- ✓ Enjoys being playful and imaginative
- ✓ Communicates and interacts respectfully with peers and adults
- ✓ Uses a growing vocabulary to express and understand ideas
- ✓ Enjoys gaining skills and knowledge through day-to-day experiences

## A ready family:

- ✓ Understands the crucial role they play in their own child's education
- ✓ Knows how they can support their child's learning at home and prioritises time for this
- ✓ Links readily with early years professionals for any support they need e.g. with pre-school setting, health visitor, Children's Centre Services
- ✓ Appreciates that moving on to school is a significant time of change in their child's life and knows how they can support this
- ✓ Acknowledges that this transition time may bring a range of feelings to them as parents/carers
- ✓ Knows about their child's individual stage of learning and development, appreciating their strengths as well as any areas needing particular support

## A ready school:

- ✓ Links closely with the child's early years setting so they understand the child's individual stage of learning and development, and any areas needing particular support
- ✓ Welcomes the child and family into the life of the school well before the child starts, through accessible, clear communications and events such as home visits and stay and play sessions
- ✓ Recognises the need to be approachable, with a genuinely open door attitude, so all parents feel welcome and know that their ideas and concerns are noticed and valued
- ✓ Values the crucial role that parents play in their child's education and models this respectful ethos in everyday practice throughout the school
- ✓ Links with feeder settings to develop a shared, consistent understanding of early childhood assessment, so that children's strengths are celebrated and any needs are recognised, clearly communicated and well supported

## Promoting school readiness: some examples of local collaborative working

Early years settings, schools and early childhood services play a very important complementary role in supporting children and families to be ready for school.

### The voice of Early Years settings

In some areas of Bath & North East Somerset, local peer clusters of early years settings have met to discuss how they can support school readiness most effectively. For example in Radstock, a working party from St Nicholas Primary School and St Mary's Primary School Writhlington developed a practical "Helping hand to school" guide, for children and families in the area.



- ✓ **I am confident:** I can speak for myself, I don't mind getting messy and I can make friends
- ✓ **I like to learn:** I am curious. I can concentrate, I like finding out about stuff and I can ask questions
- ✓ **I can be independent:** I can go to the loo, dress myself and say when I need help
- ✓ **I can control my body:** I can jump, balance, run and stop. I can use a knife and fork and tidy up after myself
- ✓ **I can clearly express my own needs and feelings** so other people can understand me

Another group of early years settings reflected together on the questions

1. What do we think school readiness is?
2. How do we know if a child and family were school ready?
3. What things do we do to ensure a child is school ready?

A cluster of schools and early years settings in Keynsham produced a guide to support parents' understanding of school readiness. Children's centre family support workers use this leaflet as part of their work to promote school readiness.



## The voice of parents

A group of parents accessing targeted Children's Centre services were asked their views on school readiness. They commented on ways they felt schools could support transition, so that children feel confident and ready.

*"The teachers need to pick up on the things the children can do rather than what they can't, or they lose confidence."*

*"Different children need different things, so being school ready depends on the child's needs."*

*"If a child is not ready they should have a softer start – like a transition period."*

*"I don't want to be told "They will be okay, they will be okay" Schools need to listen to mums."*

*"Schools need to understand that parents know their child best."*

## The voice of early years and health professionals

Representatives from a number of partner agencies in Bath & North East Somerset met to discuss school readiness. As part of this discussion, the group defined their vision of effective, universal transition, as follows, seeing this process as an important part of preparing all children to be ready for school.

***"Transition is a planned, smooth and seamless process, of a child and their family moving from one learning environment to another, safe in the knowledge that parents and professionals will work together to minimise disruption to each individual child's learning and emotional journey. A good transition helps promote enthusiastic life-long learning."***

In addition to universal transition support, it is important to note that some children will be moving to school with identified additional needs, special educational needs and/or disabilities where enhanced transition planning between families, settings, schools and professionals is strongly recommended, coordinated by a named Lead for Transition.

## Conclusion: Moving Forwards

This guidance can be used by anyone involved in the care and education of young children to support their effective practices around school readiness. For example, local groups of schools and settings could work together to produce bespoke information for the families in their communities, or key messages from the guidance could be included in a setting's prospectus.

This guidance may be further revised in the light of feedback from groups such as the multi-agency Early Years Network meetings. It would also be valuable to include children's views on their experiences of starting school. Children are of course central to this process and may ultimately be the best judges of a successful approach to school readiness.

As effective links between early years professionals grow and strengthen it is hoped that every child in Bath and North East Somerset will be fully supported to be ready for school.