

It's Your Next Step

Your guide to
starting big school
for the first time.

Previously known
as *Get Ready, Go!*

get ready
go!

Lee Herdman





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Scripture Union Trinity House, Opal Court, Opal Drive, Fox Milne, Milton Keynes, MK15 0DF
email: info@scriptureunion.org.uk
www.scriptureunion.org.uk

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Introduction



How might your child feel about starting a new school? Excited, anxious, nervous, worried, afraid? Possibly even a mixture of these emotions. Sometimes, it can be difficult for children to express how they are feeling using any words at all.

How might you, a parent/carer, feel about your child starting school? Similar words might spring to mind as you try to describe what can be an exciting and challenging transition for you, too.

Although many young children will already have had pre-school or nursery experience before starting school, this next step is an important marker and change in a child's life; it represents another milestone in their personal development and journey towards independence.

It's Your Next Step aims to guide parents/carers as you support your child in starting school. This guide, with accompanying pull-out booklet for your child, can be used all at once or over several weeks. To get the most from it you should keep revisiting it with your child – both in the weeks leading up to starting school, but also in the weeks following it. Starting school is a transition, and sometimes reflecting back on the changes that are happening can help your child make sense of the experience.

In the middle of this guide you will find a special pull-out booklet designed for your child to work through. Every page in the children's booklet corresponds directly to a page in this guide. Look out for the footprint symbol throughout, highlighting when and where you and your child can work together, using their special booklet.



Choosing a school

One of your first questions may be, How will I know which school will be right for my child?

While on the surface many schools often look similar, their ethos, specialisms (such as art and music) and methods of teaching do vary. All schools work to achieve the best for the children who are part of their community but will do this in different ways. Taking time to learn about your local schools will help you make this choice.



Learning about your local schools

All schools have websites which usually contain a wealth of information. You can normally find out about school timetables, values, the staff, curriculum, behaviour policies along with a log of school news and activities, simply by looking online. This is a good place to start when trying to choose a school for your child. But it is only a starting place. To make an informed choice and get a much better feel for school life, you should take the opportunity to visit a selection of schools, if possible. Open days or school tours are often provided several times a year. You should try to make time to look around a few schools and get a sense of the similarities and differences between them.

A key question you might find helpful to ask while visiting is, 'would my child thrive here?'

You could consider the school environment, the way adults in school interact with children and the range of experiences and opportunities demonstrated - would your child enjoy these? Would your child have the opportunity to do new things and broaden their experience?



Some useful questions

It is worth taking questions with you as you visit the schools.

Some questions you might find useful...

- What is the balance of learning in the day between adults teaching and children being able to learn independently through play?
- How much opportunity do children have for playing outdoors?
- How does the school include the interests of children to inform their planning?
- What support is there for pupils who have additional needs or disabilities?
- How does the school liaise with the nurseries or pre-school settings that children come from?



How do your local schools seek to involve parents?

To secure the best transition and ongoing outcomes for your child it is important that schools and parents work together. There will be many ways you might be encouraged to do this –hearing your child read, sharing news about the school day, noticing how children demonstrate what they have been learning in school in the home setting. When choosing a school, find out what opportunities there are for you to be involved in school life. Can parents help in school? Is there an active parents' community? How does the school support parents in developing their child's learning?

Some schools invite parents to come and help by: hearing readers, gardening, cooking, accompanying children on a school trip, sharing their personal skills and interests. Some parents even host their own prayer groups to support the school.

Something to pray about:

Starting a new school offers you and your child a chance to be part of a different community.

In Matthew 5:13 Jesus says, 'You are the salt of the earth'.

In verse 14 of the same chapter he says, 'You are the light of the world'.

Conversations at the school gates and opportunities to meet others at school events offer you the opportunity to be salt and light in a new community.

Pray for opportunities to be involved, and to share God's love with those you will meet.