



Moving on

The transition from preschool to Reception can be a stressful experience for children and their parents, but early years practitioners can do much to help, says **Clare Cane...**

Last autumn, Ben, one of the three-year-olds in my preschool group, showed a marked change in his behaviour. Previously smiley, cooperative and keen to join in, he became attention seeking, thinking it funny to say "no" when asked to do anything, and hurting other children. A chat with Mum revealed that Ben's behaviour had deteriorated at home too, and we discussed what might be the cause. During our conversation Mum said that they were hoping Ben would be able to go to their first preference school but that as it tended to be oversubscribed, they had not taken him to look round in case he did not get a place.

Knowing that Ben is a sensitive child who likes the security of routines, I suggested that fear of the unknown about school might be playing on his mind. I suggested to Mum that they take Ben to look round the school. She agreed to do this, and afterwards reported that Ben clung to her throughout the whole visit, clearly feeling very nervous. The interesting thing was that after the visit Ben's behaviour improved again, virtually overnight, his fears clearly allayed.

I use this example to illustrate what I have found over the years, that preschool children can become noticeably unsettled in the Autumn term, around the time that primary schools offer open days and parents make

their school choices. Moving on to school is a major transition for four-year-olds and indeed affects their parents too, particularly when it is the oldest child in the family. Nursery settings provide an invaluable link between home and school and can do much to ease the transition process.

Easy does it...

Early on in the Autumn term, it is a good idea to talk to parents about how choosing a primary school can be an unsettling time for their child. Generally, I think it is helpful for parents to take their children with them to look round school in order to remove that fear of the unknown. However, I advise them not to overdo talk about school at this stage. Saying to a child how exciting it will be to go to school may actually fill them with trepidation.

It is also important to give children a time frame so that they have some sort of understanding of how long it is before



READY OR NOT?

Each year, there is often one child, usually a summer-born boy, whose parents are very concerned about whether he is 'ready for school'. Whilst there may be exceptions, on the whole I would recommend that the child goes to school with his peers. Reassure the parents that the Foundation Stage is all about catering for the needs of the individual child, and that Reception teachers are well used to supporting children who are at very differing developmental stages. It is often said that it is in fact the move from Reception to Year One that is more of a shock for the children, so all the more reason to spend the maximum length of time in Reception to get used to school before the next step up.

It is **important** that nurseries pass on clear documentation to show each **child's** Next Steps so that their **learning** can follow on in a seamless manner when they start **school**

school starts. Last autumn, I used a garden analogy with my group. We looked at a series of photographs of the garden from the previous year, and I explained that after Christmas we would be digging the ground and planting seeds. Then we would be waiting for the plants to grow taller and taller and then have flowers all before big school started.

If your nursery setting feeds one local primary school, try to foster links throughout the year. In my last Reception post, we had visits from the feeder nursery on a fortnightly basis: the nursery children were brought over to use the playground equipment at a time when the Reception children were not outside. The nursery manager also came into the Reception classes several times during the year to read stories to her 'old' children, and the Reception teachers reciprocated with visits to the nursery.

Visiting times

From May onwards the transition process starts in earnest. In my current nursery the children go on to a large number of different primary schools. It is very helpful if, as described above, the Reception teachers visit the nursery at this point, as it provides an ideal opportunity to pass on those little bits of extra information about a child which perhaps would not be evident in more formal records – for example, that a child who appears not to listen when asked something actually just needs extra time to process information, or that a child has a particular issue with food and so will need

sensitive support at lunch times. (Remember that if a parent has shared confidential information with the nursery about home circumstances then you must check with them that they are happy for you to pass this on)

For children with special needs, liaising with the new teacher is particularly important, to explain exactly what sort of extra support has been provided in the nursery and to discuss how the child can best be supported in school.

Most schools offer sessions where the preschool children come to visit their new classroom. This is generally a very positive experience for the children. They find that their new classroom has lots of similar toys to nursery as well as some exciting new ones. This is a good time to share picture books about starting school. They provide the opportunity for lots of discussion, especially once the children start to have first-hand experience of their new classes. If your setting has a persona doll, he/she can be used to tell the children about school, perhaps wearing some school uniform, having come back from a school visit. In all discussions about big school, I try to stress the similarities with nursery. Indeed, now that the Foundation Stage is so well embedded, most Reception classes are run in a very similar way to nursery settings, so the changes are not so great.

You should remind your nursery children about the sort of behaviour that their Reception teacher will like to see, such as good listening, sharing and taking turns. Parental support may also need to be

sought to encourage independence over toileting and dressing – both areas which can cause anxiety about starting school for those children who still need a lot of help.

Saying farewell

Transitions are a part of growing up and can feel as daunting for the parents as they do for the child. At all times, try to be positive and excited about that big step on to school whilst recognising that for some there is a fear of the unknown – a sensitive and reassuring approach is very important.

As the Summer term progresses it can begin to feel that the children and their families are turning their attention more and more to school and 'growing out' of nursery. This is all part of the transition process, although it always feels sad at nursery to be losing those big children. Try to celebrate their time at the setting with a farewell event – it is the end of an era and so a moment to savour for nursery staff, parents and children. Later, when the Reception children come back to visit you wearing their school uniform, full of confidence and enthusiasm about school, you can feel proud to have played a key part in preparing them for this next big step in their young lives.



about the author

Clare Cane has QTS and EYPS and over 25 years' experience of working with young children.

She has divided her career between working as a teacher in primary schools, and as a nursery practitioner and deputy manager. Her current post is as an early years teacher in a large private day nursery in West Sussex.