

Fact Sheet: School Readiness

Ready or Not?

Readiness for school is in itself an important factor for consideration before starting school, despite the responsive and adaptable programs that schools provide for children and the emphasis upon individualising learning for each child.

Readiness is not about schools just adapting and attempting to meet the needs of children. International research emphasises that certain areas of development and maturity are essential for children so that once at school, they are able to maximise the opportunities provided.

Social and emotional areas are the key areas of development that are most important for a child in regard to school readiness. This is in contrast to what many people believe - reading, writing and knowing colours or numbers are NOT readiness indicators. Some schools may suggest this is necessary, however this is only a reflection of a particular schools position and not reflective of a child's readiness for school.

The key areas of social and emotional maturity related to school readiness can be summarised by reviewing these questions. At preschool does your child

1. Separate easily from parent / carer at preschool drop off
2. Independently make a decision of where they are going to work / play
3. Self initiate, engage and sustain engagement (6 – 8 minutes), have the skills to solve basic problems and ask for help from the educator if needed
4. Work and play besides other children
5. Have basic independence skills (able to put shoes and socks on, art smock on, toileting independently)
6. Sit with the group (eg mat time) and remain focused, ask questions and answer questions from the educator
7. Self regulate their emotional response when they need to do something they don't want to (eg don't tantrum when it is time to pack up)

The importance of these skills related to school readiness is highlighted when one imagines a class of twenty school children who do not have these skills. The good news is that most children when they start school have these skills; unfortunately however there will be some children who start school and do not have these skills. This is why making informed decisions about children and school readiness is paramount to giving children the opportunity to thrive and flourishnot just cope.

The following information may help guide parents when making their decision related to when to start their child at school.

- If you already have a child in childcare or 3- or 4-year-old kindergarten, the qualified kindergarten teacher, alongside the parent, is usually the most able to appropriately assess a child for readiness. Preschool field officers, most often attached to local governments can provide additional information and assessment to children at no charge in the funded 4-year-old program and private consultants can also conduct assessments for a cost.
- Given the difficulty in having two years of funded Kindergarten in Victoria, families are being encouraged to plan ahead in determining when they would like their child to commence school. Obviously, we cannot know at the age of 1 or 2 years if a child will be ready, but there is some useful information that may help some families in the planning process.

- Young boys, according to some research, may benefit from having an additional year to mature before commencement.
- Multiple births or children significantly premature may also benefit.
- Remember that Victoria has one of the youngest age entries into school of anywhere in the world.
- Ask yourself, “am I in a rush to send my child to school?”.
- There is no detrimental impact of giving a child an additional year, in fact it is often viewed as a bonus year.
- Don’t assume children will magically ‘catch up’ once they start school. In the majority of cases, they don’t, and in fact the problems in maturity usually become more pronounced.
- Don’t send a child to school already thinking they can repeat prep if they have to. We want the first year of school to be exciting, successful and not just one where the child attempts to ‘cope’ and then has to do it all again.
- Readiness for school or kindergarten is about having the maturity to make the most of these early years.
- Being legally ready to start school does not mean the child will be ready and does not mean that the child must start school at that time
- For further information see the book, Ready Set Go by Kathy Walker which has a number of chapters related to readiness, preparation and choice of school or speak to your local kindergarten teacher.