

EMAT
EASTERN MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST

**WHAT IS
'SCHOOL READY'?**



INTRODUCTION

School readiness is best described as how prepared a child is to succeed in school cognitively, socially and emotionally. In England, it is most often assessed through the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP), where achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of Reception is a key indicator. The EYFSP reflects a broad range of development areas — including communication and language, physical development, personal, social and emotional development, as well as early literacy and mathematics.

However, school readiness is not solely about what a child can do academically. It is about the whole child and their ability to thrive within the wider school experience - building relationships, managing feelings, developing independence, and engaging with learning.

As Kathy Hirsh-Pasek reminds us, *“Children are not just ready for school; schools must be ready for children.”* This highlights the shared responsibility between families, early years settings and schools in supporting every child to feel confident, capable and ready to belong.



WHAT DOES 'SCHOOL READY' LOOK LIKE?

Research from the Department for Education (2015) suggests that a child who is “school ready” demonstrates a broad range of developmental skills that enable them to engage positively with school life. By the age of 4-5, this typically reflects a “whole-child” approach, where academic foundations sit alongside social, emotional, physical and practical skills. A school-ready child is not expected to be perfect in all areas, but will usually show many of the following characteristics:

- ▶ Can socialise, play and begin to form friendships with peers, and cope in group settings.
- ▶ Communicates effectively: understands instructions, speaks clearly, asks questions and expresses needs with a growing vocabulary.
- ▶ Shows independence in basic self-care, such as dressing, toileting and handwashing.
- ▶ Can eat and drink independently, including using cutlery and managing snacks or lunch.
- ▶ Can focus attention for short periods: listening, taking turns, following simple instructions and cooperating with others.
- ▶ Demonstrates early literacy and numeracy awareness (e.g. recognising their name, letters, numbers or patterns in everyday contexts).
- ▶ Has developed physical coordination and motor control, supporting activities like running, climbing, drawing and using simple tools.
- ▶ Shows emotional awareness and resilience: can manage feelings, share, take turns, and separate from parents or carers.
- ▶ Can adapt to routines and transitions, responding positively to new environments and expectations.
- ▶ Has foundations of health and well-being, including being well-nourished, active, and ready to participate fully in the school day.

In essence, school readiness reflects a child’s overall development - ensuring they are equipped not only to begin learning, but to feel confident, independent and part of their new school community.



WHY DOES BEING ‘SCHOOL READY’ MATTER?

Being school ready is crucial for children joining an Eastern Multi-Academy Trust (EMAT) school, as it helps them to settle quickly, build positive relationships and engage confidently with learning from their very first days.

Children who begin Reception with a strong foundation across communication, social skills, independence and early learning are more likely to achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD), which is closely linked to future academic success, wellbeing and positive life outcomes.

At EMAT, where schools are committed to inclusive, high-quality education and a strong sense of belonging, readiness ensures that every child can access the curriculum, participate fully in school life and develop resilience as learners.

As Loris Malaguzzi observed, *“Learning begins long before children start school,”* reminding us that the foundations laid in the early years are critical to a child’s future success.

When children arrive in Reception less prepared - perhaps with gaps in language, self-care or social development - these challenges can grow over time, affecting both attainment and confidence. Supporting school readiness, therefore, is not only about a successful start to Reception, but about giving every child the strongest possible foundation for lifelong learning and success.



WHOLE SYSTEM READINESS FOR SCHOOL

At EMAT, we genuinely believe that school readiness is not just about what a child can or cannot do when they walk through our doors - it's about all of us working together to make that transition a positive and successful one.

From our experience in our schools, the children who thrive most quickly are those supported by strong, consistent relationships between home, early years settings and school.

Families play such an important role by building routines, encouraging independence and providing that emotional reassurance children need.

Equally, high-quality early years provision helps children develop language, confidence and social skills before they arrive.

As schools, we take real responsibility for being ready too - creating welcoming environments, nurturing relationships and ensuring every child feels safe, included and valued from day one.

The wider community also matters, with health services and early support helping families where needed.

In reality, it is this shared effort that makes the biggest difference. As the saying goes, *"If we give children what they need at age 2, 3 and 4, they will be ready for what comes at 5, 6 and 7,"* and at EMAT, we are committed to playing our part in making sure every child gets that strong start.



IMPLICATIONS FOR EMAT PRIMARY ACADEMIES AND EYFS PRACTITIONERS

For us at EMAT, school readiness isn't something we see as a checklist - it shapes how we think about our practice every day in our classrooms and communities. We know that the foundations laid before children arrive with us matter enormously, and that we cannot do this work alone. That's why our practitioners place such value on building strong relationships with families, early years settings and wider services.

At the same time, we recognise that every cohort of children is different; some arrive full of confidence and independence, while others need more support with language, social interaction or self-care. Our role is to meet them where they are - with high expectations, but also with care, flexibility and understanding. This means creating Reception environments that nurture communication, emotional security and physical development alongside early literacy and maths and putting strong transition arrangements in place, so children feel safe and known from the very start.

We also prioritise early identification and support, using our professional judgement and ongoing assessment to ensure no child falls behind unnoticed. Above all, we understand that readiness is multi-dimensional, and our provision reflects that whole-child approach. As Martha Brook reminds us, *"The future of the world is in my classroom today,"* and across EMAT, we take that responsibility seriously, working together to give every child the best possible start.





'SCHOOL READY' INDICATORS

These indicators are not a checklist or expectation that every child must meet in full. Instead, they provide a helpful guide to what “school readiness” can look like in practice.

At EMAT, we recognise that each child is unique, and our role is to build on their strengths, support their individual needs, and ensure every child feels ready to learn, ready to belong and ready to thrive. Developing independence plays an important part in this journey; as the NHS highlights, *“Children who are better able to care for themselves are more likely to have a positive experience when they start school. This includes being able to dress themselves and go to the toilet independently.”*

By working together with families and early years partners, we can support children to grow in confidence and capability, giving them the best possible start to their school life.

COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE

- ▶ Listens for short periods of time in a small group and responds to simple instructions
- ▶ Beginning to use full sentences to express needs, ideas and experiences
- ▶ Asks and answers basic questions about familiar topics or stories
- ▶ Understands everyday vocabulary and simple concepts (e.g. big/small, before/after)
- ▶ Engages in conversations with adults and peers, taking turns to speak

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- ▶ Separates from parents/carers with growing confidence
- ▶ Begins to build positive relationships and play cooperatively with others
- ▶ Can take turns, share and follow simple rules in a group
- ▶ Shows some awareness of own feelings and begins to manage them
- ▶ Demonstrates independence in choosing activities and completing simple tasks

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

- ▶ Moves confidently in a variety of ways (running, jumping, climbing, balancing)
- ▶ Uses tools such as pencils, crayons, scissors with increasing control
- ▶ Can manage basic self-care (toileting, handwashing, dressing with some support)
- ▶ Shows coordination in both gross and fine motor activities
- ▶ Is developing stamina for a school day (e.g. sitting, focusing, participating)



LITERACY

- ▶ Shows interest in books and stories
- ▶ Can hold a book correctly and turn pages
- ▶ Recognises familiar logos or environmental print
- ▶ May recognise their name in print
- ▶ Beginning awareness of sounds (e.g., rhymes, initial sounds)
- ▶ Attempts to mark-make or write symbols/letters

MATHEMATICS

- ▶ Counts objects reliably (often to 5 or beyond)
- ▶ Recognises and uses numbers in everyday contexts
- ▶ Understands basic concepts such as more/less, big/small, full/empty
- ▶ Notices patterns and relationships
- ▶ Uses mathematical language informally during play (e.g. counting, comparing)
- ▶ Recognises basic shapes (circle, square, triangle)

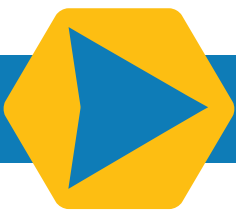


UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD

- ▶ Shows curiosity about the world and asks questions
- ▶ Talks about familiar people, places and events
- ▶ Understands simple routines and changes in daily life
- ▶ Uses simple technology (e.g. tablets, interactive toys) appropriately
- ▶ Begins to recognise similarities and differences in people and environments

EXPRESSIVE ART AND DESIGN

- ▶ Engages in imaginative play and role play
- ▶ Uses a range of materials to create and explore (drawing, building, crafting)
- ▶ Sings songs and joins in with rhymes and music
- ▶ Expresses ideas, thoughts and feelings through play and creative activities
- ▶ Explores colour, texture, shape and form with curiosity



CONCLUSION

At EMAT, this school readiness document is more than just guidance on paper - it reflects the way we work with children every day across our schools. It actively shapes our day-to-day practice in Reception classrooms and across our wider school communities. Our approach is rooted in knowing our children well, responding to their needs quickly, and creating environments where every child can succeed from their individual starting point.

In the first few weeks of starting school, Reception staff prioritise getting to know each child as an individual. Through careful observation, interaction and play-based assessment, teachers identify strengths as well as any emerging needs - whether in speech and language, social interaction, emotional regulation or physical development. This early understanding allows us to act quickly, ensuring that no child falls behind and that support is put in place from the outset.

Our Reception classrooms are intentionally designed to reflect how young children learn best. This includes:

- ▶ High-quality play-based learning experiences that promote curiosity and independence
- ▶ Rich opportunities for talk, storytelling and language development
- ▶ Spaces that encourage movement, exploration and physical development
- ▶ Structured routines and visual supports that help children feel safe, secure and confident.

These environments enable children to settle quickly, build relationships and access learning in a way that feels natural and engaging.



We recognise that successful transitions rely on effective communication and collaboration. EMAT schools work closely with nurseries, pre-schools and childminders to gather meaningful transition information. Equally, we place great value on working with parents and carers—sharing expectations, offering guidance and listening carefully to their insights about their child. This joined-up approach ensures continuity for children and supports a smooth and positive start to school.

Where additional needs are identified, we act early. EMAT schools offer a range of supportive strategies and interventions, such as:

- ▶ Speech and language support to develop communication skills
- ▶ Nurture groups to build confidence, relationships and emotional well-being
- ▶ Fine and gross motor interventions to support physical development
- ▶ Early phonics and language-rich teaching to strengthen foundations for reading
- ▶ School-readiness programmes for children who need additional help adapting to routines and expectations

This proactive approach helps children to catch up quickly and thrive alongside their peers.

At its heart, this work reflects EMAT's commitment to ensuring that every child is welcomed, supported and set up for success - so that from their very first days in school, they feel confident, capable and ready to learn.





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