

Guidelines on Helping Primary One Pupils Adapt to a New School Life

Children who first start their primary schooling would invariably be awed yet excited when facing a new environment, an unfamiliar social setting and different teaching approaches. Therefore, schools should collaborate with parents to give more support and encouragement to children, and help them attain a smooth transition to a pleasurable learning life in the primary school.

Readiness for Primary Schooling

2. Most of the difficulties encountered by primary one pupils can be attributed to the change in the pattern of learning, and the physical and social setting of a primary school. Children entering primary schools have to adapt to changes such as a larger school size and class size, a tighter timetable, longer school hours with frequent changes of subjects and teachers, a more subject-based curriculum, stricter school rules and more homework demanding the application of literacy and numerical skills. Hence, prior to the admission into primary school, children may develop their readiness in the following aspects through the learning experience in daily life and kindergartens/nurseries :

(i) Physical health

- To enjoy doing physical exercise
- To know the importance of physical health
- To develop a good co-ordination of basic motor skills

(ii) Social Adjustment

- To acquire interpersonal skills
- To enjoy participating in group activities
- To be willing to help others

(iii) Daily routines

- To observe proper order of daily routines with rest and work at regular hours
- To develop the ability of working independently
- To be able to look after themselves, including tidying things up, having meals, putting on clothes and shoes on their own, and tending to their belongings.
- To foster hygienic habits, including using the toilet bowl, and washing hands after using the toilet
- To observe rules and orders such as queuing, walking silently and learning the proper ways of borrowing things from others.

(iv) Learning

- To be eager to learn, create and appreciate beauty
- To be able to work and listen to others attentively
- To be able to reply with clarity, as well as to report and raise questions systematically
- To be fond of reading
- To be able to turn pages of a book and know the word sequence
- To be able to recognize frequently used words
- To learn how to hold pencils and write their names properly
- To grasp the concepts of quantity, shapes and colour, and be able to categorize and compare objects
- To be able to acquire the concept of time from the clock, and do addition and subtraction with concrete objects of numbers within 10

Understanding the Development of Children

3. Although primary school children are more advanced than the pre-primary children in both the ability and psychological aspects, those aged between six and eight are, strictly speaking, still at the early stage of child development. They grow at different paces and are in great need of care and guidance of adults. **Therefore, teachers should listen patiently and be observant in order to understand their developmental pattern and identify their individual needs, and should offer them appropriate guidance and support in their transition to a new stage of learning.**

Adaptation Measures for Primary One Pupils

4. Primary schools are expected to carefully draw up a complete set of interface strategies based on the newly admitted primary one pupils' developmental characteristics. Close reference should be made to the Chinese booklet '老師關懷瞭解多、小一生活愉快過'^{*} recently produced by the Curriculum Development Council. The following are some measures recommended for schools to help children's smooth transition to primary education, and minimize the difficulties encountered by some primary one pupils in the process:

(i) Orientation Programmes for Parents

As parents are the most significant persons in affecting children's development, schools should develop close partnership with them. Before the commencement of the school year, orientation programmes should be organized for parents of primary one pupils to enable them to have a better understanding of the school's vision and mission, and to get the necessary advice on how to help their children become psychologically prepared for primary schooling. The messages to be conveyed should include the following :

- the aims of primary education,
- the layout of the school and its facilities

- the details of school life, including timetabling, school regulations, homework policies, use of textbooks/learning packages and exercise books, assessment methods, policies and procedures on sick leave, school routines and contingency plans and other problems, etc.
- the mode of home-school collaboration

One month after the commencement of the school year, schools should organize seminars for parents again so that they can exchange views, resolve doubts and work together in dealing with the adaptation problems that children face.

(ii) Adaptation for Primary One Pupils

Schools should allow an adaptation period for primary one pupils to ease the transition from a free and relaxing environment to a relatively structured school life. **The adaptation period could last for one month or even one school term**, depending on the needs of primary one pupils. It should help children in making the following changes :

- Getting acquainted with and developing a sense of belonging to the new school community
- Adjusting to an increasing amount of homework of various nature
- Becoming more attuned to subject-based learning
- Adjusting to a more structured daily school routine
- Becoming more familiar with recording homework in pupils' handbook, school regulations and mottoes, timetabling, seating and lunch arrangements, personal hygiene, packing of school bags, use of textbooks/learning packages, exercise books and pupils' handbooks, school assembly schedules and extra-curricular activities, etc.
- **Becoming progressively accustomed to new learning experiences and assessment methods**, including revision, dictation, tests, examinations, spelling and sentence writing, etc.

(iii) Communication between primary schools and kindergartens/nurseries

In order to have a better understanding of the newly admitted pupils, schools could, in addition to liaising with parents, obtain information on the learning experiences of the children from the kindergartens/nurseries they have attended. Information such as teaching approaches and contents, etc, will facilitate curriculum planning to match children's ability.

Parental Collaboration

5. Schools may refer to the newly issued parental leaflet '我家孩子上小學 - 家長錦囊'*, and should encourage parents to give children a certain degree of freedom, autonomy and independence to explore the new environment so as to acquire valuable experiences through attempts. Parents should also be reminded not to place too high an expectation on their children and to make excessive demand on their academic achievement, lest both the parents and their children will be subject to heavy pressure. As such, children under the encouragement and nurture of adults, should be able to cope with the adaptation difficulties, and become relaxed, cheerful primary pupils.

*Please browse the website http://www.edb.gov.hk/FileManager/TC/Content_3083/parents_new.pdf for details

Curriculum Development Institute,

Education Department

August 2001