

# STARTING SCHOOL

A guide for families



**ACT**  
Government



# Starting School

This guide provides practical information for families about starting school in a Canberra public school. It includes links to relevant websites and contact information for further reference.





## A message from the Minister

I am pleased to present the new edition of *Starting School*, a book designed to assist families with children starting preschool and kindergarten in Canberra public schools.

We aim to nurture and support our young children through the early years of childhood and schooling, so that every Canberra child feels safe and respected.

Our children need a supportive learning environment to help broaden their skills and their abilities, and to further develop their talents so they can realise their potential. High quality education in the early years has lasting benefits for a child's social, emotional and intellectual development.

I remember when my own children started school and how exciting, if a little anxious, that time can be for families. I am confident you will find the advice and practical tips in *Starting School* useful as you and your children prepare for preschool and those first weeks in kindergarten.

We have also provided a number of contact details should you like more information.

I wish your child all the best as a Canberra public school student.

**Yvette Berry MLA**

**Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development**

## Education in the ACT

High quality education is vital for every child and young person to give them the best start in life. The ACT Government has committed significant funding to public schools to develop and extend programs to ensure your child will have the best possible foundations for learning.

In recent years, this has included a renewal of school curriculum across all ACT schools so that what is taught is relevant and important for children to know, understand and gain skills to equip them for lifelong learning. In addition, specific funding has allowed schools to grow and develop the use of the latest digital learning technologies. This includes extending the opportunities for families to follow their child's learning development online.

Your child will participate in a range of programs to develop their intellectual, emotional, social and physical skills. A typical school day will involve a variety of activities such as reading and writing tasks, learning about numbers, shapes and patterns, lessons in science and how things work, physical education activities, art and music activities, visiting the library and using information technologies. Developing your child's literacy and numeracy skills will be a key focus across all learning areas as these skills are the essential platform for their future success. Your child's teacher will provide a range of lesson experiences to challenge and stimulate their learning while supporting them to meet their individual needs in becoming confident learners. The learning at school builds on the learning you do together at home.

## ENROLLING IN SCHOOL

In the ACT it is compulsory for children to start school from six years of age and to continue in full-time education until they complete year 10. Students are then required to either participate in full-time study or employment until they complete year 12 or equivalent; or reach 17 years of age, whichever occurs first.

Applications for enrolments are completed online and can be submitted at any time throughout the year.

Please contact the school in your area for more information or telephone the ACT Education Directorate on **6205 5429**. Information about enrolment is also available from the ACT Education Directorate website at **[www.education.act.gov.au](http://www.education.act.gov.au)**



## Starting school

Starting school is an exciting time for children and families. Your support and encouragement is critical to a successful start in a new learning environment.

## Term dates

To find out more about term dates, visit [www.education.act.gov.au](http://www.education.act.gov.au)

## Label all belongings

Label all your child's belongings including your child's lunch box, drink bottle, hat, clothing and library bag.

Encouraging your child to dress themselves will help them develop independence and to recognise their own belongings.



**ParentLink** aims to increase the confidence and skills of parents by supporting and linking them to information, ideas and community services.

ParentLink guides are full of practical information and tips to manage parenting challenges, including sibling rivalry, sleeping, blended families and grandparenting.

Whatever your child's age, you will find lots of good ideas. Visit [www.parentlink.act.gov.au](http://www.parentlink.act.gov.au)



## Road safety and walking

Schools can be busy traffic environments, particularly during drop off and pick up times. Drivers need to ensure that they abide by the traffic rules and car parking arrangements. Ensure that properly adjusted seatbelts are worn and be especially careful when reversing your vehicle. Park on the same side of the road as the bus to ensure children are not tempted to rush out from behind a bus to cross the road.

As children become old enough to walk to school, parents need to consider the route to school and likely road crossings. Teach your child road safety and reinforce the learning by setting a good example.

Educate your child about not accepting gifts or lifts from someone they do not know.

Some schools organise a 'walking bus' where children walking to and from school can join a group of other school children and a responsible adult. Children join the 'walking bus' along a designated route. More information will be available from your school website.

## THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

So your child's first day is as enjoyable as possible, ensure your family is prepared and allow time for your child to eat a balanced breakfast. Arrive at school well before the first class or activity so they have time to become settled. To help them to become secure, be positive and reassuring. Demonstrate your trust in the teacher and your enthusiasm about school and learning.

Once your child is settled into school, a short and reassuring goodbye encourages independence. You should tell your son or daughter when you leave. Be guided by your child's teacher who will use a number of strategies so that the first day is as stress-free as possible for students and parents.

At the end of the school day, be on time to collect your child, and make sure your child knows the pick up arrangements such as going to after school care or who is collecting them.

If your child is nervous about their first day, *On My First Day* includes a collection of messages from year 1 students to kindergarten students, available at [www.children.act.gov.au](http://www.children.act.gov.au).

## A healthy breakfast and lunch

It is vital that your child begins their day with a nutritious breakfast. Participation in school activities will burn up their energy and a hungry child will lose concentration and become tired. Useful information for parents on how to provide a healthy breakfast is available from the Raising Children Network website at [www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au).

Specific dietary advice is also available from the Dietitians Association of Australia at [www.daa.asn.au](http://www.daa.asn.au) and Nutrition Australia at [www.nutritionaustralia.org/act](http://www.nutritionaustralia.org/act).

## Tips for school lunches

- Organise food and drink according to the timetabled breaks. You may need to explain to your child that snack items are for the shorter, morning break and lunch items for the longer break.
- Let your child help prepare healthy lunches and snacks.
- Pack food that is ready and easy to eat and not too messy. Pre-cut items such as oranges, celery and carrots are ideal.
- Use a lunch box that keeps food cool and ensure all items are clearly labelled.
- Ensure your child is able to open containers such as yoghurt containers and small packages.
- Try different types of breads, rolls or muffins.
- Limit sweets, chips and treats.
- Provide water only, which could be flavoured with a slice of lemon or orange.
- Limit the use of non-recyclable or non-reusable packaging and wrapping.

## School canteens

Healthy eating is encouraged in Canberra public schools. School canteens promote and provide healthy food and beverages and limit the sale of foods and drinks high in fat, sugar and salt, such as cakes, chips, lollies and juices. Schools welcome parents volunteering their time to assist with school canteens.

## Food allergies

Please inform the school if your child is allergic to particular foods. Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction to certain foods and many schools have adopted an 'allergy friendly' school environment to minimise the risk of severe allergic reaction. Your school may request that food brought to school does not include certain foods such as nuts or nut products including Nutella and peanut butter.



## ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Some children require additional support to thrive at school. The ACT Government provides support to help every child reach their educational potential. This includes specific services and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students for whom English is an additional language or dialect, students with a disability and students identified as gifted and talented.

Information about language support is available from your school and on the Directorate website at [www.education.act.gov.au](http://www.education.act.gov.au).

Canberra public schools provide a range of supports for students with disability. If your child has additional needs, please make an appointment to talk with your principal as early as possible so the school can work with you to best meet the needs of your child. For further information contact the Disability Education section on **6205 6925** or email [disabilityeducation@act.gov.au](mailto:disabilityeducation@act.gov.au). Students with disability may also benefit from additional support from specialists in other areas. The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) was introduced as a way of supporting people with disability and can include funding for individual supports. For more information on the NDIS call **1800 800 100** or visit [www.ndis.gov.au](http://www.ndis.gov.au).

## ATTENDING SCHOOL

Children are required to attend school each day. If your child is unable to attend you are required to provide a written explanation of your child's absence.

Playing with peers is important for a child's social and emotional development as they learn to get along with others and respond appropriately to various situations. In the early years of schooling children need opportunities to practise these skills, test new ideas and negotiate with other children. As parents know, there will be disagreements between children and friendships will be made and some will break up. The teacher will assist your child to deal with conflict and will appreciate being told of any circumstances you are aware of that may be affecting your child.

## Voluntary contributions

Public education is free. The school board of a government school may ask parents of a child enrolled at the school to make a financial contribution to the school. Each contribution is voluntary and a child at the school is not to be refused benefits or services because the child's parents/carers do not make a contribution. Records of contributions are confidential.

Schools may charge for additional activities such as excursions, swimming lessons, camps, school photos and extracurricular tuition. Student equity funds are maintained in all public schools to facilitate access to additional activities for all families.



## Sun protection and preparing for hot days

Much of the sun damage to skin occurs in childhood and adolescence. In Canberra, sun protection is required for part or most of each day between August and May. Canberra public schools encourage children to play in shady areas and require children to wear a SunSmart hat (e.g. broad-brimmed, bucket with deep crown or legionnaire hats) when outdoors.

Parents are encouraged to ensure children apply sunscreen before leaving for school. Schools will ensure sunscreen is available for re-application throughout the day.

Canberra public schools take steps on hot days to ensure children are not exposed to extreme heat and have access to water. Parents may also like to pack extra water bottles.

## Dress standards and uniform

Dress standards and school uniforms are determined by schools in conjunction with the School Board. The school's dress standard and uniform policy and guidelines are available from the school's handbook or website.

## Head lice

Head lice are a common occurrence in childhood. Head lice are only found on the human head and are not found in furnishings or classroom carpets. Head lice are usually transmitted by close head-to-head contact.

An outbreak of head lice can be annoying, but is not harmful to your child's health. Schools take measures to limit the spread of head lice including requesting that affected children not attend school during the treatment period. A useful head lice fact sheet on how to treat head lice is available from the ACT Health website at [www.health.act.gov.au](http://www.health.act.gov.au).

## Toilets

Help your child with going to the toilet by themselves and ensure they are able to make their needs known to the teacher. Accidents can happen so a change of underwear can help your school manage the accident with the least amount of fuss.

## Student behaviour and school discipline procedures

Schools use a range of approaches to promote positive student behaviour in collaboration with families.

In the early years students are supported to build their self-confidence, learn to work together and to follow classroom routines.

At the beginning of the school year teachers and students establish classroom expectations and students are supported to monitor and manage their behaviour.

Each school has a behaviour management strategy available on the school website or from the school front office.

## Policies and guidelines

The ACT Education Directorate provides policy advice to Canberra public schools. This is available from the Directorate website or from your school. Each school also has a range of policy guidelines providing advice on how the school is conducted. These are often found on the school's website or are available from the front office.

### School Boards

Each school has a School Board as part of its governance structure. The role of the School Board is to establish and monitor school strategic direction and policies.

Typically School Boards have three parent representatives nominated by the school's Parents and Citizens Association.

Parents are encouraged to consider becoming a part of the association and schools welcome parents volunteering their time and skills to support the school. Schools regularly communicate with parents about school programs and activities through the school newsletter and other channels including email, school website, Facebook page and apps.

The ACT Education Directorate website at [www.education.act.gov.au](http://www.education.act.gov.au) provides further information on Canberra public schools, education services and programs and contact details.

## COMMUNICATION ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S PROGRESS

Effective teaching and learning is a collaborative partnership between parents and teachers. Teachers will provide feedback about your child's progress and how you can assist them with their learning.

Your child's teacher will assess how your child is progressing individually and also in relation to other children. Your school will provide written reports at least twice a year indicating strengths and areas for further development.

Parent-teacher meetings provide a formal opportunity to discuss your child's achievement and progress. Parents may also choose to make an appointment with the class teacher during the school term.

### BASE (formerly PIPS)

As of 2020, the Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) is being transitioned to BASE. The BASE assessment is produced by The Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring (CEM) and administered through the University of Western Australia.

BASE is easy to use and provides baseline data at the beginning of the year, supplies data on the expected and actual progress of a student at the end of the year, and provides the teacher with concrete evidence on the spread of abilities within a class.

### Parents and schools working together

There are simple things parents and families can do at home, and with their child's school, to help their child to do their best. Showing children that education is important, building their confidence, and connecting with their school helps to shape children's learning and wellbeing.



**One of the most powerful things you can do for your child is show them you believe in them and their ability to do their best at school.**

For practical tips to support your child's learning, visit the Parental Engagement section of the Education Directorate website at [www.education.act.gov.au/parental-engagement](http://www.education.act.gov.au/parental-engagement).

## Parents and Carers working positively with schools

To ensure schools are safe, secure and respectful learning environments for all students, it is vital that parents work positively with school teachers and staff, as well as other parents. When visiting schools, please help us to ensure the learning environment is free of any inappropriate behaviour to others and follow the requests of teachers and the principal.

# Contact details and websites

## Helpful phone numbers

### Access Canberra

13 22 81

### ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations Inc.

6241 5759 or email

[contact@actparents.org.au](mailto:contact@actparents.org.au)

### ACT Education Directorate

6205 5429

### Emergency – Police, Fire, Ambulance

000

### Calvary Hospital

6201 6111

### Carers ACT

1800 242 636

### Canberra Hospital

6244 2222

### Canberra Preschool Society

6286 2527 or email

[info@canberrapreschools.org.au](mailto:info@canberrapreschools.org.au)

### Child Abuse Prevention Service

1800 688 009

### Citizens Advice Bureau ACT

6248 7988

### Crime Stoppers

1800 333 000 (8am-9pm)

### Domestic Violence Crisis Service

6280 0900

### Health First

6207 7777

### Kids Helpline

1800 551 800

### Lifeline

13 11 14

### Mental Health Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team

1800 629 354

### OneLink

1800 176 468 (Mon-Fri 8am to 6pm)

### Poisons Information Centre

13 11 26

### Police Assistance

131 444

### Translating and interpreting service

131 450

## Helpful Websites

### Access Canberra

[www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au](http://www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au)

### ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations Inc.

[www.actparents.org.au](http://www.actparents.org.au)

### ACT Education Directorate

[www.education.act.gov.au](http://www.education.act.gov.au)

### ACT Government

[www.act.gov.au](http://www.act.gov.au)

### Fresh Tastes, ACT Health

[www.act.gov.au/freshtastes](http://www.act.gov.au/freshtastes)

### Canberra Preschool Society (now merged with ACT P&C Council)

[www.actparents.org.au](http://www.actparents.org.au)

### Citizens Advice Bureau ACT

[www.citizensadvice.org.au](http://www.citizensadvice.org.au)

### Good Habits for Life

[www.goodhabitsforlife.act.gov.au](http://www.goodhabitsforlife.act.gov.au)

### OneLink

[www.onelink.org.au](http://www.onelink.org.au)

### ParentLink

[www.parentlink.act.gov.au](http://www.parentlink.act.gov.au)

### SunSmart

[www.sunsmart.com.au](http://www.sunsmart.com.au)



## Tips for talking to your child about their day

Your child might not feel like sharing their experiences, thoughts and feelings at the end of a long day at Preschool. Try not to ask them too many questions the minute you pick them up if they don't feel like talking. Bed time is a great opportunity to share a conversation with your child about their day. Try to avoid asking "yes" or "no" questions to help develop their conversation skills. Here are some conversation starters you can try. Don't forget to share about your day too!

**Did you help anyone today?  
How did you help?**

**Was someone kind to you today?  
What did they do that was kind?**

**What was the hardest part of your day?**

**What was the best part of your day?**



**What are you looking forward to doing at Preschool tomorrow?**

**Who did you play with today? What did you play?**

**What made you laugh today?**

## Communication resources for Preschoolers and families:

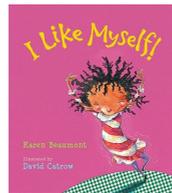
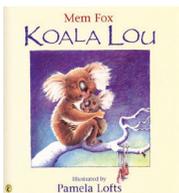
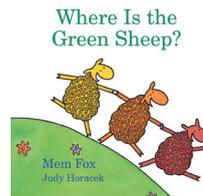
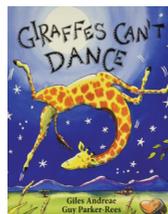
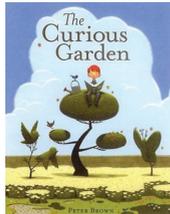
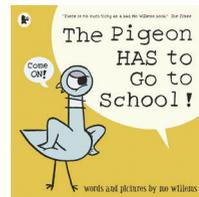
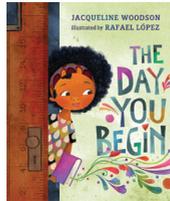
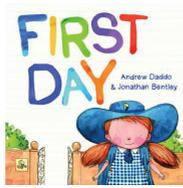
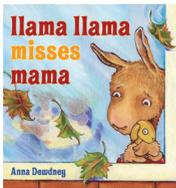
Preschoolers: connecting and communicating - <https://bit.ly/3vnj4g5>

Talking is teaching - <https://bit.ly/3AYNfep>

Helping you to support your child's learning - <https://bit.ly/3pfZt00>

## Reading with your child

Reading with your child is not only a great way to bond with them, it also helps to develop an understanding of the world around them and lays the foundations for learning. Below are some examples of great books that you can share with your child.



## Tips for reading with your child:

- Look at the pictures and talk about what is happening in them before you read the words
- Make predictions by asking "What do you think will happen next?"
- Point out letters, numbers, colours and shapes on the pages
- Talk about the characters and their feelings
- Read with expression - give characters voices and pay attention to punctuation (? ! ...)

## Reading resources for Preschoolers and families:

Books about starting school - <https://bit.ly/3lV7aXK>

Join the Library - <https://bit.ly/2Z3p4yb> ABC Kids - <https://ab.co/3B0iXIA>

Raeading with Preschoolers - <https://bit.ly/3BVfpIK>

# PRESCHOOL PATHWAYS



1

**BEFORE  
WE START  
PRESCHOOL**

3  
**LET'S GO TO  
PRESCHOOL!**



2

**WHAT DO  
WE NEED?**

5  
**PLAY-BASED  
LEARNING**



4  
**MAKING  
FRIENDS**



6  
**THINGS  
TO THINK  
ABOUT**



7  
**GETTING  
INVOLVED**



8  
**FINDING  
THE RIGHT  
SUPPORT**



## 1 BEFORE WE START PRESCHOOL

There are many things you can do with your child before they start Preschool to support them with their transition. Some suggestions include:

- Walk or drive by the school grounds and talk about what it might be like and where they might play.
- Have a lunch box picnic near the school and invite other families along (if COVID restrictions allow).
- Read books with your child – there are many great books about starting school that you can enjoy together (take a look at the *Great books to read with your child* resource on the Directorate website for ideas).
- Set up a morning routine to help your child get used to getting ready for school – wake up, eat breakfast, get dressed and pack a lunchbox and school bag.
- Talk with your child about the things they are looking forward to.

## 2 WHAT DO WE NEED?

Each school will have different requirements, but generally your child will need:

- A clearly labelled school bag, lunch box and drink bottle - try to choose a lunch box that your child can easily open (if they need help, that's ok!) and pack food they usually eat at home. The school will share information about any foods that can't be in lunch boxes. Keep a look out for this.
- Sun smart clothes that can get messy and are easy to move in.
- A change of clothes, underwear and socks in case of accidents.
- Comfortable and safe shoes that your child can run, climb, dance and ride in.

## 3 LET'S GO TO PRESCHOOL!

Day one at Preschool will look different across schools and services, and may change depending on COVID restrictions and Public Health directions. Your school will communicate this with you - talk with your child about the arrangements so that they know what to expect.

Some children will skip straight through the door, whilst others may take longer to warm up. All children settle in their own time. Acknowledge your child's feelings and remain positive about the experience. They are watching to see that you are happy too!

Be mindful that it can cause additional stress for a child if there is a large group of adults to farewell. Take photos to capture and share the memory.

## 4 MAKING FRIENDS

Consider reaching out to arrange a play date or group meet up on the weekend to strengthen connections and friendships. Many schools and services will distribute a contact list at the start of the year (with your permission).

You can help your child to practice relationship building skills such as sharing, taking turns, listening and negotiating - playing simple games can be a great start. You might also like to consider joining a sporting team in the local area.

Talk to your child about what you look for in a friend and how you are a good friend to others. Remember that at this age friendships are different to adult friendships and can be quite fluid!

## 5 PLAY-BASED LEARNING

All ACT Preschool programs implement the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) for Australia, which emphasises play-based learning and is centred around the concepts of *belonging*, *being* and *becoming*. Play is an important aspect of early learning that helps children to develop imagination, social, communication, language and physical skills in a fun way.

Remember, the aim in Preschool is not to teach your child to read and write. Literacy involves story telling, talking, listening and responding. Numeracy involves working with numbers and patterns and engaging in mathematical thinking. Your child will engage in a range of structured and open-ended activities and will be encouraged to explore their interests and build their confidence and curiosity through play.

More information can be found in the *Preschool Pathways Supporting Resources* on the Directorate website.

## 6 THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Many parents worry about how their child will transition to Preschool. Keep the following in mind:

- Talk to others – if your child attends an early childhood education and care service, speak with educators about your child's strengths, concerns or extra support your child might need.
- Try not to focus solely on academic skills – your child does not need to know how to write their name, recite the alphabet or recognise numbers before they start preschool.
- If your child needs support with toileting, that's ok. Let the school know this beforehand so they can be prepared to support their needs.

You know your child best. Be confident in your decision and maintain open communication with your school throughout your child's transition.

## 7 GETTING INVOLVED

- Talk to your child about school and ask open-ended questions about their day.
- Read with your child to help them develop an interest in stories and words. Share and chat about your favourite books.
- Encourage your child to help count, measure and compare items around the house to build maths skills.
- Talk to the teacher about how you can help out or share your skills or interests with the class.
- Consider joining the Parents and Citizens Association (P&C) or volunteering to help at Preschool.

More suggestions can be found in the *Preschool Pathways Supporting Resources* on the Directorate website.

## 8 FINDING THE RIGHT SUPPORT

If your child has a disability or developmental delay and will be attending an ACT Government Preschool, the school will:

- consult with you to understand your child's needs and any adjustments required to support them;
- make the reasonable adjustments necessary to enable your child to take part in education on the same basis as other students; and
- assist your child and family to feel safe and supported in the education environment.

If you are concerned about the level of support your child will require at Preschool, talk to the school in the first instance, as early as possible.

**Each school will have different requirements - make sure you find out about the transition approach at your child's preschool and engage in it!**