

Beyond ABCs – skills your child needs for primary school

Learning to read and write may be crucial, but other life skills are just as important for children entering Primary 1, experts say.

Social skills, flexible thinking and self-control are some of the attributes they should pick up by the end of kindergarten.

A Ministry of Education (MOE) spokesman says the Primary 1 curriculum is designed to meet the learning needs of all children, regardless of their background or the pre-schools they come from.

“Children are not expected to know the spelling of specific words or solve mathematical problems before entering Primary 1,” she adds.

“Instead, it is more important for pre-school children to develop self-confidence, social skills and a positive attitude towards learning.”

The MOE’s Nurturing Early Learners framework helps pre-school educators understand how children at the ages of four to six learn best.

This “provides clarity on what children are expected to know and

be able to do by the end of Kindergarten 2, and is aligned with the expectations of children at the beginning of Primary 1, to better facilitate their transition into primary school,” says the MOE spokesman.

The guide outlines six key learning areas: aesthetics and creative expression, discovery of the world, language and literacy, motor skills development, numeracy, and social and emotional development.

The MOE says it will continue to work with primary schools on appropriate teaching and learning practices to meet the needs of incoming Primary 1 pupils and their different starting points.

It also works with the Early Childhood Development Agency to help pre-school educators better understand how they can lay the foundation for learning in primary school. This includes sharing primary school curriculum developments with pre-schools.

Dr Jacqueline Chung, academic director of St James’ Preschool Services, which manages St James’



Church Kindergarten and Little Seeds Preschool, says that preparation for Primary 1 goes beyond academic skills.

“Rather than just how to count, write and spell, children need to know why numeracy, writing and spelling are important, and the part these play in their daily lives,” she adds.

For instance, children at her centres learn numeracy through practical experiences and role-play, rather than through rote learning.

School readiness also includes a positive attitude to learning and foundations needed for building knowledge, says Dr Chung.

Schools and families should adjust to children’s different learning appetites and avoid force-feeding or underfeeding them.

Ms Jean Koh, assistant director of Circle of Care, a programme to help young children from low-income families, says there are seven key life skills that make up

executive function, which refers to mental attributes that are needed for everyday life.

These broadly cover working memory, flexible thinking and self-control. The first four skills are focus and self-control, perspective-taking, communication and making connections. The other three are critical thinking, taking on challenges and self-directed learning.

Ms Koh says these skills are critical for transition because the expectations on children increase when they enter primary school.

The skills help children to navigate not just a new environment, but also relationships around them, enabling them to excel in school and in life. They also help them to build strong academic foundations, for instance, in making connections and exercising self-control, says Ms Koh.

Amelia Teng

Key life skills such as focus and self-control help children navigate a new environment and the relationships around them, say educators.
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