Cognus EARLY YEARS TEAM

Supporting Children's Transition from Nursery and Preschool into Reception

Transitions matter. For young children, moving from a familiar early years setting into Reception is one of the most significant changes they experience. When handled thoughtfully, this transition can build confidence, wellbeing and a love of learning. When rushed or fragmented, it can increase anxiety for children, families and staff alike.

Strong transitions are not about preparing children to *fit* school, but about ensuring schools and settings are ready to *receive* every child.

Why transitions matter in the early years

Children entering Reception are navigating multiple changes at once: a new physical environment, unfamiliar adults, different routines, and often higher expectations around independence and learning behaviours. Research and practice consistently show that children who feel secure, known and understood settle more quickly and are better able to engage in learning.

Transitions into Reception are particularly important because they mark a shift from nursery and preschool into statutory schooling, even though the EYFS curriculum continues.

What makes an effective transition?

Effective transition is:

- **Child-centred**
- **Planned and gradual**
- **Based on strong relationships**
- **Built on shared understanding between settings and schools**

Most importantly, it is a **process**, not a one-off event.

How nurseries and preschools can support transition

1. Build transition into everyday practice

Supporting transition starts long before the summer term. Developing children's confidence, independence and emotional literacy throughout the year helps ensure they are ready for change in a developmentally appropriate way.

This might include:

- Talking positively about moving on
- Reading stories about starting school
- Practising turn-taking, dressing, and self-help skills naturally through play
- Encouraging children to express worries and ask questions

2. Share meaningful information with schools

Transition information should go beyond tick lists or attainment data. Reception teachers benefit most from:

- The child's interests and motivators
- How the child communicates and plays
- Relationships with adults and peers
- Emotional regulation strategies that work
- Family context where appropriate

Well-completed transition documents help schools see the *whole child*, not just where they are developmentally.

3. Prepare families as well as children

For many parents, this is their first experience of school. Nurseries and preschools can support families by:

- Talking through what Reception looks like
- Normalising anxieties
- Explaining the similarities between EYFS practice in nursery and school
- Encouraging families to share information with schools

Confidence in adults supports confidence in children.

How schools and Reception teachers can support transition

1. Start early and build relationships

Transition works best when Reception teachers engage with feeder settings early. This might include:

- Visiting nurseries and preschools
- Attending transition meetings
- Talking directly with key persons
- Observing children in familiar environments
- Nursery staff/ key person visits to school to gain a deeper understanding of children's new environment and routines.

2. Create welcoming and familiar environments

Reception classrooms should feel like a natural continuation of the EYFS, not a sudden step away from it. Consider:

- Using continuous provision
- Offering opportunities for child-led play
- Maintaining routines similar to nursery where possible
- Using visual supports and familiar resources

A play-based, flexible start helps children feel safe and confident.

3. Prioritise emotional wellbeing over academic pressure

The first half term of Reception should focus on:

- Building relationships
- Helping children feel secure
- Establishing routines gradually

Children who feel emotionally settled will access learning more effectively in the long term.

Working together: the power of partnership

Strong transitions depend on collaboration between:

- Nurseries and preschools
- Schools
- Families

Supporting children with additional needs

Transitions can be particularly challenging for children with SEND or those requiring additional emotional support. For these children, transition planning should be:

- Individualised
- Started earlier
- Reviewed regularly

Additional strategies may include:

- Photo books showing the new school, classroom, adults and key spaces
- Visual timetables that mirror what will happen during the Reception day
- Simple social stories explaining change in reassuring language
- Short videos or virtual tours
- Extra school visits
- Gradual increases in time spent in the Reception environment
- Clear communication between SENCOs, key persons and families ensuring working together in partnership.

Small adjustments can make a significant difference.

A shared responsibility

Successful transition into Reception is not the responsibility of one person or one setting. It is a shared responsibility rooted in respect for children's early experiences and trust in professional judgment across the EYFS.

By focusing on relationships, communication and emotional wellbeing, we can ensure children do not just start school—but start school **feeling confident, valued and ready to thrive**.

Further Reading:

Supporting a smooth transition into reception - GOV.UK

Home - Starting Reception