




Developmental Milestones for Children of Primary School Age

Foundation Stage 2 (Rainbows)

Important context: While age-based milestones are helpful guides, they're not rigid rules. Daily living skills develop at different rates, often unevenly or asynchronously, especially for neurodivergent learners. Use these milestones as a flexible reference, always considering each individual's unique profile.

<p>Being School Ready</p>	<p>“School ready” self-help skills are the everyday independence skills children need to manage themselves in school without constant adult support. These are especially important for starting Reception and developing through the early years.</p> <p>Here’s a clear breakdown:</p> <p> Personal care skills</p> <p>A school-ready child can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dress and undress themselves (including shoes and coat)• Manage fastenings like buttons, zips, and Velcro• Use the toilet independently• Wash hands properly (soap, rinse, dry)• Manage basic hygiene (nose blowing, wiping face)• Ask for help if needed <p> Managing belongings</p> <p>A school-ready child can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognise their own belongings (coat, bag, lunchbox)• Hang up their coat and put away their bag• Open and close lunchboxes and water bottles• Look after their own items with reminders• Begin to tidy up after themselves <p> Mealtime independence</p> <p>A school-ready child can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eat lunch independently
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- Use cutlery appropriately
- Open food packaging (where possible)
- Sit and eat calmly with others
- Recognise when they are full or hungry

Listening and following routines

A school-ready child can:

- Follow simple instructions (1–2 steps, e.g. “Put your coat away and sit on the carpet”)
- Listen in a group setting for short periods
- Follow familiar daily routines (register, snack time, tidy-up time)
- Transition between activities with minimal support

Emotional independence

A school-ready child can:

- Separate from parents/carers without distress (most days)
- Ask an adult for help when needed
- Begin to manage small frustrations (e.g. waiting, sharing)
- Comfort themselves with reassurance from adults
- Show confidence in trying new activities

Social skills

A school-ready child can:

- Play alongside and with other children
- Share and take turns (with reminders)
- Use polite language (please, thank you)
- Begin to resolve small conflicts with support
- Understand simple rules

Learning independence

A school-ready child can:

- Sit and focus on a short adult-led activity
- Hold a pencil and use basic mark-making tools
- Follow simple classroom expectations
- Attempt tasks independently before asking for help
- Show curiosity and willingness to try

★ Simple summary

A school-ready child can:

"Look after themselves, follow simple routines, and take part in learning with growing independence."

Foundation Stage – 4-5 years





Self-Help and Independence Skills

Key Self-Help Skills (4-5 Years)

- **Dressing:** Putting on clothes, beginning to manage buttons and zips, and choosing weather-appropriate clothing.
- **Toileting:** Using the toilet independently, flushing, and cleaning up afterwards.
- **Eating:** Using a fork and spoon correctly, pouring liquids, and opening food containers.
- **Hygiene:** Brushing teeth, washing and drying hands thoroughly, and blowing their own nose.
- **Jobs around school/home:** Putting toys away, hanging up coats, and helping to set the table.

How to Encourage Independence (4-5 years)

- **Break Down Tasks:** Teach complex tasks like getting dressed in small, manageable steps.
- **Create Accessible Spaces:** Place clothes, toys, and hygiene items where they can reach them.
- **Offer Limited Choices:** Provide two options (e.g., "Do you want to wear the blue shirt or red shirt?") to empower decision-making.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice "Little and Often": Encourage daily practice of skills rather than long, intense sessions. • Use Praise and Encouragement: Celebrate their efforts to try new things and do tasks independently. • Model : Show them how to do tasks while describing the steps aloud.
<p>Social and Emotional Skills</p>	<p> Personal, Social & Emotional Development</p> <p>A child is expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take turns and share with others • Follow simple rules and routines • Show confidence in trying new activities • Manage feelings with growing independence • Form positive relationships with adults and peers
<p>Communication skills</p>	<p> Speaking (expressive language)</p> <p>A child is typically expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak in clear sentences that others can understand • Use a growing range of vocabulary to explain ideas, feelings, and experiences • Retell simple stories or events in the correct order • Ask and answer questions appropriately • Use talk to explain thinking (e.g. "I think this because...") • Begin to use more complex sentences using words like <i>because, and, so</i> <p> Example: "I went to the park and I played on the swings because it was fun."</p> <p> Listening and attention</p> <p>A child is expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen attentively in a group for short periods • Follow simple instructions (and sometimes multi-step instructions) • Understand and respond appropriately to questions

- Focus on stories, songs, and conversations without constant repetition
- Shift attention between activities when guided

💡 Example: "Put your book away, then sit on the carpet."

🗨️ Understanding language (receptive language)

A child is expected to:

- Understand instructions containing several key words
- Follow stories without needing repeated explanation
- Understand questions like "who, what, where, why"
- Understand basic concepts such as:
 - before/after
 - under/over
 - same/different
- Begin to understand more abstract language in stories and discussions

🗨️ Communication in social situations

A child is expected to:





- Take turns in conversation
- Listen and respond appropriately to others
- Use language to negotiate and resolve simple conflicts
- Join in group discussions
- Express needs and feelings verbally rather than physically

💡 Example: "Can I have a turn when you've finished?"

📖 Storytelling and narrative skills

A child is expected to:

- Retell familiar stories using key events
- Use story language (e.g. "once upon a time", "then", "finally")
- Begin to create their own simple stories
- Describe characters and events
- Use imagination in speech during play

<h2>Physical Skills</h2>	<p> Physical Development</p> <p>A child is expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold a pencil correctly and begin forming letters • Use scissors and tools safely • Move confidently (running, jumping, balancing) • Show good control in fine motor activities (drawing, threading, building) • Manage personal hygiene (toileting, handwashing)
<h2>Academic Skills</h2>	<p>In England, Foundation Stage 2 (Reception) is part of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) within the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework. Children are typically aged 4–5, and the focus is on building strong foundations in language, number, and early learning habits through play and structured activities.</p> <p>By the end of Reception, children are assessed against the Early Learning Goals (ELGs).</p> <p> Literacy (Reading & Writing)</p> <p> Reading</p> <p>A child is expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read simple words and sentences using phonics • Blend sounds together (e.g. c-a-t → cat) • Recognise and read common “tricky words” (e.g. the, was, you) • Talk about stories and predict what might happen • Show understanding of what they’ve read <p> Writing</p> <p>A child is expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write recognisable letters, most of which are formed correctly • Spell simple words using phonics • Write simple phrases and sentences that can be read by others • Begin to use capital letters and full stops (with support) • Say out loud what they are going to write before writing it

Mathematics

A child is expected to:

- Count reliably to at least 20 (often beyond)
- Recognise numbers to 10 (and beyond)
- Understand and use number bonds to 10 (e.g. $3 + 7 = 10$)
- Add and subtract single-digit numbers using objects or fingers
- Recognise and name basic 2D shapes (circle, square, triangle, rectangle)
- Compare quantities (more, less, same)
- Begin to understand simple patterns and sequences

Understanding the World

A child is expected to:

- Talk about their family and community
- Recognise similarities and differences between people
- Explore the natural world (plants, animals, seasons)
- Use simple technology (tablets, interactive tools)
- Show curiosity and ask questions

Expressive Arts & Design







A child is expected to:

- Draw, paint, and create with a range of materials
- Sing songs and move rhythmically
- Use imagination in play and storytelling
- Explore colour, texture, and form
- Begin to represent ideas creatively

End of Reception expectation “Good Level of Development” (GLD)

By the end of Foundation Stage 2, children are expected to:

- Be **ready for Year 1 learning**
- Have secure early reading and writing skills
- Understand basic number concepts
- Be able to learn through structured routines as well as play

	<p> Simple summary</p> <p>A Reception-ready child is:</p> <p>“Beginning to read and write, confident with early number skills, and able to learn independently through play and structured activities.”</p>
	<p> Speech, language and communication concerns</p> <p>Watch for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficulty following simple instructions (e.g. “put your coat on and sit down”)• Speech that is unclear to unfamiliar adults• Limited vocabulary compared to peers• Struggling to join in conversations or play talk• Not understanding simple “why” or “what” questions• Frustration when trying to express ideas <p> Red flag: child relies on gestures instead of words most of the time.</p> <p> Early reading and phonics difficulties</p> <p>Watch for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not recognising letters or sounds over time• Difficulty blending sounds (e.g. c-a-t → cat)• Not showing interest in books or stories• Struggling to hear rhymes or recognise sounds in words• Avoiding reading activities <p> Red flag: little progress in phonics after consistent exposure may indicate a lack of phonological awareness.</p> <p> Early writing and mark-making concerns</p> <p>Watch for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficulty holding a pencil or making basic marks• Not attempting to write their name or simple words• Very limited interest in drawing or writing activities• Writing that is not progressing over time

💡 Red flag: no attempt to represent ideas on paper.

Early maths difficulties

Watch for:

- Struggling to count objects reliably
- Not recognising numbers to 10
- Difficulty understanding “more” and “less”
- Not engaging with counting games or number songs
- Trouble recognising simple shapes

💡 Red flag: no secure number sense developing despite practice.

Attention and learning

Watch for:

- Very short attention span compared to peers
- Difficulty sitting for short group activities
- Not following classroom routines even with support
- Easily overwhelmed or disengaged in structured tasks
- Frequent avoidance of learning activities

💡 Red flag: cannot engage even in short adult-led tasks; difficulty finishing one task and moving to another.

Social and emotional development

Watch for:






- Difficulty playing with other children
- Limited interaction or repeated solitary play
- Frequent emotional outbursts or frustration
- Difficulty separating from adults beyond expected settling period
- Struggles to follow basic classroom rules

💡 Red flag: ongoing difficulty forming relationships or managing emotions.

Physical and self-help skills

Watch for:

- Difficulty dressing/undressing independently

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Struggles with toileting independence (beyond early settling period) • Poor fine motor control (cutting, holding tools) • Lack of coordination in movement activities <p> General signs to monitor over time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little or no progress over several months • Child consistently “behind” in multiple areas (not just one) • Increasing frustration or avoidance of school tasks • Teacher expressing ongoing concerns about development <p> What to do if you notice concerns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak to the class teacher early (don’t wait) • Ask what support is already in place in school • Share what you see at home (patterns matter) • Request suggestions for home support activities • If needed, ask about additional assessment or early intervention support <p> Important reassurance</p> <p>In Reception, children develop at very different rates. Many children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • start slowly and “catch up” quickly • struggle with one area but are strong in others • need time, repetition, and confidence-building rather than formal intervention <p> Simple summary</p> <p>Look for concerns in:</p> <p>communication, phonics, number sense, attention, independence, and social interaction—especially if progress is slow or not happening over time.</p>
<p>What to look out for if you are concerned that your child is falling behind</p>	<p> Speech, language and communication concerns</p> <p>Watch for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty following simple instructions (e.g. “put your coat on and sit down”) • Speech that is unclear to unfamiliar adults

- Limited vocabulary compared to peers
- Struggling to join in conversations or play talk
- Not understanding simple “why” or “what” questions
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- Lack of coordination in movement activities

General signs to monitor over time

- Little or no progress over several months
- Child consistently “behind” in multiple areas (not just one)
- Increasing frustration or avoidance of school tasks
- Teacher expressing ongoing concerns about development

What to do if you notice concerns

- Speak to the class teacher early (don't wait)
- Ask what support is already in place in school
- Share what you see at home (patterns matter)
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★ Important reassurance

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