StarTing School

A guide for families of children starting school, brought to you by Big Fat Smile.
## School Term Dates

### 2020

**TERM 1**  
Tuesday 28 January to Thursday 9 April

**TERM 2**  
Monday 27 April to Friday 3 June

**TERM 3**  
Monday 20 July to Friday 25 September

**TERM 4**  
Tuesday 12 October to Friday 18 December

### 2021

**TERM 1**  
Wednesday 27 January to Thursday 1 April

**TERM 2**  
Monday 19 April to Friday 25 June

**TERM 3**  
Monday 12 July to Friday 17 September

**TERM 4**  
Tuesday 5 October to Friday 17 December

NSW Public School term dates from  

Check with your child’s school to confirm term dates, as they may vary for Catholic and independent schools as well as your school’s development days.
Dear families,

Starting ‘big’ school is a milestone in every child’s life, filled with excitement and expectations for both the children and families. Preparing children socially and emotionally is pivotal in the time leading up to this change. For both children and families, school is a new environment which comes with new surroundings, new rules, faces longer days, and different expectations. To some children (and Mums and Dads) this may be overwhelming and even a little scary.

Big Fat Smile is a leader in early education and care. Our research and experience indicate that children thrive at school when they are equipped with the skills and confidence necessary to deal with their new surroundings and many new experiences.

Quality education and care offer important foundation skills, knowledge and experiences to help support and cultivate each child’s development, confidence and readiness for school skills.

For many families, these prior-to-school services play an important role in their child’s preparation for ‘big school’.

In preparation for your children transitioning to school, Big Fat Smile has prepared this Starting School Guide for you, to help you and your child have the best possible start in their schooling career.

For more information about school readiness and transition programs, visit the Transition to School Program website at www.transitiontoschool.com.au.

Jenni Hutchins
CEO, Big Fat Smile
1 Promote open conservations with your child about starting primary school
Having open conversations with children about starting school allows children to ask a variety of questions and gain a better understanding of what school will be like.

2 Encourage the development of social and emotional skills
The development of positive social and emotional skills is paramount to educational success, and a smooth transition into primary school. Parents can support children by playing simple games which can help them learn to play cooperatively by taking turns, following rules and develop self-regulatory behaviours if they don’t win.

3 Help your child develop self-help skills
Self-help skills underpin many school related tasks; therefore, it is imperative children are given opportunities to develop their ability to negotiate and handle everyday tasks such as getting dressed. Giving children opportunities to practice these skills before starting school can help build their confidence in their abilities.

4 Implement predictable routines
The importance of a predictable home routine cannot be underestimated. Parents can assist children in preparing for school by implementing a predictable night routine before the term starts. Some children even benefit from following a routine chart, as this encourages children to take ownership of their day.

5 Practical preparation
Now to the practical points... Parents should encourage children to wear school uniform at home before school, so it feels familiar when they have to start primary school. It is also important that all school items are labelled e.g. lunch box, bags, clothes with a familiar symbol and the child’s name so they can easily recognise their own belongings.

Overall, this is a wonderful milestone in your child’s life, good luck and well done!

Dr. Michele Peden,
Pedagogical Thinker in Residence, Big Fat Smile
WHEN SHOULD MY CHILD START SCHOOL?

According to the NSW Department of Education and Communities,

“Children can start Kindergarten at the beginning of the school year if they turn 5 on or before 31 July that year.

Some gifted or talented children may be ready to start school at an earlier age while others may benefit from being a little older. By law, all children must start school by their sixth birthday.”*

Starting school at the right time is important. We want to ensure that every child has the optimum opportunity to have a successful transition to formal schooling.

Deciding if your child is ready for school is an individual matter for your family to consider. The following questions may assist you in making a decision, based on how ready your child is to start school:

✔ Is my child emotionally ready for the challenges of school?
✔ Can my child socialise well with others?
✔ Does my child separate from me easily? How can I lessen this?
✔ Does my child listen well and respond appropriately to instructions?
✔ Will my child flourish in a structured environment or does s/he need a more relaxed, unstructured one?
✔ Does my child communicate effectively?
✔ Do I want my child to go to school because it will be more convenient for me, or because they are ready?
✔ Will another year at a prior-to-school service be more beneficial for my child?
✔ Will my child cope with the tiredness of five days at school?

If you have concerns about your child’s school readiness, speak with your centre director and staff, who can help you identify your child’s needs.

The NSW Transition to School Statement is a practical and simple tool designed to make it easier for information to be shared between families, early childhood services and schools. It summarises the child’s strengths, identifies their interests and approaches to learning, and suggests ways these can be supported.

The Statement is completed by the child’s early childhood educator, in cooperation with the family. All information is provided voluntarily. The Statement is then communicated to the child’s intended school where it provides the school and teachers with information they can use in planning and preparing for the child’s arrival and transition into the new learning environment.

Use of the Statement is optional. Each service and family will make the decision about whether to prepare a Statement, and the family will choose whether to make it available to the child’s intended school and teacher.
Help your child prepare for school by giving them opportunities to practice and develop their skills through play. Here are some of our tips to incorporate into your child’s everyday activities...

**PRE-WRITING ACTIVITIES**

Enhance your child’s ability to adjust to the school routine.

- Provide plenty of opportunities for your child to recognise their name.
- Trace or copy shapes and letters, using thick pencils to start with – this helps to develop the dexterity in their little fingers.
- Encourage clapping and rhyming games and provide opportunities (such as threading and play dough) to help your child develop fine motor skills.
- Encourage your child to hold their pencil between their thumb and pointer finger, but don’t worry if this is hard – children develop at different rates.
- Encourage drawing and art and craft activities to encourage creative thinking.

**EXERCISE:**

Enhance gross motor skills and builds strength.

- Encourage your child to run, climb, march, jump and dance.
- Throw and catch balls, bean bags and other objects to help improve reflexes.
- Create an obstacle course and follow simple instructions around the backyard or local park.
- Go for a bike ride.

**CUTTING SKILLS**

Enhance fine motor skills and help small muscles develop.

- Practice opening and closing scissors.
- Encourage correct scissor holding and safety.
- Let your child practice cutting out shapes in old magazines or newspapers.
SOCIAL SKILLS
Enhance your child’s ability to adjust to the routine.
• Have regular conversations and encourage children to express their thoughts, opinions and needs.
• Encourage independence – getting dressed, looking after belongings, packing up toys and being respectful of others.
• Play turn taking games such as board games and ensure your child is not always the ‘winner’ so that they can learn about ‘losing’ in games and are able to better cope when this happens with their peers in a school setting.
• Role play situations where self-regulation is necessary such as managing one’s emotions and behaviour appropriate for a described situation in a socially acceptable manner.
• Explain rules and how to follow instructions in a variety of situations.
• Visit public places, such as the swimming pool and the library.
• Have daily routines.
• Encourage independent toileting - visit public toilets and allow children to use toilets and wash their hands independently.
• Practice road safety and awareness.

READ, READ, READ
To enhance your child’s speech and language development.
• Read to your child every day.
• Identify stories as having a beginning, middle and end.
• Limit screen time for all devices including phones, tablets, computer and TV.
• Point out words in everyday situations, on street signs and at the supermarket.
• Visit the library for story time.
• Encourage independent reading. Your child will not be able to read yet - this is something that will develop later on - but children can learn to love books by looking at them.
School Healthy Lunchboxes

Children need to eat a variety of healthy foods everyday. Good lunch box foods include lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, breads, some protein and dairy foods and a bottle of water.

When your child first starts school, they may not eat everything you give them for lunch. Children are often very busy dealing with new routines at recess and lunch times and eating takes second place.

Don’t worry - this will settle once your child feels comfortable with new routines.

Include small, healthy and easy-to-eat snacks, as children often want to eat quickly so they can go and play and limit sugary, salty or fatty foods to occasional treats.

Some schools participate in healthy eating programs, where children are allowed to eat fruit and drink water at their desk. Check if your school is one of these and provide appropriate food, if so.

Always encourage your child to eat a healthy breakfast, as this will increase their ability to stay focused and concentrate at school.

For links to healthy lunch box ideas and suggestions, visit:
BANANA BERRY YOGURT MUFFINS

- Olive or canola oil spray
- 2 cups wholemeal self-raising flour
- 2 cups white self-raising flour
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 150ml low-fat natural yoghurt
- ½ cup orange juice
- 1 large banana, peeled and chopped
- 1 pear, cored and diced
- ½ cup buttermilk or low-fat milk

Preheat oven to 170°C. Lightly spray muffin trays with oil. Sift flours, returning husk from wholemeal flour to the bowl, add brown sugar. In a separate bowl mix eggs, yoghurt and juice. Combine with the flour mix and fold through fruit and milk (you may need less milk depending on moisture in fruit). Do not over-mix. Spoon mixture into trays. Bake near the top of the oven for 18-20 minutes. Turn onto a wire rack to cool.

Makes 24 muffins. Use any unsweetened fruit juice or use apples, blueberries or any other firm fruit to vary the flavour.

Recipe from www.healthykids.nsw.gov.au

NOT ANOTHER SANDWICH!

Why not try filling your child’s lunchbox with these tasty replacements instead?

- Quiche or frittata
- Chicken drumsticks
- Rice, pasta or salad
- Cooked sausages, cut into pieces
- Dinner leftovers
- Corn chips with salsa to dip

SATISFYING SNACKS

- Popcorn
- Homemade trail mix (breakfast cereal, chopped dried fruits or seeds)
- Cherry tomatoes and cucumber
- Cheese cubes and crackers
- Veggie sticks with dip

HOT TIP: INCLUDE A FROZEN DRINK OR SMALL FREEZER PACK TO KEEP LUNCH COOL.
Starting school can seem like a daunting step for mums and dads. Our monthly calendar shows the steps to take in your child’s preschool year to help ease the transition.

THE YEAR BEFORE

**FEBRUARY**
- Start health checks (eye, dental, hearing). Ensure immunisations are up to date.
- Practice independent skills with your child (going to the toilet and dressing independently, being responsible for their own clothes and toys).

**MARCH TO APRIL**
- Consider the question - is your child ready for school? Speak with preschool staff and consider all aspects of your child’s social and emotional development.
- Enquire now for independent and Catholic school enrolments.

**MAY TO JUNE**
- Participate in local community events.
- Enrol now for public schools: visit your school to complete an enrolment form.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JULY TO AUGUST</th>
<th>SEPTEMBER TO OCTOBER</th>
<th>NOVEMBER TO OCTOBER</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Meet with other parents and organise regular play time with children that will be attending the same school.</td>
<td>• Buy uniforms and label everything!</td>
<td>• Participate in orientation programs and school events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Look out for Transition to School playgroups.</td>
<td>• Visit your school and point out important buildings (toilets, canteen, office, playground).</td>
<td>• Practice walking to school, catching the bus and/or visiting after school care to help your child adjust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Contact your school for orientation dates.</td>
<td>• Practice eating lunch with a lunch box, opening drinks and putting things back in a school bag.</td>
<td>• Check your school’s start date for next year.</td>
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</tbody>
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**ONE MONTH TO GO!**

**JANUARY**

• Practice morning routines and wearing uniforms... **and be positive!**
You will be asked to provide an Immunisation History Statement when enrolling your child at school.

A child without an Immunisation History Statement will not be prevented from enrolling. Under the NSW Public Health Act 1991, however, children without proof of immunisation may be asked by Public Health Officials to stay at home during an outbreak of vaccine preventable disease. For more information on immunisation, speak to your GP or contact your local early childhood health centre.

AUSTRALIAN CHILDHOOD IMMUNISATION REGISTER

The Australian Childhood Immunisation Register is a national register administered by Medicare Australia that records details of vaccinations given to children under seven years of age who live in Australia.

The Immunisation History Statement can be obtained by calling 1800 653 809 or visit https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/medicare/australian-immunisation-register/how-use-and-update-it/immunisation-history-statements

NSW IMMUNISATION SCHEDULE

The current NSW Immunisation Schedule can be obtained from NSW Health at https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/immunisation/Pages/nsw-immunisation-schedule.aspx
# Childhood Vaccines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Vaccines</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BIRTH</strong></td>
<td>Hepatitis B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 MONTHS</strong></td>
<td>Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, Haemophilus influenzae type b, hepatitis B, polio, Pneumococcal, Rotavirus</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4 MONTHS</strong></td>
<td>Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, Haemophilus influenzae type b, hepatitis B, polio, Pneumococcal, Rotavirus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6 MONTHS</strong></td>
<td>Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, Haemophilus influenzae type b, hepatitis B, polio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12 MONTHS</strong></td>
<td>Meningococcal ACWY, Pneumococcal, Measles, mumps, rubella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>18 MONTHS</strong></td>
<td>Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, Measles, mumps, rubella, varicella, Haemophilus influenzae type b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4 YEARS</strong></td>
<td>Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>(all vaccines may be given as early as 3 1/2 years)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Adolescent Vaccines (School-Based Program)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Vaccines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>YEAR 7</strong></td>
<td>Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis Human papillomavirus (2 doses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YEAR 10</strong></td>
<td>Meningococcal ACWY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NSW Immunisation Schedule current as of 1 April 2019. Check the health website for updates.
The Best Start Kindergarten Assessment is a literacy and numeracy assessment conducted for all Kindergarten students during their first five weeks of school.

Children start school with a range of early literacy and numeracy knowledge, skills and understandings. The Best Start assessment helps teachers develop effective learning programs that build upon what students know and can do.

Remember - this is not a test, and you do not need to prepare your child in any special way. Support your child by reassuring them that there is no need to worry about this type of assessment, they only need to try their best. It’s merely another part of school life.

Some children may need extra support because of difficulties with hearing, vision, language, mobility, learning or behaviour.

The NSW Department of Education and Communities may provide for your child’s needs in a number of ways. Depending on your child’s individual circumstances, s/he may be enrolled in mainstream classes with specialist support, in special classes within mainstream schools, or at a special school.

Schools need to know if your child has special learning needs at least 12 months before enrolment. Schools also need time to prepare for your child’s needs. If your child has a physical need, you should inform the school at least 18 months prior to starting school.

The NSW Department of Education and Communities has developed transition guidelines to assist you with the enrolment of your child with special learning needs. There are special enrolment procedures for children with additional learning needs.

Contact the NSW Department of Education and Communities (see back page for details).

Speak with your School Principal and they will guide you in the process.

If you have concerns about your child’s development, you can contact:
Child and Family Services: Helensburgh to Dapto
Port Kembla Hospital: P: 4223 8044
Kids Cottage: Albion Park to Gerringong, Belfast Avenue, Warilla P: 4297 1022
School Age Care

If your child is going to attend School Age Care, they will need to be familiar with the routine.

Sometimes School Age Care services will be located at your child’s school. At other schools, children are transported to the School Age Care service located at a nearby school or community centre.

Visit the School Age Care service with your child in the months prior to starting school and become familiar with the staff and routines. Ensure your child is comfortable with transport facilities or getting to the School Age Care centre from their classroom.

Speak to staff at your child’s school as they may be able to arrange for an older child to pair up with your child as a School Age Care buddy, to support them on the journey until they are comfortable doing it themselves.

Once your child has started school, speak to them about School Age Care in the morning and remind them of what will happen in the afternoon.

To find out which School Age Care services provide care for students at your child’s school, speak to staff at the school.

Big Fat Smile - Fun Club!

Big Fat Smile operates fifteen School Age Care services. These include:

- Albion Park
- Austinmer
- Balarang
- Bingara Gorge
- Bulli
- Fairy Meadow
- Flinders
- Goulburn West
- Illawarra
- Koonawarra
- St Columbkille’s
- Thirroul
- Unanderra
- West Wollongong
- Wollondilly
- Wollongong East

For more information, phone 4283 9900 or visit www.bigfatsmile.com.au/5-12-centres.
If your child attends a daycare centre, talk to staff about their transition to school.

 Attend your school orientation or transition to school programs.

 Take your child to your doctor for a health check and ensure that their immunisations are up to date before school starts.

 If your child takes medication, has an allergy, medical condition or additional needs, inform the school early on and make an appointment to speak with school staff.

 Fill in a travel pass application if this applies to you. You can visit transport.nsw.gov.au/ssts.

 Organise outside of school hours care if needed.

 Practise safely walking or travelling to and from school.

 Connect with your school and other parents on Facebook and Twitter.
The first day of Kindergarten is an exciting event in your child’s life. To help you make the most of the day and ease your child’s nerves so they can enjoy the experience, here are some helpful tips.

**THE NIGHT BEFORE**

- Help your child lay out their clothes
- Prepare your child’s morning tea and lunch and have it packed and ready in the fridge
- Help your child pack their school bag and get familiarised with what they need to bring to school every day
- Pack a spare pair of underpants, socks and a change of clothes in a plastic bag. Let your child know these are in their backpack in case they have any toilet accidents at school.

**ON THE DAY**

- Be confident with your child and encourage them to dress themselves.
- Make sure your child knows who is picking them up after school and where the meeting spot is.
- Apply sunscreen and ensure they have their hat.
- Tie back long hair or plait hair.
- Don’t forget to take photos!
- Pick up your child on time
- At the end of the school day take time to talk to your child about what happened during the day and how they felt.
The First Year of School

Primary school routines differ greatly from early childhood education and care, in terms of structure, routine and expectations of the children.

To help your child during their first year of school, we’ve come up with some helpful tips.

✔ Meeting new people, learning new things and adjusting to a new routine can be very tiring for children and many may find that their children become quite tired by the end of the school day. It may be worth considering fewer extracurricular activities such as sports or dance lessons until they adjust to their new routine.

✔ Encourage your child to talk about their new experiences at school, what they are learning in class, what they are enjoying and any difficulties they may be having. This will help you support their learning and keep up with how they are adjusting.

✔ Ask the teacher what might work best in terms of regular ongoing communication with you. It’s important to be able to get in contact with your child’s teacher if your child is experiencing difficulty at school.

✔ Organise time for your child to play with new school friends outside of school to assist in nurturing their relationships and their social skills.

✔ Plan a light, healthy afternoon snack for your child when they come home from school as they may be more tired than usual and in need of an energy boost.

Make reading part of your daily routine. Reading to your child as they prepare for bed is a great way to wind down with your child before bed, spend some quality time together and build important skills.
If you would like to speak to professionals that can support you on your transition journey, or have further questions, help is only a phone call away. Speak to your early childhood service director about your child’s needs. You can also seek help from your local school principal or visit www.transitiontoschool.com.au.

NSW Department of Education and Communities
P: 4251 9900
www.dec.nsw.gov.au