What are ‘Strong Foundations’ and why do they matter?

Wednesday 30th September 2026

“Build the Foundations and the outcomes will follow.”

What do we mean by ‘strong foundations’?

- Strong foundations are the knowledge, skills, attitudes and habits children develop that help them learn successfully.
- They include much more than reading, writing and maths.
- Foundations develop gradually from Reception through primary school – and children develop at different rates.
- Key areas include communication, relationships, independence, physical development, emotional wellbeing and learning behaviours.
- These foundations help children access the wider curriculum and make the most of learning opportunities.



Think of foundations as the building blocks that support everything else children learn.

Why are strong foundations important?

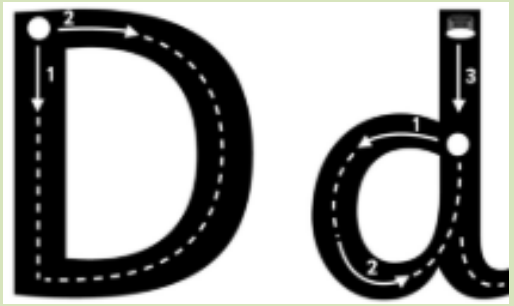
- Children who have secure foundations are better able to engage with new learning and solve problems.
- Strong communication skills help children understand instructions, explain ideas, ask questions and build relationships.
- Emotional security and positive relationships help children feel safe enough to take risks and make mistakes.
- Independence helps children manage routines, organise themselves and take responsibility for their learning.
- Good learning habits – such as listening, concentrating, persevering and reflecting – become increasingly important as children grow.



The foundations children need

- Communication & language – listening, speaking, vocabulary, conversation and explaining ideas.
- Reading & writing – developing phonics, fluency, comprehension, spelling and the ability to communicate through writing.
- Mathematical thinking – understanding number, calculation, patterns, measures and solving problems.
- Personal, social & emotional development – managing feelings, forming relationships, confidence and resilience.
- Physical development & self-care – coordination, handwriting, movement, healthy routines and looking after themselves.
- Learning behaviours – curiosity, concentration, perseverance, independence and being willing to learn from mistakes.





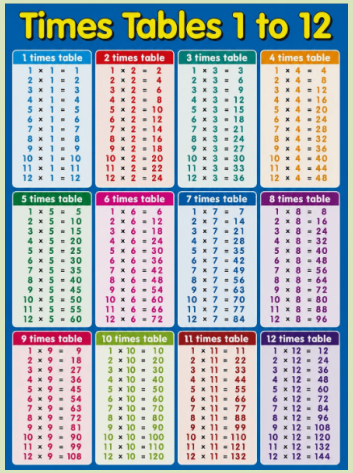
What we do in school to build strong foundations

- Create positive relationships where children feel safe, valued and ready to learn.
- Through our Oracy curriculum we teach children how to listen, communicate, collaborate, concentrate and manage distractions.
- Provide regular opportunities to read, talk, practise, explore, question and solve problems.
- Explicitly teach independence: organising equipment, following routines, making choices and taking responsibility.
- Support emotional wellbeing through relationships, pastoral support and opportunities to talk about feelings.
- Adapt teaching and provide additional support when children need help to develop particular skills.
- Work with parents and carers so that children receive consistent messages and support between home and school.

What does this look like across primary school?

- Reception & KS1: learning to listen, communicate, follow routines, become independent, develop phonics, read regularly and build number understanding.
- Lower KS2: becoming increasingly fluent readers, developing writing and maths skills, organising themselves and learning to persevere with challenges.
- Upper KS2: applying knowledge independently, thinking critically, managing increasing responsibility and preparing for the transition to secondary school.
- At every age: children continue to develop vocabulary, confidence, resilience, relationships, self-regulation and positive learning habits.
- Children do not all develop at the same pace – progress can look different from child to child.

Our role is to meet children where they are and help them take their next step.



How can you support your child at home?

• Talk together every day. Ask questions, introduce new vocabulary and encourage your child to explain their thinking.

• Read regularly. Share books, listen to your child read and talk about characters, events, information and new words.

• Encourage independence. Let children get dressed, organise belongings, prepare simple things and solve manageable problems themselves.

• Build routines. Regular sleep, meals, time outdoors and limits around screens help children be ready to learn.

• Make learning part of everyday life: cook together, count money, read signs, measure ingredients, play games and notice maths around you.

• Praise effort, perseverance and improvement rather than only getting things right.

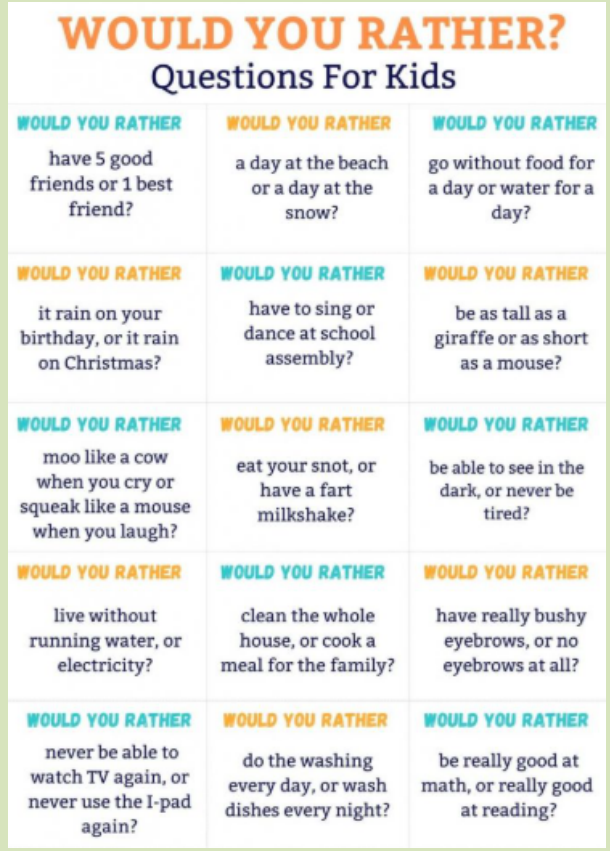
• Talk positively about school and let your child know that mistakes are a normal and useful part of learning.

Strong foundations are built together – at home, at school and through everyday experiences.

Small things make a big difference

Talk together every day

- Dinner-time questions: “What was the best thing about today?” “What was tricky?” “Why do you think that happened?”
- Would you rather? Ask fun questions such as, “Would you rather live in the jungle or at the seaside? Why?”
- Mystery object: Put an object in a bag and give clues while your child guesses what it is.
- Word of the day: Choose an interesting word and see who can use it correctly during the day.
- Explain it to me: Ask your child to explain how to play a game, make something or complete a task.
- Spot the difference: Look at two pictures and encourage your child to describe what is different using detailed vocabulary.



Small things make a big difference

Read regularly

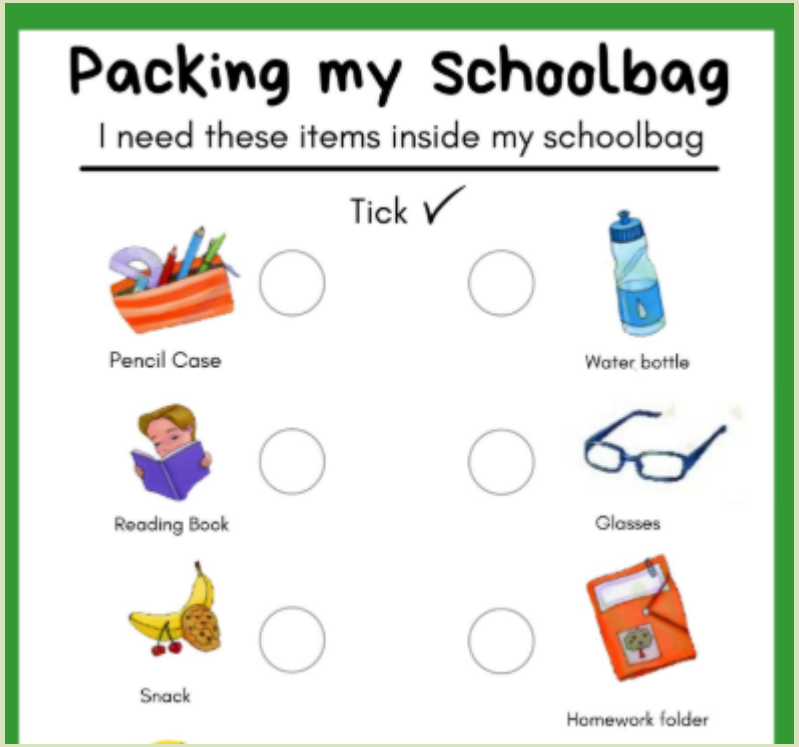
•Bedtime story: Take turns choosing the book and talking about what you have read.
•Book detective: Before reading, look at the cover and ask, “What do you think this book will be about?”
•Character chat: Ask, “How do you think the character is feeling? What makes you think that?”
•Predict the ending: Stop before the end and ask your child what they think will happen.
•Real-life reading: Read menus, recipes, signs, instructions, comics, newspapers and shopping lists together.
•Vocabulary hunt: Choose an interesting word from the book and find out what it means.



Small things make a big difference

Encourage independence

•Morning challenge: Let your child get dressed and organise what they need for school.
•School-bag check: Encourage them to check their own bag and remember what they need.
•Make a snack: Let children prepare something simple, such as cereal, toast or fruit.
•Tidying challenge: Give them responsibility for organising a drawer, toy box or bedroom area.
•Problem-solving: Instead of immediately helping, ask, “What could you try?”
•Helping at home: Give children jobs such as feeding a pet, laying the table, putting laundry away or helping with shopping.



Small things make a big difference



Build positive routines

- Bedtime routine: Keep a predictable sequence such as wash → pyjamas → story → bed.
- Morning routine chart: Let younger children tick off jobs as they complete them.
- Screen-free time: Have regular periods when the whole family puts devices away.
- Outdoor challenge: Go for a walk, cycle, visit the park or simply play outside.
- Weekend routine: Give children regular responsibilities, such as helping with breakfast or tidying their room.
- Healthy choices: Involve children in choosing fruit, vegetables and meals for the week.

Small things make a big difference

Make learning part of everyday life

•Cooking together: Weigh ingredients, count, measure, halve or double quantities and follow instructions.
•Shopping maths: Give your child a budget and ask them to work out what they can buy.
•Number spotting: Look for numbers on houses, buses, cars and signs.
•Time detectives: Ask, “What time do we need to leave?” or “How long until dinner?”
•Board games: Games involving counting, reading, strategy and turn-taking are fantastic for learning.
•Build and create: Use LEGO, blocks or recycled materials to design and build something.
•Nature hunt: Look for different leaves, insects, shapes, colours or patterns when outside.
•Map challenge: Use a simple map to plan a walk or find your way around a new place.



Small things make a big difference

Praise effort and perseverance

Instead of only saying “You're really clever!”, try:

- “I noticed how hard you worked on that.”
- “You didn't give up when it was difficult.”
- “What did you do differently this time?”
- “You have improved since last time.”
- “That was tricky, but you kept trying.”
- “Tell me how you worked that out.”
- Try a “yet” sentence: “I can't do it yet.”



Small things make a big difference

Talk positively about school and mistakes

•Dinner-table school chat: Ask what they enjoyed learning rather than simply, “Did you have a good day?”
•Share your mistakes: Tell your child about something you got wrong and what you did next.
•Celebrate mistakes: Say, “That's okay — what can we learn from that?”
•Try something new together: Cook a new recipe, learn a new game or visit somewhere unfamiliar.
•Ask for their thinking: “There isn't always one right answer. What do you think?”
•Celebrate progress: Look back at an old piece of work and talk about how much your child has improved.

You don't need to sit down and do extra lessons at home. Everyday activities are full of opportunities to talk, read, count, solve problems, become independent and develop confidence.
The most important thing is doing things together, talking together and giving children the opportunity to have a go.