



## Is Your Child Ready for School?

The Early School Readiness Assessment Tool

Ministry of Education: Republic of Vanuatu  
Early Childhood Care and Education

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# Is Your Child Ready for School?

## Introduction

There are many articles, research and documents about young children's early school readiness.

The most important point about early school readiness is that it is an opportunity to support children to transition to school and for schools to be ready to receive children. It is not meant to keep children from entering school. It is also not meant to punish children because they do not have yet all the knowledge and skills that will prepare them to succeed in school.

There are two kinds of readiness we look for in children:

- readiness to learn; and
- readiness for school.

We define readiness as:

*"Children's preparedness to enter Kindergarten and Kindergarten's preparedness to receive young children."*

(Kagan, 1990)

The new Vanuatu Kindergarten (Kindy) programme has a section called “prior learning.” This section outlines what a child should know, or at least begin to understand, before they enter Kindy. It is important for each Kindy teacher to review this section since it forms the basis of the readiness process for children entering Kindergarten.

The move from home to Kindergarten for children and parents can be very difficult. Children are leaving a familiar place and this is stressful for them. That is why it is important for teachers to reach out to parents and have “ready for school” workshops that include them and their children. In these workshops teachers can introduce families to the Kindergarten classroom and the kinds of activities that will take place in Kindergarten.

Teachers have to remember that the child’s family is the central influence in their lives throughout the early years. It is important, therefore, to link steps in children’s education to their earlier experiences at home and to involve parents in their school activities (Health, 1987). For example, a parental letter (Appendix A – Letter to Parents) and the Vanuatu Early School Readiness Assessment Tool (Appendix B – Early School Readiness Assessment Tool for Parents) are provided so that you can guide parents to fill it out before children begin their Kindergarten year. All teachers will be trained to use this readiness assessment tool so that they are capable and ready to use it with parents. This tool is one of two assessment instruments which have been prepared for teachers use in order to:

- guide programme practice;
- identify children who may need more support;
- plan for programme revisions; and
- evaluate how well programme goals are being met.

The second tool is the Vanuatu Early School Observation Tool provided in the document *Observing and Assessing Children’s Learning*.

It is important for everyone using the Early School Readiness Assessment Tool to understand that children’s experiences before entering Kindergarten will be unequal. For example, children from poorer communities may have limited access to:

- experiences;
- resources;
- health care; and
- quality education.

To minimize these differences, schools can work with parents before their children come to school. Also, communities can:

- set up family and children centres for an hour a day; and
- introduce different activities to engage parents and children in learning.

Remember: a readiness tool is not a test! It is simply a guide to see what a child can do since no child is expected to master all of the selected skills before entering Kindergarten. Kagan states that if every child who enters Kindergarten is given the support each needs, especially if not ready, then all schools are supporting children's differences equally.

The Vanuatu Early School Readiness Assessment Tool will focus on the child's development continuum from three to six years of age. Often readiness tools are based on academic efforts. This focus has the potential of limiting children's success. Instead, the Vanuatu readiness tool focuses on the holistic play-based curriculum programme that all Kindergartens teachers will use for teaching children.

## Kindergarten Readiness to Accept Children

All young children learn best by doing and experimenting. It is, therefore, essential that Kindergarten programmes promote learning experiences in the classroom that allow for children to:

- handle objects;
- explore;
- experiment; and
- be creative

with materials from their environment that are familiar to them.

Play is often viewed by society simply as "something trivial and a waste of time." Yet play is an essential way of learning for the young child. Play allows children to learn by imitating others, imagining possibilities, practicing how to do things, and making sense of the world around them. Play is developmental and changes as children go from exploratory play to constructive play to dramatic play:

- During exploratory play children will fill cups with seeds or sand, or they will build structures in the sand or doodle over and over again.

Learning will be a balance between child-initiated and teacher-initiated activities.

This balance will be the main feature of a Kindergarten that is ready to encourage children to engage in age-appropriate learning.

- In **constructive play** children begin to use objects and materials to represent “something.” At times their activities become more complex as they build houses, cars, or other things familiar to them.
- They also engage in **dramatic play** as they build blocks and imagine the blocks to be a horse or a car. They know, for example, that the wheels on their wooden cars help the car move. Children at this stage also begin to create imaginary roles or situations.

The learning environment of the school is an essential part of all Kindergartens. Children need spaces that are planned well with safety always a major consideration. Teachers should play activities inside and outside the classroom but always with focused supervision. They should also observe children at play in order to assess their learning. All Kindergartens should have the materials necessary to enhance learning as outlined in the play-based programme document.

Play is reading and writing, learning, creating and having fun.

*-John Dewey, Educational Reformer*

A Parent/Teacher Handbook has been prepared for your use with parents to encourage the use of play at home and school.



## The Ministry of Education's Approach to Education in the Early Years

Vanuatu's Ministry of Education has undertaken an extensive review and revision of the early year's education process. It has a:

- Childhood Care and Education Policy
- National Quality Early Child Care and Education Framework
- Document outlining the Learning and Development Standards.

Besides the alignment of policies, frameworks and standards, the Ministry has built a strong foundation for the early years by having:

- A holistic and integrated play-based curriculum programme
- A framework for early literacy and numeracy
- Assessment tools for teachers: early readiness and observation of children
- Assessment tools for Provincial Coordinators to use when visiting Kindergartens
- Monitoring tools for Ministry staff to visit and support teachers
- Training plans for Ministry staff and teachers
- A Code of Ethics to guide teacher behavior
- A strong parental campaign, focus on parent and teacher partnerships and a Parent/Teacher Handbook.

The above resources will meet the need of teachers, children and parents. The Ministry can coordinate its outreach in partnership and coordinated efforts with other non-governmental institutions. If children are not prepared for success in school and life, all the hopes of a nation will be dashed.

The Ministry of Education will ensure that everyone is properly trained in the use of the Early School Readiness Assessment Tool. The Ministry will also monitor the initial stages of teachers using the tool to ensure that they are comfortable with the tool, understand its use, and engage parents in the process.

## Portfolio Use

Portfolios are collections or samplings of information relating to each child's developmental progress in an educational setting. As explained by Carol Gestwicki in *Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Curriculum and Development in Early Education* (1995): "Portfolios may contain collections of representative work of children that

illustrate their progress and achievements. ...Children are encouraged to add to their portfolios their own selections of work that they feel show their progress" (Gestwicki, p. 304).

Each child in Kindergarten will have a portfolio that includes:

- the teacher's Early School Readiness Assessment Tool results;
- the teacher's Early School Observation Tool results;
- samples of the child's work over the course of the year; and
- the certification that they have finished the Kindergarten term.

This documentation is to be shared with the child and his or her parents. It will also be given to the primary teacher to acquaint them with the child's work, areas of strengths and areas needing extra support. This portfolio will encourage the child to feel pride in his or her work. It will also help primary teachers familiarize themselves with their new students.

This kind of assessment is extremely valuable and also labour intensive; therefore, teachers will require strong support and encouragement from the Ministry of Education Provincial Coordinators and Key Teachers. The Ministry will support teachers to:

- Understand child development and the link to readiness for school
- Support teachers to have an ongoing partnership with parents
- Plan a media communication strategy for communities on the use of the readiness tool
- Invest in training Provincial Coordinators and Key Teachers to be mentors and experts in the use of assessment tools
- Support each child to have a "portfolio" that includes their readiness documents, observation reports, samples of their work and certification
- Promote collaboration between the Kindergarten and Primary teachers
- Prepare an orientation package for parents to inform them about the importance of Kindergarten
- Hold parent workshops to explain the readiness tool, child and brain development, and other important areas that parents should become familiar with.

## **Implementation of Early School Readiness Assessment Tool**

In the following section you will find the letter to parents and the readiness assessment tool to be completed by parents with your support. Please make time to visit each parent or

invite them to individually visit the Kindy. It is **essential** you ask the parent to come with their child. Each child is required to do two tasks during the assessment. Support the parents as they complete the readiness tool and be prepared to answer their questions. Keep the readiness tool results safe in each child's portfolio.

**Instructions for teachers to use the letter and readiness assessment tool with parents:**

1. Read aloud to parents the letter below and answer any questions.
2. Show the parents the Early School Readiness Assessment Tool. Help parents feel comfortable sharing information about their child. It is important that they do not feel they or their child is being judged by the answers they give.
3. Explain that the readiness tool has four parts.
4. Read aloud to parents all the information and statements on the tool. Write down their answers on the tool.
5. Follow the instructions below.
  - **Part One** lists 41 activities that a child may do. Read aloud each statement to the parent. Ask the parent to answer YES or TRYING or NOT YET. Based on what the parent says, put a checkmark under one of these three headings.
  - **Part Two** asks the child to identify different colors that you show. Make sure you have items available that represent each color such as colored paper or crayons. Record the child's responses where indicated.
  - **Part Three** asks the child to identify different numbers that you call out.
  - Make sure you have copied all the numbers onto a large piece of paper. Make the numbers large enough for the child to identify easily. Record the child's responses where indicated.
  - **Part Four** asks parents to comment on their child and sign off. As the parents speak, write down their comments on the page.
6. Analyze the results of the information you now have on the child. Use the Ministry of Education's Learning and Developmental Standards document to help you

## Appendix A - Letter to Parents

### LETTER TO PARENTS

Ministry of Education  
Republic of Vanuatu

Dear Parents:

We value your child and want him or her to have a joyful, safe and motivating learning experience at school. The Kindergarten teacher plays an important part as a liaison between home and Kindi. It is important for parents to share information about their child so that the teacher can help your child settle in Kindi. Also, if something scares or worries your child, it can have an effect on your child's well-being. That is why we are asking you to complete the Early School Readiness Tool. The information that you provide will help the teacher understand what your child already knows and what your child needs to learn next. The information you provide is confidential and will only ever be shared with your child's teachers.

The Kindi teacher will help you to fill this form out and explain it to you. The teacher will also ask your child to complete a few tasks. After, the teacher will keep the form as a confidential record in your child's file folder called a portfolio. It will also contain samples of his/her work during the year that you can look at in order to see your child's progress.

If you have any positive comments or concerns you wish to share, please do not hesitate to speak to your child's teacher. The teacher is there to support you and to make learning a fun, safe and motivating experience for your child.

Regards

Jennifer James  
National Early Childhood Care and Education Coordinator  
Ministry of Education

## Appendix B - Early School Readiness Assessment Tool for Parents

### Early School Readiness Assessment Tool For Parents

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#### **THIS FORM IS CONFIDENTIAL**

When completed, it will be kept in the child's portfolio with a sampling of his/her work and other reporting tools used to gather and share information about your child.

**Name of Child:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date Starting Kindergarten:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender: (please circle)**

Male

Female

**PART ONE: Activities****Topic: General Development**

Child Activities	Yes	Trying	Not Yet
My child knows how old she/he is:			
My child can name body parts			
My child can talk about the weather: rainy, sunny, windy			
My child can use crayons			
My child plays with local toys and other materials we give him/her			
My child can ask questions about what she/he sees, hears, smells and touches			
My child loves to listen to music and songs			
My child loves to explore musical instruments or likes to imagine playing tam tam, guitar and other instruments			
My child plays with imaginary friends			
My child loves to play with messy activities like sand and water			

**Topic: Physical Development**

Activities	Yes	Trying	Not Yet
My child walks without help			
My child can climb a small stair and/or play on a monkey bar			
My child can run without assistance			
My child can catch a ball			
My child can kick a ball			
My child can play with small toys, blocks, cartons, shells and other objects			

**Topic: Language Development**

Activities	Yes	Trying	Not Yet
My child has started to explore making marks and drawings on paper			
My child has established handedness: right or left hand			
My child loves to listen to stories and knows custom stories and dances			
My child can is able to recall/recite a short poem or song			
My child uses sentences of four or more words			
My child joins in songs and rhymes			
My child understands the story read to him/her			
My child loves to look at books			
My child responds to his/her name			
My child enjoys being read to			
My child points to pictures in the book when asked questions, for example, where is the blue ball? She/he will point to the blue ball			

**Topic: Social Development**

Activity	Yes	Trying	Not Yet
My child relates well to other children			
My child relates well to adults they know			
My child is able to share with others			
My child is able to feed self			
My child is able to wash own hands and face			
My child is able to wipe and blow own nose			
My child is toilet trained			
My child can remove and put on clothing			
My child helps with tidying up toys, books, clothing and other items			
My child knows the name of things around the house			

**Topic: Mathematical Development**

Activity	Yes	Trying	Not Yet
My child understands simple comparisons like “big and small”			
My child can identify different shapes like circles and squares			
My child can recite numbers to 10			
My child can count objects to 10			

**PART TWO: Identifying Colors**

Show the child each color below using, for example, **different crayons** or **colored paper**. Ask the child to identify each color. Record the results below by putting a checkmark in the correct column.

Color	YES Able to identify color	NO Not able to identify color
<b>RED</b>		
<b>BLUE</b>		
<b>GREEN</b>		
<b>YELLOW</b>		
<b>ORANGE</b>		
<b>BROWN</b>		
<b>BLACK</b>		
<b>WHITE</b>		



**PART THREE: Identifying Numbers**

Show the child a large piece of paper with the 12 numbers below written on it. The numbers do not have to be in a straight line. Make sure the numbers are written randomly on the page. Make each number large enough for the child to easily identify it.

Call out all the numbers, one at a time. Have the child point to the number you called out. Record the child's responses where indicated by putting a checkmark in the correct column.

<b>Number</b>	<b>YES Able to identify number</b>	<b>NO Not able to identify number</b>
<b>1</b>		
<b>7</b>		
<b>2</b>		
<b>5</b>		
<b>3</b>		
<b>6</b>		
<b>9</b>		
<b>4</b>		
<b>8</b>		
<b>10</b>		
<b>11</b>		
<b>12</b>		

**PART FOUR: Parent Comments**

1. Please comment on your child's unusual talents, interests, and individual needs.
2. Is there any reason why this child should be screened for a possible special condition before entering school in the fall?
3. If yes, please say what it is.

**Signature of Parent and Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

# References

- Coley.R.J. (March 2002). *An Uneven Start:Indicators of Inequality in School Readiness*. Princeton, New Jersey: Educational Testing Services.
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