

A sanity-saving  
organiser for the  
reception year  
at school

# THE SCHOOL MUM'S NOTEBOOK

## SCHOOL MUM, YOU'RE GOING TO FLY

Sending your child off to school can feel like the end of an era. How is that tiny bundle, who clung so tightly to your finger, suddenly old enough?

Lots of mums naturally feel very anxious about their child starting school. There's so much to learn and it can feel overwhelming.

*The School Mum's Notebook* written by Amy Ransom - mum of three - is the third book in the popular *Notebooks for Mums* series, following on from *The New Mum's Notebook* and *The Not So-New Mum's Notebook*.

With its pages of reassurance, tips and self-care, it will help you navigate that first school year, and also keep you organised with a diary page for every week.

Take your time. And remember, there is always a way. Your way. It might take a while to find what works best for you and your child.

But you will figure it out. And you will fly.

# THE SCHOOL MUM'S NOTEBOOK

A sanity-saving organiser for the reception year at school

Amy Ransom

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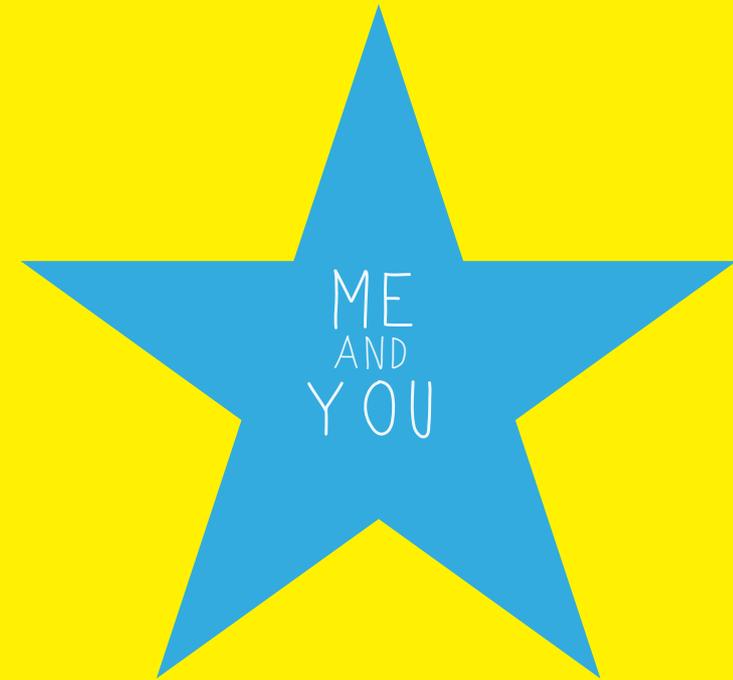
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What went through my head when I walked away  
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One thing I wish for you .....

One thing I wish for myself .....

## Dear School Mum

So. Here we are again. The third book in the Notebook series. Or maybe you're joining me for the first time, in which case, hello! I really hope *The School Mum's Notebook* helps you through that reception year at primary school, which I personally found quite daunting. I've done it three times now; here's everything I wish I'd known.

If you've read and scribbled your way through *The New Mum's Notebook* and *The Not-So-New Mum's Notebook*, you're already a pro at this. If, however, you've come straight here with your schooler in tow, here's a little bit on how to make the most of this book. I've chosen to divide *The School Mum's Notebook* into three parts, to mirror the three school terms but, more specifically, the seasons of *your* year. Because, just as Autumn, Spring and Summer show us so magically every year, I just know that you are going to Harvest, Blossom and Shine. As you did in that first year of motherhood and beyond. You can, of course, start the Notebook at ANY point in the school year and use the contents page to dip in and out; we all reach stages at different times (hold onto that thought when the doubts creep in). You also don't have to be a 'new' school mum. Maybe you've had a gap between children and would like a refresher or perhaps you're sending your last born off and want to keep a record. You might not even be a reception mum and that's ok, too; there's plenty here to support you throughout the primary years.

My desire is for you to find (almost) everything you need to navigate that first school year, amidst these reassuring articles and affirmations as well as a diary page for every week of the school year (based on the standard 39 weeks), to help keep you organised. There's also some journal space to keep a note of your thoughts, feelings and memories; there is so much I have forgotten because I didn't have anywhere to write it down.

Stand tall with your child. Always. Allow yourselves to learn together. Give yourselves time. You haven't done this before. The transition to school will be especially strange for you both if, until now, you've spent a large portion of your time together. There is no rush to get there. Take your time. And remember, there is always a way. Your way. It might take some time to find what works best

for you and your child. But you will figure it out. My first child took weeks to settle. My second and third children didn't even look back on their first days of school. Every child is so wonderfully different.

Try not to over think all the school stuff. Phonics. Homework. Friendships. Who reads better than who. It will overwhelm you if you let it. If your child is happy, then you're both doing more than ok. The curriculum these days is tougher than it was when we were at school and there are targets for your child to hit. But I remain a believer that your child will develop at their own pace, when they are ready. My eldest has shown me this time and time again; that there is so much more to education than knowledge alone.

The reception year is a great foundation. There's fun and a lot of play, to ease children into school life. I hope your child has the blessing of a teacher who nurtures their mind *and* their soul. Because a teacher who can do this is a wondrous being and someone you'll never forget (thank you Mrs M and Mrs K).

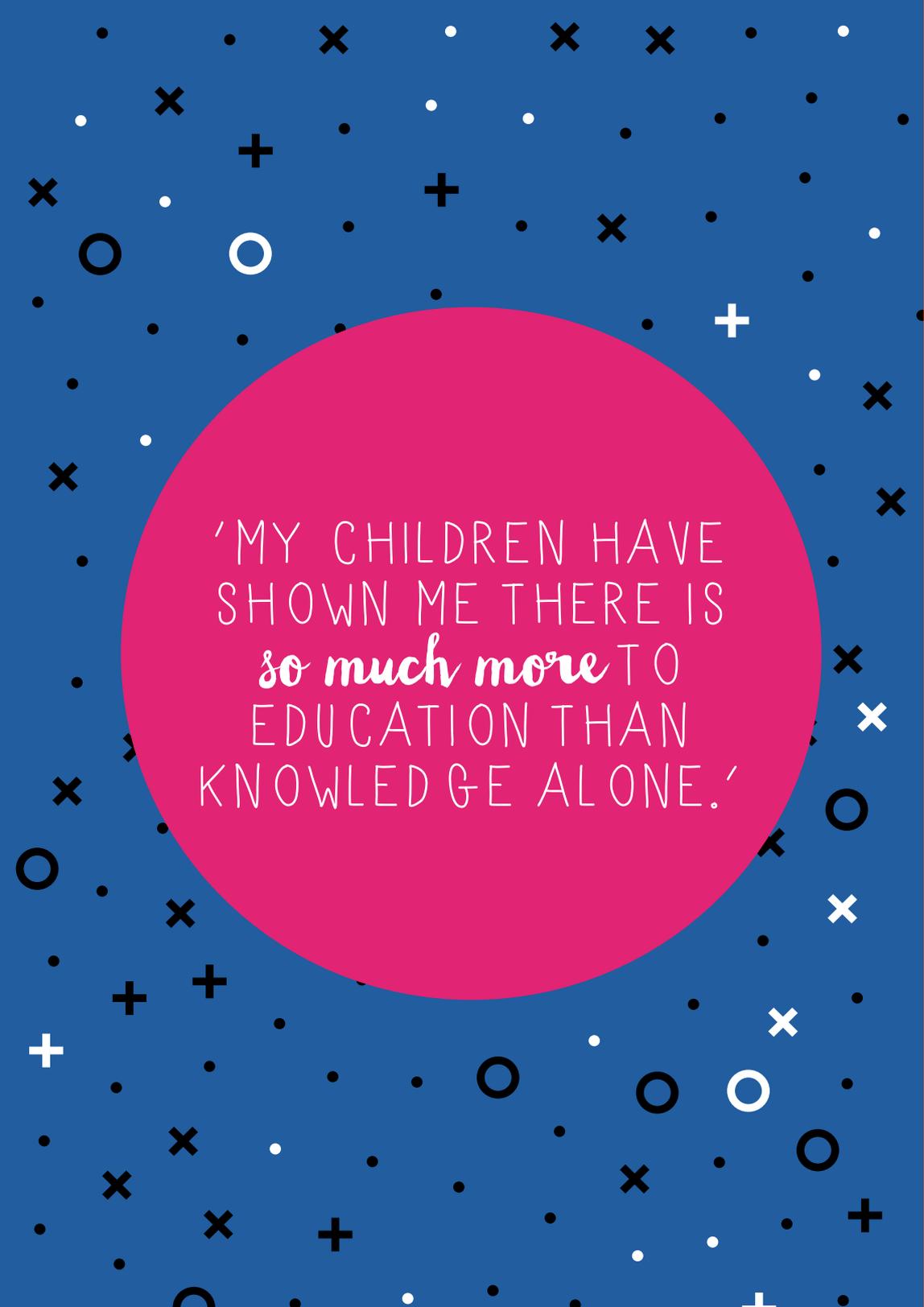
As with everything in motherhood, this school journey is your own. Decide how you want to travel it and note what's important to you. Everything else is just noise, which you will learn, soon enough, to tune out.

This is the beginning of a truly amazing chapter for you both. I never imagined that I would enjoy these years as much as I do (getting out of the house each morning being the exception). That I would feel such awe at watching my children essentially grow further away from me and need me less. But I do. Every single day. You are about to see things you didn't even know your child was capable of. You are about to watch their mind explode. And their soul soar. And you have the best seat in the house.

I wish you every happiness in this next year and thank you for entrusting me to be a very small part of helping you through it.

Much love, as always,

Amy x



'MY CHILDREN HAVE  
SHOWN ME THERE IS  
*so much more* TO  
EDUCATION THAN  
KNOWLEDGE ALONE.'



TERM ONE  
HARVESTING:  
'OH, HELLO AUTUMN'

# MY 'STARTING SCHOOL' CHECKLIST

Every school is different and each will have different requirements. They'll also very likely give you your own checklist but, as a safeguard, here's another to help you focus, in case your thoughts and emotions are making this tricky.

- Official uniform (from school)
- Trousers/skirts/pinafores
- Shirts/polo shirts
- Pants/knickers/socks/tights
- School shoes
- School bag
- P.E. bag
- Lunchbag
- Water bottle
- School coat
- Winter accessories (hat, scarf, gloves)
- Nametags (order in good time)
- Spare pants for school bag (in case of accidents)

## OTHER HELPFUL THINGS

- Phonics cards (for homework)
- Biros (for writing at home)
- Lots of paper

THIS IS JUST THE START  
OF YOUR CHILD  
DISCOVERING ALL THE  
WONDERFUL THINGS THEY  
CAN DO ON THEIR OWN.  
(BE PROUD.)

# HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE FIRST DAY

## PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT (SORT OF)

There is a lot you can do to prepare you and your child for that first day of school. In the lead-up, you can do stuff like working out your new 'school' routine ahead of time, so you can factor in stuff like breakfast, enough time to get dressed and travel logistics. Lay out breakfast the night before if it helps. Hey, eat it the night before, if it helps. Whatever it takes. This level of preparation will probably only last a week (if you're anything like me) but at least you'll be on time when first impressions count, right?

## DON'T GO OVERBOARD

That said, there is a fine line between useful preparation and going on about it so much that starting school eventually feels like Armageddon and the end of life as you both know it. Don't make a huge deal out of it, especially not to your child. The more hype there is, the more anxiety there will be for you both. Talk about school in a fun, casual way, not in a 'THIS IS THE BIGGEST MOMENT OF YOUR LIFE!' kind of way that leaves your child shaking in their new school shoes.

## LEAVE THE PAPARAZZI AT HOME

When the first day arrives, keep your cool. Go easy on the photos. One traditional photo standing at the front door is enough. Resist the urge to walk behind your child taking a video of their every step to the school gates, narrating every emotion running through your veins. I may have done this very thing. No wonder my first child was so overwhelmed.

## FIND OUT YOUR SCHOOL'S SETTLING IN ROUTINE

All schools do the first day and weeks differently. Most have a settling in period of a few days where your child only attends for a few hours each morning, extending gradually. Some do this over a longer period of time. Some allow you to go in and settle your child, others encourage you, beyond the first week, to let your child go in independently. It really does depend on your individual school.

Make sure you are aware of the procedure ahead of day one, so you know what to expect. But there are no hard and fast rules and if your child needs a different approach, speak to your teacher. Reception teachers are, in my experience, a special breed of teacher; compassionate and nurturing, first and foremost.

## SAYING GOODBYE (AND MAKING A RUN FOR IT)

When the time comes to say goodbye to your child, do it confidently and happily. If your child bounces into school buoyantly, congratulations! You've raised a confident, independent child who is ready for school. Hooray! Don't let the side down now by hanging onto their leg in agonising denial or clambering for one last hug. Then, get yourself out of there so you can have a good old sob around the corner, out of the sight of your child and all the other parents, who will probably be doing the exact same thing. Unless you're one of the mums who has just offloaded your last child to school. In which case you'll more likely be rejoicing and doing some sort of celebratory dance whilst grinning from ear to ear and drinking fizz out of a hip flask.

## KEEP YOURSELF BUSY

Until you pick your child up, keep yourself occupied. If you're going off to work, you won't have any choice in this, which is probably a good thing. If you're going home after that first drop-off, keep yourself occupied. Now is a great time to do a menial task like catching up on all the hoovering you haven't managed to do over the past five years. Best not to sit there looking at the clock, listening to sad ballads on Magic and counting down the seconds until you're reunited with your child.

## DON'T FORGET TO PICK THEM UP

This one is a reminder for all those mums overcome with the excitement of just offloading their last child to school.

MONDAY \_\_\_\_\_ (date)

**THINGS TO REMEMBER / DO**

(LIKE BOOKBAG, HOMEWORK, PE KIT, CLUBS, SCHOOL TRIPS, PERMISSION SLIPS, EVERYTHING ELSE)

TUESDAY \_\_\_\_\_ (date)

**THINGS TO REMEMBER / DO**

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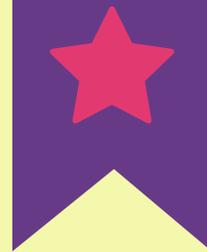
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**MY NOTES**

(WHAT I LOVED, FELT, WISHED, NEEDED, STRUGGLED WITH, OVERCAME)

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**YOUR LEARNING NOTES**

(PHONICS SOUNDS, SHAPES, NUMBERS)

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**FUNNY THINGS YOU DID/SAID**

(THANKS FOR MAKING ME LAUGH)

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# HOW TO ACE THE SCHOOL RUN

The horror of the school run and getting everyone ready and out in the morning is real. I'd like to say it's got better as the years have passed but I'm pretty sure it hasn't. That said, I'm happy to share what hacks I have learned on how to totally kick the school run's a\*se.

## GET OUT OF BED

I know what you're thinking. 'Well this one is obvious.' But that exhaustion that had already set in, two weeks into starting school? It just accumulates. The first day of term, we are always up, dressed and eating porridge before arriving at school EARLY. Three days later (and for the rest of the year), we are eating dry Cheerios out of a sandwich bag whilst hurtling towards the school gates like a jet making an emergency landing. This is due to a variety of factors. Mainly looking for shoes and the fact that my kids don't listen to a word I say.

## GET YOURSELF UP AND DRESSED BEFORE YOUR KIDS

If you're going straight to work from drop-off, you're probably doing this one already, because your boss has already told you twice that pyjamas at work are frowned upon. Killjoy. If you're going home, however, to look after smaller siblings, freelance or watch daytime TV (no judgement) and you want all the sleep you can get, gym gear is your friend, here. This basically eliminates the need for a) a shower b) make-up and c) non-greasy hair. All the while making you look like Super Fit Mum. No one needs to know you never went to the gym, do they?

## GET EVERYTHING DONE BEFORE ANY TV

We have a very strict rule in our house. No Netflix before everyone has dressed, eaten breakfast, cleaned their teeth, brushed their hair and put their shoes on. So far, we have failed to do this approximately 1,164 days out of our six year school career.

## MAKE IT CLEAR WHAT SHOES ARE

Help your child understand what shoes are and what you expect them to do with them. If I whispered, 'Put your shoes on because we're going to the shops to buy sweets,' my kids would not only hear me from three floors up but they'd also miraculously know what a pair of shoes were and where to put them on their bodies. Ask them to do this at 8.15 AM in the morning to go to school and the blank expressions staring back at me indicate that apparently I am asking FOR THE WORLD. I do not know why this is such a difficult proposition. But it is. Expect to remind them every, single, soul-destroying morning.

## LAY STUFF OUT THE NIGHT BEFORE

Why not get a little ahead of yourself and lay everything out the night before? School uniforms. Letters that need signing. Homework. Oh yes, I know why not. Because it's MUCH MORE FUN sitting on the sofa, eating maltesers and watching Netflix.

## RETAIN A SENSE OF CALM IN THE MORNINGS

I have found that shouting at my kids in the morning achieves nothing. On the other hand, I've found that NOT shouting at them also achieves nothing. I think this is what they call, 'being stuck between a rock and a hard place.'

## PUT ON YOUR BEST POKER FACE

Grit your teeth, smile, utter FFS under your breath 435 times and by the time you reach the school gates no one will know you've had the morning from hell. Mainly, because they're all too busy recovering from their own.

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## EASY PEASY, QUICK NUTRITIOUS BREAKFAST IDEAS

If you want some alternatives to the usual sugar loaded, but so-convenient-you-turn-a-blind-eye, breakfast cereals, here's a few options that work for us.

### YOGHURT TOPPED WITH GRANOLA

Buy a giant tub of greek yoghurt and top it with granola. Typically, granola's high in sugar, but used as a topper, you don't use that much so it's not as bad. Go wild and slice a banana on top. Making your own granola ahead of the morning is really easy. Mix 200g of porridge oats with 2 tablespoons of honey, 4 tablespoons of maple syrup and 2 tablespoons of coconut oil (any other oil will do), spread it out on a roasting tin and cook at 150 C for 15 minutes. Stir in 100g of raisins and roast for another 10 minutes. This will last about 10 servings, as a topper.

### GO CONTINENTAL

Some kids just aren't that keen on traditional breakfast foods and don't fancy a piece of toast. Try new things, like you get on holiday. A slice of cheese or ham with a couple of oatcakes and some apple chunks (which they'll probably leave but will make you feel like an ace mum).

### 'LET THEM EAT CAKE!'

Lots of countries eat cake for breakfast; why shouldn't we? Serve up some bought or leftover banana, apple or sponge cake, every now and then, and watch your child look at you like you're the best mum in the world. You can also give them a fairly healthy chocolate rice krispie rocky road, made with honey, cocoa powder and a few marshmallows.

### CHEERIOS IN A SANDWICH BAG ON THE GO

Because it won't kill them and, when you're late, you're late. Do whatever it takes in the mornings, no guilt.

*What I say:*

'TIME TO GO! SHOES ON  
AND BY THE DOOR!'

*What my kids hear:*

'TIME TO WANDER OFF  
AND DO WHATEVER THE  
F\*CK YOU LIKE.'

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Talk to fellow new parents in the same boat. It will make you feel better.

**YOUR LEARNING NOTES**

(PHONICS SOUNDS, SHAPES, NUMBERS)

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