

## Exciting times for the sisters

Things came full circle at the Chevalier household in Concord West last week, when sisters Natalie and Mia headed off to school. Natalie, 11 has just begun her final year at St Anne's Primary School in South Strathfield, while Mia, 5, (pictured below) started kindergarten.

"They've both been so excited," says mother Caroline Chevalier. "Natalie is nervous and excited and a bit anxious about going off to high school next year. And Mia is so ready. She has been so bored staying at home with her grandmother or coming in to the office with me."

For the last few months, Chevalier has also been tutoring Mia in preparation for her first day, and teaching her about what to expect. "She knows all her sight words," she says.

On her first day, Mia also met her "buddy", an older student to look out for her during the first few weeks. Her big sister is also on hand in case of any tears.

In fact, most of the tears so far have come from Mum. "Oh, yes, I've been teary all right," Chevalier says.

- POLLY SIMONS



and salt molecules to carry hydration into the cells," Sgourakis explains.

"Children need constant reserves of calories coming in, but if they're encouraged to drink lots of water, they're filling up on empty liquids." Choose fresh fruit juice in favour of artificially sweetened beverages, or whip up a fruit smoothie in the morning.

Milk drinks, if kept well insulated, are perfect for sipping on during school, Sgourakis adds. "Milk is an easily absorbable protein and jam-packed with calcium."

She suggests making a healthy chocolate milk with cacao powder and honey or maple syrup.

### Questions

In the words of creative education advocate, Sir Ken Robinson, if you can light a child's spark of curiosity, they will learn without further assistance. Welcoming questions from children is a large part of nurturing their natural curiosity. Educational

psychologist Juliet Moore says: "Identify when a child has asked a good question and encourage them to do their own research to figure it out." Striking up conversations about what a child has learnt at school can help them review new information, and come up with questions to ask their teacher. "Asking questions helps people engage in learning, it's through questions that they gain a deeper understanding, and being able to speak up in front of a class is an important skill," Moore said.

### Sun protection

The sun's rays are at their strongest during school hours, and childhood sun exposure makes an important contribution to the lifetime risk of skin cancer. According to the US Skin Cancer Foundation, just one blistering sunburn in childhood or adolescence more than doubles a person's chances of developing melanoma later in life. The Department of

Education advises parents to put sunscreen on their children before school and, if sunscreen isn't provided, to pack some for re-application (roll-on creams are easiest for young children). Children should also wear either bucket hats or legionaire-style hats with a brim of at least 6cm.

### Creative ideas

A well-rounded education isn't just about the three Rs, and a growing number of educators are pushing for a greater emphasis on creativity. In a research paper, founder and director of the Washington International Center for Creativity, Dr Rosa Aurora Chavez-Eakle, argues that creativity is key to survival and resilience, and feeds the innovation and problem-solving abilities essential in a fast-changing world.

Child psychologist and education expert, Andrew Greenfield, says parents can encourage children to get into a creative frame of mind by playing problem-solving

games on the way to school. "A good game is getting kids to guess what animal you're thinking of, and only answering yes or no," Greenfield says. "It encourages kids to think laterally. At home, try turning the sound down on the TV and ask your child to guess what's happening on the screen."

### A book

Encouraging a child to read is arguably the single most important thing that can be done to influence positive outcomes in their lives outside of health and housing, according to an ABS report.

Compiled for the 2012 National Year of Reading, the report cites a range of studies linking literacy to school performance, self-esteem and opportunities in adulthood.

The Centre for Community Child Health has found poor literacy skills are associated with generally low education, employment, health and social

outcomes. "Lead by example," says Greenfield. "If children see parents reading they'll be more inclined to pick something up. If they're not proficient readers, read with them and take turns to read a paragraph or a line."

### Technology

By the time kindergarten students graduate from high school, they'll be using computers comparable in processing power to the human brain, says education consultant and author Mal Lee. "Used correctly, technology can enhance literacy, numeracy and all the other things that are core to learning," he says. "In their daily lives, it's where children can turn when they want to find something out, create with graphics, read and write." While virtually every

school makes some use of digital devices, Lee says only a small proportion have embraced them to the same extent that they're used in the wider world. Lee says it's worth questioning whether your school's technology policy is in-step with current technological realities.

### Not too much

An overloaded backpack can cause children to lean too far forward, distorting the spine's natural curve and rounding the upper back. The Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA) recommends backpacks weigh no more than 10 per cent of a child's body weight, with a recent study finding more than 60 per cent of high school students carry bags that exceed this level.

Other APA recommendations include packing the heaviest items closest to the spine, using both straps, having separate folders for each subject and checking class timetables to ensure students only carry what's needed.

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