Capacity and Volume: Exploring How Much Things Hold

Key points

- Capacity is how much a container can hold, while volume is the amount of liquid or material actually inside it.
- Children in Reception (the first year of primary school) learn to use words like 'full', 'empty', and 'half-full' to describe what they see.
- It is common for children to think that a taller container always holds more, even if it is very thin.
- Hands-on play helps children understand that a short, wide cup can sometimes hold more than a tall, thin one.
- At this stage, the focus is on comparing and reasoning rather than using formal measurements like millilitres.

Things to try at home

- During bath or kitchen time, let your child pour water from a tall thin glass into a short wide bowl to see if it fits.
- Use a scoop of rice or dried pasta to fill different sized containers and see which one holds the most.
- Play a guessing game with two different jugs, asking 'Which one do you think holds more?' before testing it out together.
- Find a few empty food boxes or plastic tubs and explore which ones are 'full' or 'nearly empty'.

Find out more

- Your child's class teacher can tell you more about the maths activities they are doing in school.
- The GOV.UK website provides the official Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework which outlines what children learn in Reception.