

Tips for Parents

Your Child in the Primary School



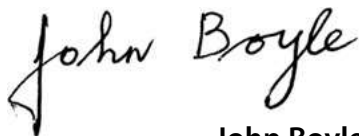
Foreword

Dear Parent/Guardian,

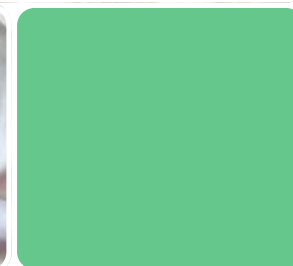
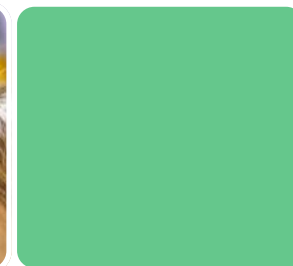
Your child is about to start school. Think of it! New friends, a new place, new sounds, new rules, more people; it is a whole new world. That is the first day. Every school day after that will be part of that new world of maturing, learning and growing.

We hope this publication will give you an understanding of the modern primary school and how it works. Primary teachers believe that sharing the details of the day-to-day workings of the primary school is the first step in building a partnership between parents and teachers. Throughout the country teachers work closely with parents and recognise the importance of keeping parents involved and informed about primary school. This is a practical example of the partnership between school and home.

We hope that you will find this booklet useful.



John Boyle
General Secretary
Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Updated August 2025

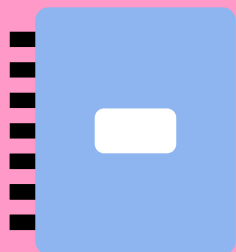


Irish National Teachers' Organisation
35 Parnell Square
Dublin 1, D01 ET35
Web: www.into.ie
Email: info@into.ie
Tel: (01) 804 7700

Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann
35 Cearnóg Parnell
Baile Átha Cliath 1, D01 ET35
Gréasán: www.into.ie
Ríomhphost: info@into.ie
Guthán: (01) 804 7700

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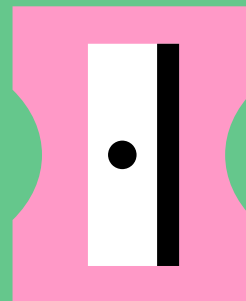


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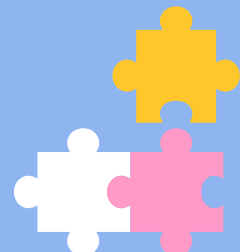


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From home to school

Children learn naturally and informally from their parents and from the world around them. In school, children will start to read and write at their own pace. Just as they walk and talk at different ages, they also read and write when they are ready.

It is not necessary for children to be able to read or write before coming to school. It is far more important that they look forward to starting school.

Children usually begin primary school at four to five years of age. All children are entitled to free primary and post-primary education.

The primary school, or national school, usually has a junior infants and a senior infants class, followed by 1st to 6th classes. There are many different types of primary schools and parents can choose the school they feel suits their child best.



Resources

- Citizens Information: [**bit.ly/CitizensInfoPrimary**](https://www.citizensinfo.ie/primary/)
- School admissions policies: [**bit.ly/SchoolAdmissionsPolicies**](https://www.education.ie/en/SchoolAdmissionsPolicies/)
- Department of Education and Youth: [**bit.ly/DeptEdYouth**](https://www.education.ie/en/Department-of-Education-and-Youth/)
- National Parents Council: [**www.npc.ie**](https://www.npc.ie/)



School enrolment

Each school publishes an admissions notice, available on their website or by contacting the school. This outlines the dates when they accept enrolments for the next school year and the deadline for applications. The earliest a school can enrol a pupil is during the school year before they will attend junior infants. If you are seeking to enrol your child during the school year, contact local schools directly to inquire about a place and for information on how to apply.

How to enrol your child in primary school

If you wish to enrol your child in a local school, please contact the principal of the school by phone and arrange to meet with them. Do not go to the school for the first time without making an appointment. If you need assistance to speak in English, you may bring a friend to help. At the first meeting, you can ask the school principal to enrol your child. Applications for school enrolment should be made in writing. If there is an application form, you should apply by completing the form.

Where a school refuses to enrol a child, a copy of the decision, including the reasons for refusal should be received in writing. The *School Admissions Act (2018)* provides that a parent may appeal against a decision to refuse to enrol a child in a school.

Tusla (Child and Family Agency) Educational Welfare Services can assist you with placement where efforts to secure a place have not been successful. In dealing with any such request, Tusla will require a copy of all correspondence with the relevant schools. Further details can be obtained from Tusla directly by phoning their National Office **01 7718500**; by email info@tusla.ie or through their website www.tusla.ie.

If your child is enrolled in the school the principal will want to know information such as:

- The name, age and nationality of your child;
- Your name, address and a contact telephone number where you can be contacted, if for example, your child becomes ill at school;



- If they have any medical problems that the school should be aware of such as asthma/epilepsy in case they get sick while in school;
- What education your child has had to date;
- What particularly interests your child such as music, art, sports;
- If you want your child to partake in the school's religious education classes and/or in religious ceremonies; and/or
- If they have any special needs.

Are there different types of schools?

Yes, primary schools can be based on a particular religious ethos, for example, Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland or Islamic. Educate Together schools and Community National Schools adopt a multi-religious ethos. Most schools teach the curriculum through English. Some schools, known as 'Gaelscoileanna', teach the curriculum through Ireland's national language, Irish. Single-sex schools teach boys and girls separately, while other schools teach boys and girls together. It should also be noted that some primary schools are junior schools, catering for students from junior infants to 2nd class, while other schools are all-through schools, catering for pupils from junior infants to 6th class.

Attendance at school

Once your child is enrolled in a school, they must attend school every school day. It is your responsibility and it is required by Irish law that you inform the school of your child's absence from school because of illness or other exceptional circumstances. You should send a notification to the class teacher and explain the reason for your child's absence through the school's preferred method. This may be via the school's app, email, or by letter.

A letter may say: (name of child) was absent from school yesterday (date) due to (reason). Signed: (your name).

School ethos

Irish primary schools promote tolerance, mutual respect and an understanding of **cultural, ethical, racial, social and religious diversity**. They also promote the reality of difference within an intercultural society. The celebration of intercultural diversity is an important component of school life, particularly through experiences in music, art, dance, and history. Every child's ethnic origin and religion is respected. It is expected that all children will also respect other children in the school.

Discipline

Each school has a **code of behaviour** which should encourage positive behaviour and the set of rules/principles to be followed by all. Any sanctions will also be clear in this policy.



Help prepare your child for learning

- **Positive attitude** – it is important to create a positive attitude towards learning. If children have this, then they will try to become involved in the learning process.
- **Curiosity** – the natural inquisitiveness of children is central to learning. Children are encouraged to ask more questions when they get positive responses.
- **Self-confidence** – if children are confident about their abilities then they will be more willing to take on new challenges.
- **Listening** – children should be encouraged to develop good listening skills. Instruction and directions are a big part of school life.
- **Interacting with others** – children need to learn key skills like how to share and take turns. They also need to learn respect for others and to be aware of the feelings of others.
- **Independence** – in order to take part in school life, children should have a good level of independence.
- No child will exhibit all of the above traits before school and schools will support children as they transition from home to school.

The following will help you develop your child's management of new skills:

Play

Children learn through play and should be given lots of opportunities to:

- **Act out roles** – children enjoy pretending to be different roles, like doctors or shopkeepers, which helps them use language.
- **Dress up play** – children love dress-up play, which boosts their creativity and language skills.
- **Play with objects** – sand, water, jigsaws, boxes, bricks and other toys.
- **Engage in physical play** – ball games, skipping or chasing games.

Children can be encouraged to play with blocks to build, simple jigsaws or basic construction toys. Encourage them to build and make use of odds and ends such as paper-plates, used packets, cartons or egg boxes.



Language

The importance of language cannot be over-emphasised. Language is essential for developing reading and writing and is a vital part of the social and emotional development of children. In developing your child's language skills, encourage your child to:

Listen • Explain • Tell • Talk • Question • Retell

Listen to children and encourage them to talk. Give them time to explain or describe events to you. Avoid interrupting, even if you know what they are going to say. When talking to your child, don't economise with words. Limit baby talk.

- **Encourage your child to name objects in a room or place that are of a particular size, shape or texture:**

- What shape is the book on the shelf?
- What does the rug feel like?

- **Ask your child to describe a particular incident which has taken place such as:**

- What did you see on our walk today?
- What happened at the dentist today?

- **Ask your child to categorise objects:**

- Name all the food on the table.
- Name all the vegetables in the fridge.
- Name all items in the fridge that are not vegetables.

- **Assist your child to use language to reason in various situations:**

- Why do you wear a coat in cold weather?
- Why do you need to put on suncream in warm weather?

- **Help your child to use language to describe past, present and future events:**

- What will you do when you go to the playground?
- What happens when we go to the supermarket?

- **Encourage your child to express their feelings:**

- How did you feel when you fell over?

- **Rhymes, riddles and singing songs with a repetitive chorus are a good way of encouraging language development.**

- **Reading to your child also assists language development.**

Irish, as both language and subject, is most often new to children beginning school. From time to time, use words or short sentences in Irish to help introduce children to the Irish language. This will help them handle a second language. Familiarity with expressions such as 'más é do thoil é' (please), 'go raibh maith agat' (thank you), and 'maith an cailín/buachaill' (good girl/boy), or 'maith thú' (well done) will be a help to them with school. Help your child to identify **colours**.

This could also lend itself quite easily to the use of Irish as it may involve single word terms only, such as 'dearg' (red), 'buí' (yellow) or 'bán' (white).

If you need support with pronunciation there are many guides and videos online: teanglann.ie/en/fuaim/.

English as an additional language

Children learn their first language in the home, and it is important that children develop their language skills in their mother tongue at home. Research shows that it is not unusual for non-English speaking pupils to enter a 'silent period' when they begin school. This could be caused when a child suddenly finds themselves surrounded by a different language, different surroundings and different people. As language skills are transferable, children will gradually learn and acquire their new language in school.

Children with English as an additional language need much practise and repetition.

A language support teacher may be available to support your child in school. You should check with your child's school.

Reading

Reading to your child regularly encourages a love of books and creates an interest in reading, making it a lifelong learning experience. Ensure that reading is an enjoyable experience. Don't prolong reading when your child has lost interest – short enjoyable experiences are best.

Pay attention to the mechanics of reading, such as holding the book and turning the pages. Let your finger go under the words as you read from left to right. The child's main interest will be in pictures so allow time to examine and talk about them.

Encourage them to repeat what happened in the story and to talk about their favourite bit. As your child becomes more confident with the mechanics of reading you can play 'what do you think would have happened if...!' games, or 'what would you have done if you were...?'

If your child is learning English as an additional language, it is important that you choose suitable reading material. Check with your school or library for advice.

Writing

Young children need to develop the right muscles in their hands before they can begin to write properly. You can help this development by encouraging them to do things that involve using their hands. You can give them:

- Large sheets of paper and chubby crayons for scribbling, drawing, colouring in, tracing or copying;
- Scissors for cutting paper (be sure to use scissors that are safe for children to use);
- Activities that involve pouring, stirring, mixing or rolling (plasticine clay);
- Dolls or teddys with clothes that can be buttoned, laced, zipped and tied;
- Encouragement to dress themselves.

Allow your child to use the hand they choose naturally. Being left-handed will not cause any problems in school!

Mathematics

You can help your child become familiar with the ideas they will need to understand when they start maths in school. Allow your child to help sort cutlery, set the table, count out the correct number of spoons or forks. Talk about the numbers visible on a trip to the shops. Help your child to sort and match objects on the basis of:

- **Size** – place all the small objects in the box;
- **Shape** – put all the round objects on the table;
- **Colour** – put all the red items on the chair;
- **Texture** – put all the smooth items in the box;
- **Function** – collect all the items which roll together;

- **Material** – gather all the wooden items together.

Again, the incidental use of the Irish number terms is easy for some as, just like with colours, it entails the use of single words such as 'aon' (one), 'dó' (two) or 'trí' (three).

Encourage your child to collect things on walks, like shells, cones, pebbles, nuts and feathers. They can have fun later sorting and classifying the different objects. Try the same thing with collections of buttons, badges or lids, and other odds and ends from around the house.

Use language with your child that will help them to understand the concepts of 'more', 'less', 'the same', 'different', 'longer than', 'shorter than' and other useful comparisons

Confidence and self-esteem

If children are confident about their abilities and capabilities then they will be more willing to take on new challenges. Parents can build their children's self-esteem by becoming aware of and noticing their abilities, talents, interests and skills and then drawing attention to them. Praise children frequently and give them opportunities to demonstrate their abilities.

Praise and encouragement shape behaviour and promote learning. When children are praised they learn that they are special, can take pride in their achievements and become aware of their talents and abilities. If parents view children in a positive manner then they will view themselves in a positive light also. When children are aware that parents approve of their actions or activities then their level of self-esteem will be enhanced.

Using language to build self-esteem

A very important factor in the development of children's self-esteem is the language used by parents. The many interactions that parents have each day with their children provide children with feedback. It pays dividends, therefore, if children are given feedback in the language of self-esteem. Such feedback contains three elements:

- **A description of the behaviour.**
- **Parents' reaction to the behaviour.**
- **Acknowledgement of feeling.**

It's important to separate a child's worth from their behaviour. A child isn't 'good' for tidying or 'bad' for spilling milk. They are valued because they are loved, not because of what they do.

Describing behaviour helps children understand its impact without linking it to their self-worth. For example:

- "I notice books and toys on the floor" (describes behaviour)
- "When the kitchen is tidy, we'll have dinner" (reason)
- "I know you're tired and hungry" (acknowledges feelings)
- "I want the toys put away and books on the shelf" (clear expectation)

This kind of direct, respectful communication supports self-esteem. When children understand the reasons behind expectations, they're more likely to respond positively.

Including children in daily routines builds confidence and helps them handle school better. Saying "Don't touch" too often becomes "Don't learn." Showing trust in children encourages them to believe in themselves.



Resources

- Schooldays: www.schooldays.ie
- Seomra Ranga: www.seomraranga.com
- Childrens Books Ireland: www.childrensbooksireland.ie
- Scoilnet: bit.ly/ScoilnetPrimary



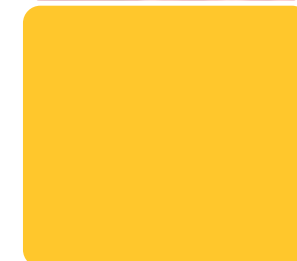


Preparation for school

Starting school can be a time of anxiety for both children and parents. It is an enormous change for a child to share a room with 25 or more children. Parents can help to reduce such anxiety – both for themselves and their child – by gently preparing their child. This preparation should begin some months before the child starts school and should be carried out gradually.

The following may help:

- **An initial visit to the school** is a good idea. Meet the principal and the teacher of infants. Show your child the school building, the cloakroom, the classroom, where the toilets are and the playground. Contact your school and ask if they have an infant open/visit day.
- Talk to your child about **your own school days**. Be positive about your experience.
- Emphasise the opportunities for **making friends** and for getting involved in new activities. However, don't 'hype up' school life. Approach this talk with a calm attitude and treat it as normal.
- Introduce your child to another junior infant, if possible have them around to play during the holidays. It is reassuring for your child to see some **familiar faces** on the first day.
- **Children should be able to** put on and take off coats and hang them up, use the toilet and flush it properly, wash their hands and tidy up their crayons and colouring books. Play 'pretend school' with your child. Help to practice putting things in and out of the school bag and to open and close their lunchbox.
- Teach them to use a handkerchief or tissue, share toys and take turns.
- Label your children's **clothes and belongings** clearly and help them to identify their own belongings.
- You should provide the school with the name and telephone number of a person to be contacted if you are not at home. Explain this arrangement to your child.
- Allow your child **to do things independently**.
- Encourage confidence by having them dress themselves. Allow time for this in the morning.
- Don't criticise if things are not exactly to your liking, such as buttons that are not perfect or a tie that is slightly crooked
- **Praise their efforts** at every opportunity.



Making life manageable for the junior infant

Children cannot be independent if they cannot manage the equipment you provide. Give some thought to the items your child needs to get through the school day:

- If children cannot tie laces and need to change shoes – perhaps for PE – shoes with a Velcro fastener will enable them to change quickly and independently.
- Ask yourself whether or not children can manage their clothes by themselves. Zips may be easier than buttons for example. Elasticated trousers can be easier than zips or buttons.
- If your child needs to bring a lunch, choose a lunch box and flask that they can open easily. Carton drinks are easier and safer than bottles. Again make sure that the school bag can hold these.
- Give some thought to lunches too. If your child wants to bring oranges to school, for example, only peeled oranges should be included. Set yogurts may help avoid unnecessary spills.
- Try to get your child up a little earlier, as this will ensure a stress-free morning.



The curriculum

The primary school curriculum is designed to meet the different educational needs of the modern child. The curriculum takes a particular view of the child and of education. It celebrates the uniqueness of the child and seeks to develop each child's potential to the full. It provides a wide range of learning experiences that help the child to acquire particular knowledge, ideas and skills that will promote their development at every stage.

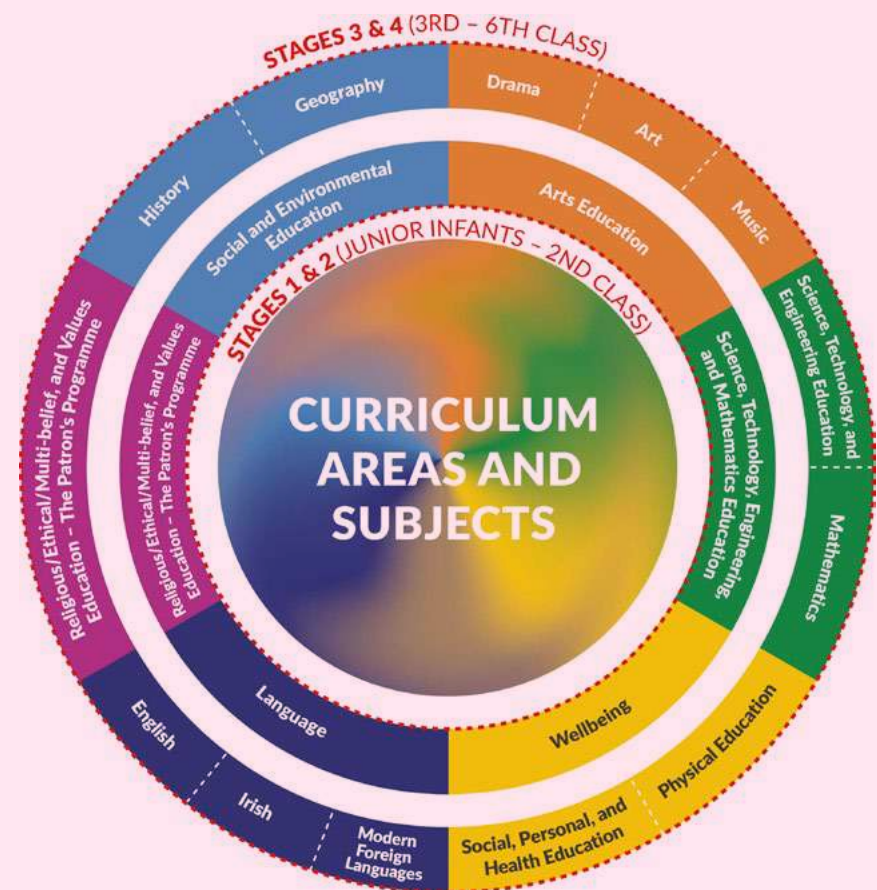
The curriculum aims to:

- Develop each child's potential to the full;
- Encourage a love of learning; and
- Help children develop skills they will use all their lives.



Resources

- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment: bit.ly/NCCAParents
- Curriculum Online: www.curriculumonline.ie/Primary





Children with special educational needs

All schools have an additional teaching allocation to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs. Schools' allocations are determined by their educational profile.

Special needs assistants (SNA) are also allocated to schools where pupils with special educational needs are enrolled.

Both the **National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)**, through their psychologists, and the **National Council for Special Education (NCSE)**, through their advisors and SENOs, provide advice and support to schools. Parents of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) should discuss their child's needs with the school principal.

The **National Council for Special Education (NCSE)** is also available to support parents.

To help with planning, the Department of Education and Youth and the NCSE have stated parents should notify the NCSE by 1 October 2025, if their child needs a place

in a special class or special school for the 2026/27 school year. This new timeline will apply to future school years as well.

Parents/guardians can submit their notifications through the NCSE's online system, available at: ncse.ie/notify-ncse-special-class-special-school.



Resources

- Department of Education and Youth: bit.ly/DEYSpEd
- Citizens Information: bit.ly/CitizensInfoSEN
- National Council for Special Education: bit.ly/NCSEParents
- National Parents Council: npc.ie/special-education

The first day

Your school will inform you of arrangements for bringing your child to school and collecting your child, what to expect in the classroom or yard and the protocols and practices in place to keep children safe. Many schools will hold an introductory meeting for new parents and guardians.

It is important that you establish a good routine early. Check that all items – uniform, bag – are ready for the morning. Do this in a calm fashion and don't have your child over-excited or anxious going to bed. Give plenty of time in the morning for dressing, washing and eating a good breakfast. It is important that your child arrives at school before class starts as children can find it intimidating to walk into a class already in progress.

Leave your child with the teacher, and tell the child you will be back at the appropriate time to collect them. If your child is upset, trust the teacher. The teacher is experienced and knows how to comfort an anxious child. If you are feeling upset, share these feelings with a partner/friend and not your child.

It is important that you arrive on time to collect your child from school. Children will become upset if they see other children being collected and feel they are being left behind.

It takes **time for children to adapt to school life and routine**. Don't expect too much too soon. Talk to them about what happened and allow them to respond in their own way. If you ask "What did you learn today?" you will most likely be told, "Nothing!". Most of the work at infant level is activity based and children do not understand 'learning' in the same way that adults do. If, however, you ask "What did you do?", "Did you sing?", "Did you draw?", you will have more success.

Your child will be tired coming home from school and, occasionally, may sleep for an hour or so when they arrive home. It is important to set a routine of quiet time together and early to bed.

If you feel that your child is worried about something that is school-related, talk to the teacher.

Dealing with the emotional side

- Ensure you talk to your child and let them know what will happen on their 'big day'.
- Encourage your child to talk to you about their fears and try your best to reassure them.
- The first day of school will be emotional for both you and your child – allow your child to cry.
- Explain to your child that it is time for you to leave, and that you will be back soon.
- Ensure you are early for pick up, as your child may become stressed if they do not see you when school is finished.
- Getting support from other parents may be helpful in the early days
- It takes a few weeks to adjust, be patient with your child.



School hours, holidays and closures

The length of the school day in primary school is five hours and 40 minutes. There is normally a 'little break' around 11am, and a 'big break' around 12.30pm. The length of the school day may be reduced by an hour for children in junior and senior infants. Ensure you are well familiarised with the opening and closing times of the school, and keep check of the dates of school closures, etc. Parents must accept responsibility for their children when it is necessary to allow them home during school hours.

The school year

The primary school year has three terms. In order to avoid problems for families, breaks at Christmas/winter, Easter/spring and mid-term in the first and second terms have been standardised

Each school usually produces a list of days when the school will close for holidays or for other reasons. Parents are given a copy of this list. If your school has a website, do check it regularly for updates regarding closures, half days, etc. If the school has to close unexpectedly or finish the school day early your child will be given a note, or you will be contacted via the school's communication system, e.g. text message or school app, in advance, by the school.

Make sure you look in your child's school bag every day for such notes and check regularly for school texts or communications.

October 2025 – mid-term break:

Schools will close from Monday, 27 October 2025 to, 31 October 2025 inclusive.

Christmas/winter 2025: Schools will close on Friday, 19 December 2025, which will be the final day of the school term. Schools will re-open on Monday, 5 January 2026.

February 2026 – mid-term break: All primary schools will close on Thursday, 19 February and Friday, 20 February 2026. (Primary schools may use three discretionary days to extend this break to a five-day-break from Monday, 16 February to Friday, 20 February 2026 inclusive.)

Easter/spring 2026: All schools will close on Friday, 27 March 2026, which will be the final day of the school term. All schools will re-open on Monday, 13 April 2026.

In addition, a small number of discretionary days are available to schools to close as suits local circumstances.



Resources

- Department of Education and Youth: bit.ly/StandardisedSchoolYear2526
- School Days: bit.ly/SchoolDaysCal

School attendance

Under the *Education Welfare Act (2000)*, you must make sure that your child attends school regularly. If your child cannot attend school for any reason at all, a signed note must be given to the school, explaining why your child missed school.

The school is required to notify the statutory educational welfare services if your child misses more than 20 days of school. An education welfare officer may then meet with you to discuss how you can make sure your child is in class regularly.

Although very rare, parents can be taken to court and fined/imprisoned if they fail to cooperate with an education welfare officer with regard to their child's attendance.

It is strongly advised that you do not take a child out of school for holidays. Taking a holiday, even a short one, during term time means that your child will miss very important school time. On return, it may be difficult for your child to catch up with the work they may have missed.



Resources

- Tusla: bit.ly/TuslaAttendance
- Citizens Information: bit.ly/CISchoolAttendance
- School Days: bit.ly/SDSchoolAttendance





Help with uniform and books

Most schools require pupils to wear a school uniform as part of their admissions policy. Wherever possible, generic rather than branded items will be specified by the school.

If you feel you will struggle with the costs of school uniforms, you may be entitled to receive help from the **Department of Social Protection**. The *Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance* can help towards the cost of uniforms and shoes for children. Applications for the allowance remain open until 30 September. Parents can also approach schools for support.

From 2023, the introduction of the **Free Schoolbooks Scheme** means that pupils in primary and special schools will have their schoolbooks provided by the school. Parents should not be asked to pay a contribution toward the cost of schoolbooks, workbooks, or copybooks. All schoolbooks will remain the property of the school and must be returned to the school at the end of the year. There may be some related classroom resources that are not covered by the scheme. Additional details (if any) on what items parents will need to supply for the return to school will be communicated to parents by the school.



Resources

- Department of Social Protection: bit.ly/DSPBTSAllowance
- Citizens Information: bit.ly/CIFinancialHelp
- My Welfare: bit.ly/MWSchoolAllowance
- Free Schoolbooks Scheme: bit.ly/FreeSchoolBookScheme



Healthy eating

Children form lifelong eating habits from an early age, so it's important to guide them well. A balanced diet, enough sleep, and regular exercise are key for healthy growth.

Make time in the morning for a nutritious breakfast, and choose lunch options carefully - fruit and sandwiches are better than sweets or biscuits. Some schools have a 'no sweets' policy, which should be followed and simply explained to your child. Health education is also part of the curriculum; in school, children will be encouraged to make good choices in relation to food. Your choice for them should not conflict with this.

Offering a variety of nourishing foods helps children grow well. To encourage healthier lunches, start small—swap sweets for fruit once a week and build up gradually to every day.

Breakfast

Breakfast is essential for schoolchildren - it breaks the overnight fast, boosts concentration, and sets the tone for healthy eating. Offer wholegrain or bran cereals with milk and fresh fruit, wholemeal toast, and unsweetened juice or an orange.

Lunch

Lunch should provide around one-third of your child's food requirements for the day. A balanced

lunchbox includes one food from each of the main food pyramid groups: bread, cereals or potatoes; fruit or vegetables; dairy; and a protein source like meat, fish or plant-based alternatives.

Tips for healthy, varied and interesting lunchboxes

- Include a mix of starchy foods, protein, dairy, and fruit/veg.
- Try to offer different foods when possible.
- Vary the types of bread: e.g. pitta, wraps, whole meal rolls.
- Use leftover pasta or rice in salads.
- Try themed lunches: e.g. pasta salad for Italian, wraps for Mexican.
- Soup in a flask is great for cold days, salads for warmer ones.
- Fluids are important for children up to six cups of fluid daily - milk and water are best. Brightly coloured drinks bottles can help make rehydrating more interesting!

Tips to encourage more fruit and vegetables

- Most children prefer fruit - variety ensures they get the key vitamins and minerals.
- Let children help choose fruit and veg when shopping.
- Children love easy-to-eat fruit like mandarins and bananas.
- Offer raw vegetables as snacks - carrot sticks, cucumber, cherry tomatoes.
- Add chopped fruit to breakfast cereals.
- Make fruit salads together - preparing it themselves adds to their enjoyment.



Resources

- SafeFood: www.safefood.eu
- Healthy Ireland: www.healthyireland.ie
- Food Dudes: www.fooddudes.ie

Health and hygiene

Your child is now sharing a room daily with a large number of four/five-year-olds. Close contact with other children is unavoidable, so particular attention should be paid to health and hygiene.

You should check **your child's hair** regularly for head lice. Watch out for **worms**. Inform the teacher or principal immediately if you notice anything like this.

Children who are sick should not be sent to school. You must consider the other children in the class. There is a school screening programme and a school immunisation programme for children attending public primary schools.

School health screenings are conducted by public-health nurses and medical officers and are carried out on the school premises. The school principal is told the date of the screenings in advance so parents can be notified and are entitled to be present. Children's hearing and sight are examined, and where requested by the parent or deemed necessary, a physical examination may be carried out.

Problems identified at these screenings are treated free of charge if the child attends as a public patient at an out-patient hospital department. Any subsequent treatment (whether out-patient or in-patient) arising from this initial referral is free of charge as a public patient.

Vaccinations under the **Childhood Immunisation Programme** are provided free of charge to all children. Parental consent is required for the administration of vaccinations to children and young people up to the age of 16.

Dental services to children attending primary school are also provided. They are screened in 2nd, 4th and 6th class and are referred for treatment, if necessary, to the local dental clinic.

Administration of medication

If your child has a particular health problem, such as an allergy, asthma, epilepsy or diabetes, you should advise the school. The **school should be made aware** of the name and address of your family doctor. If your child needs medication on a regular basis, proper and clearly understood arrangements for administration of medicines must be made. Read more here: bit.ly/ChronicIllnessSchool

While teachers in schools act 'in loco parentis', there is no obligation on them to either administer medicines regularly or to supervise children taking them. It should

not create a problem, however, if teachers are willing, have the permission of the board of management, have the written approval of parents and have been trained.

Teachers generally do their best to make provision for children who are ill, but ultimately will not do so if this in any way jeopardises the safety and welfare of any child in their care.

Resources

- Department of Education and Youth: bit.ly/DEYParentResources
- Health Service Executive: bit.ly/HSEImmunisationOffice

You are encouraged to **provide maximum support and assistance** in helping the school accommodate your child. This could include measures such as self-administration (where necessary and only after approval from a GP) or under parental supervision. Where teachers have been given **medication to administer in cases of emergency**, such as adrenaline in case of anaphylaxis, this medication should be the smallest dose possible to ensure recovery until a medical expert can take over. At no time should an emergency dose be such that it could harm your child if inappropriately administered. Confirmation of this should be obtained in writing from the medical practitioner responsible for your child before a school agrees to hold such life saving medication in its care. Where possible EpiPen type injections should be used and not injection needles.

Where children are suffering from life-threatening conditions, parents should outline clearly in writing what can and can't be done in a particular emergency situation, with particular reference to what may be a risk to the child.

Head lice

Head lice are a common problem in primary schools. As your child shares a classroom and playground daily with a large number of other children, it is very easy for these to spread. Unfortunately, they are extremely mobile and can pass from one individual to another by head to head contact.

How do you tell if your child has head lice? The first clue is frequent scratching of the scalp. To check if head lice are present, carefully examine the hair around the back of your child's neck and behind the ears. The best way to find lice and their eggs is to run a **fine-toothed comb** through damp parted hair, looking carefully for evidence of lice. Since head lice shy away from light, you may only see their empty eggs shells (nits), which are small whitish ovals of equal size attached to the hair shaft.

You should check your child's hair regularly for head lice. If your child has head lice you should inform the teacher or principal and treat the hair immediately. Everybody, including you, other members of the family and school friends, should be checked for lice. The reality is that anybody could catch head lice. Head lice are not choosy about what type of hair they go for - clean, dirty, long or short. Head lice are easy to treat. **Lotion or shampoo** treatments can be bought from pharmacies without a prescription.





Bullying

Children may encounter bullying - this is of great concern to parents and teachers. Where bullying occurs in a school, resolving the problem requires cooperation between the school and parents. Bullying can be physical, verbal or emotional and may be carried out by groups or by an individual, and may be carried out online.

Previous sections highlighted the importance of building a child's **independence, confidence, and communication skills**. These qualities are also key in helping children deal with bullying.

Children who bully often do so because:

- They are bullied at home.
- They feel insecure or under pressure.
- They struggle to socialise.
- They may target others to feel in control.

Sometimes poor hygiene or habits can make a child a target - this can be addressed with your support.

If your child is bullying others, it's important to acknowledge it and work with them to change. Without cooperation from all parties it will not be possible for the school to resolve the issue and support all parties.

Children will be taught the *Stay Safe Programme* in schools.

What to do

- Try to find out if this is a **temporary response to something else** in the child's life such as a new baby, a bereavement or stress at home.
- Talk to your child and try to get your child to understand how the other child/children feels. Help your child to socialise by inviting other children to play or to go on outings. Don't respond by being bullying yourself. Hitting and verbal attack will make things worse. You will need to deal with this problem **over a period of time**.
- **Talk to the child's teacher.** You will find teachers are willing to help. It is important that you and the teacher take the same approach to the problem. The school will have a *Bí Cineálta* or anti-bullying policy to address bullying behaviour.
- Those who bully often suffer from a lack of confidence. Don't compare your child's achievement with others. **Praise helpful, kind behaviour at every opportunity.**

- Children should be taught to **accept differences** in others. If your child always seems overly critical of others, help by making positive remarks about other children.

If your child tells you that they are being bullied

- **Stay calm** and don't overreact no matter what you are feeling. Your reaction may convey a sense of anger or disappointment to the child and could be counter-productive.



Resources

- National Parents Council: bit.ly/NPCBullying
- Citizens Information: bit.ly/CIBullying
- Web Wise: www.webwise.ie

- Your response should explain that they are not at fault and that this is a problem which can be overcome.
- Teaching the child that they have the right to say '**no**' and to carry themselves in a confident way will help with many situations.
- Let your child know they can talk to you and their teacher if they have a problem.
- Talk to the teacher. Bullying is a hidden activity and with classes of up to 30 it can be difficult for teachers to spot. Teachers need the support of parents in tackling this problem.
- If the bullying is physical, don't tell your child to hit back. Schools do not allow children to engage in violence and conflicting advice will only confuse the child. Also, telling a vulnerable child to hit back is asking the impossible of them and will only add to their sense of failure when they find they cannot do so.
- Children can be vulnerable and **may need help to socialise**. You can facilitate this by inviting children to play and by enlisting the help of other parents.
- It is important to tell children that safety must come first. Advise your child that, if threatened, to get away and tell. It is important in a situation like this to **praise a child for using common sense**.
- Some children attract bullies because of poor personal hygiene or habits. If this is the case it can be overcome with help from you.

- **Cyberbullying** can become a problem as children get older. Useful information and answers to frequently asked questions are available on www.webwise.ie

Behaviour that is not bullying behaviour

A one off instance of negative behaviour towards another student is not bullying behaviour. However, a single hurtful message posted on social media can be considered bullying behaviour as it may be visible to a wide audience and has a high likelihood of being shared multiple times.

Disagreement between students, or instances where students don't want to be friends or to remain friends, is not considered bullying behaviour unless it involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress.

Some students with special educational needs may have social communication difficulties which may make them communicate their needs through behaviours that can hurt themselves or others. These behaviours are not deliberate or planned but, in certain situations, they are an automatic response which they can't control.

Bullying is not accidental or reckless behaviour. If the repeated harm is real for the student experiencing the behaviour but unintended by the other student, this is not bullying.

These behaviours, while not defined as bullying can be distressing and you can work with your child's school to address them.



Homework

Policy in relation to homework will vary from school to school. If your child's school has a policy of giving homework, the following routine should be established early:

- Set aside a quiet regular time.
- The child should be sitting comfortably.
- Homework time should include time for oral as well as written work.
- Oral work, particularly in the early stages of schooling, can consolidate that which is learned through both Irish and English.
- Encourage your child to keep books and copies clean and tidy.
- If your child is working independently, be available to help and show an interest in what is being done. Praise your child's efforts at every opportunity.
- If, when working with your child, you feel yourself becoming impatient you should stop. Don't threaten as this will only have a negative effect.
- If your child is persistently having problems with homework contact the teacher and discuss the difficulties.
- If, for any reason, homework cannot be done let the teacher know.
- If homework turns into a stressful or prolonged task, it is best to stop.





Home-school communication

For schools to do what is best for your child it is very important to have good home-school communication.

Parents are the primary educators of their children and their cooperation and support are essential to the school.

Each school has its own way of communicating with parents and will use a form of communication that best suits its needs and those of parents. If your contact details, such as your mobile phone number or address change it is important to notify the school immediately.

For general information, schools sometimes issue notices or newsletters to parents through the children. It is important that you check your child's school bag.

Schools hold parent-teacher meetings during the school year. It is important that you attend these to keep in touch with your child's progress. It is also important that your child sees that you are interested in their progress in school. Most primary schools will have a website – check the website regularly for up-to-date information.

Each school must prepare a code of behaviour. The principal of the school will provide parents with a copy of this code and will enlist parents' cooperation in ensuring this code is followed.

If your child is experiencing a particular problem it is essential that you communicate this to the teacher. Family stress caused by an illness, a new baby, a bereavement or a separation may result in the child becoming disruptive or withdrawn in school. Ensuring that your child's teacher is aware of the issue is important as it can help them to support your child to cope and to make allowance for that distress.



The board of management

The board of management/manager(s) is the body of persons or the person appointed by the patron to manage the school. The patron is the body that establishes the school and sets the ethos of the school. Some patrons are denominational (such as the churches) while others are multi-denominational.

The board of management includes representatives of parents, teachers, trustees or patrons, the principal and the community.

You can read more about boards of management at: bit.ly/DEYBOM





If you are new to Ireland

In Ireland, all children are entitled to free primary and post-primary education. Under the *Education (Welfare) Act, 2000* education in Ireland is compulsory from age six to 16, or until students have completed three years of second level (post-primary) education. In general, children who are at least four years of age on 1 September of a school year to approximately 12 years of age attend a primary school, and children from approximately 12 years to 18 years attend a post-primary school.

English language support

Experience to date has shown that young children learn English very quickly. It is normal to place a child, even if they have very little English, in a class with children of a similar age.

The **Department of Education and Youth** provides **additional educational support** to enable schools to provide extra English classes for children with an identified English learning need.

Language acquisition

During school holidays It is possible that your child may forget some of the English and Irish that they have learned during the school holidays. It is important, therefore, to find an opportunity for your child to use, read or listen to some English and Irish every day. For example, they could: watch a television programme and then tell you about it; read a book aloud to you; ask for items in the local shop; or keep a daily diary with pictures and writing during the holiday period.

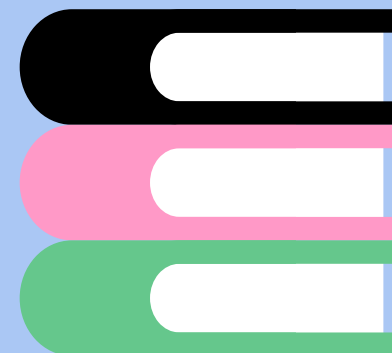
While it is important for your child to learn English and Irish, it is also very important that they do not lose the mother tongue of your family. Take every opportunity to use your mother tongue with your child and tell them about your native country.

Mother Tongues in collaboration with the School of Education at Trinity College, have produced short videos on how families can support young children with their literacy, numeracy and creativity, available in four languages **Arabic, Brazilian Portuguese, Polish and Romanian** as well as in **English**. You can find the videos at www.bit.ly/322AVxX



Resources

- Citizens Information: bit.ly/CIMovingToIreland
- Immigrant Council of Ireland: www.immigrantcouncil.ie
- Cross Care: www.livinginireland.ie
- International Protection Accommodation Services: bit.ly/IPASireland



Vere Foster House
35 Parnell Square
Dublin 1
D01 ET35

01 804 7700
info@into.ie
www.into.ie

into 
Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann