

***Useful Tip Sheets & Guidance for incoming
Junior Infants***

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CAILÍNÍ NAOIDH***

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“Is Deas A Bheith Óg”

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The **What, Why** and **How**

of children's learning in primary school

Information for parents



Junior and senior
infants

First and second
classes

Third and fourth
classes

Fifth and sixth
classes

Introduction

As a parent you are the most important person in your child's life. Before your child comes to school, you as a parent have taught your child many things. This early learning is very important as it provides a basis for all future learning.

Your child doesn't stop learning from you when he/she starts school. Meetings with your child's class teacher are helpful in letting you know what your child is learning at school and what you can do to continue this learning at home.

In order to help you to continue to support your child's learning in school and at home, the NCCA has produced a DVD on The What, Why and How of Children's Learning in Primary School. The DVD explains what your child learns in school, how your child learns and why he/she learns in this way. This booklet is intended to further support you in your important role.

If you want more information on the Primary School Curriculum you can:

- access it online at www.ncca.ie
- borrow a copy of the curriculum from your local library
- buy it on CD-Rom or in hard copy from the **Government Publications Office, Molesworth Street, Dublin 1.**

What is the Primary School Curriculum?

The Primary School Curriculum outlines what children learn in each subject, the approaches and methodologies used and how your child's learning progresses through the four levels of primary school:

- Level 1: Junior and senior infants
- Level 2: First and second class
- Level 3: Third and fourth class
- Level 4: Fifth and sixth class.

Schools develop plans which outline how they use the curriculum in their school.

The Primary Curriculum aims to:

- develop each child's potential to the full
- encourage in children a love for learning
- help them develop skills that they will use all their lives.



Information for parents

What does my child learn in school?

The Primary School Curriculum, from junior infants to sixth class, contains 11 subjects which are grouped together in 7 areas as shown in the diagram below. The curriculum for Religious Education is the responsibility of the different church authorities. Different programmes have been developed for use in different types of schools.

As well as learning about new ideas and finding out new information in the different subjects of the curriculum, your child develops important skills such as:

- communicating
- estimating
- designing and making
- problem solving
- working scientifically.

To help connect the skills learned in the different subjects, teachers often plan learning activities which include more than one subject, for example, a topic like Water, provides opportunities for children to learn concepts and skills in social, personal and health education (SPHE), physical education, history, maths, English, Irish, music, drama and the visual arts, as well as in geography and science.

	Languages → Gaeilge → English
	Mathematics
	Social, environmental and scientific education → History → Geography → Science
	Arts education → Visual Arts → Music → Drama
	Physical education
	Social, personal and health education
	Religious education

How does my child learn?

Through the Primary School Curriculum your child learns in a variety of different ways, for example, through seeing, hearing, moving, feeling and touching. They may learn working by themselves, in pairs, or in groups. Children learn through:

Talk and discussion

This means that in every lesson your child is encouraged to *listen, question, tell stories, summarise, express and explain feelings, give instructions, argue, persuade and present ideas*. Teachers often use circle work (giving special time to talk and discussion activities, while children sit together in a circle).

Play

Through **play**, your child learns important skills such as turn-taking, playing fair, investigating and problem solving. For example, when dressing up and playing shop, your child develops creative skills, social skills and mathematical skills. By playing with jigsaws your child learns the value of finishing a task, and the skills of noticing pattern and detail, and developing hand-eye co-ordination.

Working individually and in pairs and groups

While children often work on tasks alone, they also work in pairs and groups. This is called collaborative learning and shows your child how he/she can learn from others and also help others to learn. Your child learns, for example, to divide up learning tasks so that everyone in the group has a chance to take part. Children learn a lot from hearing other children's ideas and thoughts and you can be sure that they will respond to these by giving their own opinions! Working in this way gives all children a chance to shine and experience success in learning.

Using the environment as a learning resource

Teachers use the class, school and local environment in their teaching throughout your child's primary schooling. Basing your child's learning on his/her experience and environment makes learning real, practical and fun. The environment can be used in different ways:

- in science, history and geography your child observes and investigates plant and animal life in the local environment, learns to care for the environment, explores features of the geographical landscape and visits and learns about historical sites
- in arts education, local artists, musicians or dramatists may be invited to visit the school or your child may in turn visit art exhibitions or musical and dramatic performances.

Problem solving

Your child learns to solve problems alone or by working with others. The problems that your child works with in school are linked to real-life, for example, your child might be asked to design and make items for different purposes in science lessons, such as musical instruments or a bird table.

Using Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

Knowledge of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT), such as, the use of computers, digital cameras, email, internet and mobile phones, is an important part of living and working in today's world. ICT is used to broaden and support your child's learning in all curriculum areas.

As all children learn in different ways, the teacher will provide a variety of learning opportunities for your child throughout the day in different subjects. He/she will also vary the pace of learning according to your child's needs.

How does assessment support my child's learning?

The teacher uses assessment to support your child's learning. Assessment involves gathering information about your child's learning which helps the teacher to make decisions about the next steps in teaching and learning. **Your child's teacher may gather information in many different ways** including:

- talking and listening to your child
- observing and monitoring your child's social and personal development and his/her approach to tasks
- assigning small tasks and tests.

From first class onwards, your child's teacher may also give:

- weekly tests
- project work
- assignments
- standardised tests.

Standardised tests in English and mathematics help the teacher to see how your child is doing compared with other children of the same age. Teachers may also use diagnostic tests to help pick up on any difficulties your child may be having at an early stage and take steps to provide him/her with the support he/she needs. Teachers also **help children to comment on their own work from a young age**. As a parent, **you also have valuable information** on how your child is progressing in primary school. This information can be very useful to the class teacher in assessing your child's progress and planning for his/her learning.

How can I support my child with homework?

Homework **helps your child:**

- to reinforce knowledge and skills learned
- to learn to work by himself/herself
- to organise and manage his/her time.

Homework helps you:

- to keep in touch with your child's learning in school
- to monitor your child's progress
- to notice any problems your child may be having
- to learn from your child.

Homework won't always be written work. For example, your child may be asked to watch a television programme of particular interest or to interview you or his/her grandparents for a history project.

The most important way that you can support your child's learning at home is by **showing an interest in what your child is doing**.

Ask questions which encourage your child to give more than a yes or no answer, such as, *can you tell me about your picture?* or *teach me something you learned in Irish today*. **Praising your child's efforts** is also very important.

Discuss homework with your child and **agree when, how and where** homework should be done. Think about things such as having a quiet undisturbed place and whether your child works better alone or with brothers/sisters/friends. Decide a time when your child will best be able to concentrate on the work. **Help your child to plan for the use of homework time** in advance and encourage him/her to organise the books, clothes and equipment he needs for the following school day. If your child needs help with homework, **support him/her to find ways to solve the problem for him/herself** rather than doing the work for your child. **The class teacher should be able to answer any questions you may have about helping with homework.**

Information for parents

Overview 5

Why is it important to support my child's learning at home?

Learning at home is important for a number of reasons:

- opportunities for learning at home help children connect what they have learned in school to real-life situations, for example, using the skills they learned in physical education in playing games in their local community
- research studies in Ireland and abroad show that when parents read to and with their children at home, children make better progress in reading.

Your child will love to tell you all about what he/she has learned in school and your encouragement and support will help him/her grow in confidence as he/she progresses and develops in all areas.

Your child's class teacher will always be willing to answer your queries and will welcome your support and involvement.





Primary School Curriculum

Your child's learning

Guidelines for parents





Primary School Curriculum

Your child's learning

Guidelines for parents

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Welcome

The Primary School Curriculum acknowledges the central role of parents in their children's education. It follows a major review of the curriculum for primary schools and was issued by the Minister for Education and Science in September 1999.

This booklet **Your child's learning** is being distributed to all parents of primary school children to help them contribute in the most effective way to their children's learning. The booklet has four main purposes:

- to inform parents about the curriculum—what is new in it and what the new emphases are
- to encourage parents to support the work of the school in teaching the curriculum and to show some of the ways in which they can help to do this
- to stress the importance of children's learning from the earliest years
- to show parents some of the ways in which they can help children to learn at home, and in particular how to support learning in the different areas of the curriculum.

The importance of parents in children's learning

It is widely recognised that parents have a key role to play in their children's education. Parents are their children's first educators and it is with parents that children have the closest personal, emotional and social ties. The care and attention children receive from parents and the example they are given have a powerful influence on their formation.

The home and the school

Effective schools always take account of the influence of the home on children's learning and they build on the experience children bring to the school. In the school, the teacher plays a central role in using that experience to help identify children's learning needs and to provide the learning experiences that will best promote their development.

It is important to establish strong links between parents, teachers and schools in order to make children's education as successful as possible.

How should I use the booklet?

The guidelines in this booklet suggest ways in which you can help your children to learn. Due to the fact that family circumstances vary greatly parents may feel that they are not in a position to follow all the suggestions made. However, it is important to try and use those you are comfortable with, and to enjoy watching your children learn.

The Primary School Curriculum

The last major review of the primary school curriculum was completed in 1971. Many changes have taken place in Ireland since then—in the way we live, in our attitudes, in our expectations, and in the demands of life and work. Today, children have very different educational needs, and the Primary School Curriculum is designed to meet these needs.

The curriculum takes a particular view of the child and of education. This view

- celebrates the uniqueness of the child
- seeks to develop each child's potential to the full.

These two principles embody a special vision of the child as a learner. In order to realise this vision the curriculum provides a wide range of learning experiences that help the child to acquire particular knowledge, ideas and skills that will promote his/her development at every stage.

The curriculum is laid out in seven curriculum areas, as the following table shows. Some areas consist of just one subject, others contain more than one subject. There are twelve subjects in all.

The Curriculum

Language

Gaeilge English

Mathematics

Social, environmental and scientific education

History Geography Science

Arts education

Visual arts Music Drama

Physical education

Social, personal and health education

*Religious education

*The development of the curriculum for religious education remains the responsibility of the different religious bodies.

The child as learner

The most striking feature of *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (1971) was that it put the child at the centre of the learning process. It was a child-centred curriculum.

The Primary School Curriculum (1999) retains this essential feature but it concentrates on the child as a learner. It sets out in great detail what the child should learn and how the child can learn it most effectively. It also places great emphasis on inspiring in children a love of learning and on helping them to develop the ability to learn throughout their lives.

Children learn best...

...when they are actively involved in learning, that is, taking part in interesting and stimulating activities

active learning gives children a deeper understanding of what is learned and helps them to remember it

...when learning arouses their curiosity and harnesses their sense of wonder

curiosity and the sense of wonder provide the best and most natural motives for learning.

All the subjects of the curriculum encourage active learning experiences for children that will make learning interesting, enjoyable and fulfilling.

What does the curriculum emphasise?

The individual child

No two children are alike. The curriculum emphasises and encourages the individuality of every child, including children with special educational needs.

Skills

Skills are developed in every subject. These include, for example, the skill needed in music to play a simple tune or, in reading, the skill of associating certain groups of letters with certain sounds.

However, the curriculum also encourages the development of key skills such as observing, questioning, predicting, analysing, exploring, investigating, experimenting and communicating.

Developing concepts

In the course of gaining knowledge, children are helped to develop concepts, that is general ideas or notions. This helps them to link related pieces of knowledge. For example, in mathematics children learn the concept that multiplication is the same as repeated addition (4×3 is the same as $4 + 4 + 4$).

Different ways of learning

Children learn in different ways. The curriculum recommends a great variety of approaches and methodologies which will suit varying learning styles. In addition, it suggests different forms of classroom organisation, for example whole-class teaching, learning in groups and learning in pairs.

What does the curriculum emphasise?

Working together to learn

The teacher will work with children in encouraging and guiding their learning, but children will also learn through working with each other. Children are stimulated by hearing the ideas and opinions of others, and by having the opportunity to react to them. This will help to broaden and deepen an individual child's understanding. Moreover, the experience of working together helps the child's social and personal development.

The importance of language

As well as learning languages such as English and Irish, children learn through language. In other words by learning new words and phrases children learn new concepts and ideas. For example, to a young child the word 'sister' means a particular member of the family. Later the child will come to realise that there is such a thing as a sister and later still that the word has many other meanings, such as sister—a nurse, sister—a nun, sister-in-law, sisterhood, and so on. This is a very simple example of how a child learns through language. Talk and discussion and the use of language are seen as essential to learning in every curriculum area.

Literacy and numeracy

Literacy, that is, the ability to read and write, and numeracy, the ability to understand and use numbers, are essential for effective learning and vital for success in life. The development of literacy skills is a fundamental aim of the approach to reading, and enabling the child to understand and use number is a fundamental aim of the mathematics curriculum.

The environment

Children's own environment, that is, their immediate world, is real and familiar to them. Learning is more meaningful and effective when children can relate it to what they have experienced and know well. For example, in the course of investigating the local environment in geography, children might examine a stream, noting, among other things, its width, the depth and speed of the water, and the vegetation on the banks.

Hands-on experience

Using and handling materials, such as counters and beads in mathematics, or tools and implements from the past in history, help children to root their understanding of things in practical experience.

An integrated curriculum

Children are encouraged to make connections and links between what they learn in the different subjects and curriculum areas. For example, measuring temperature in geography, where temperatures above and below freezing point are recorded, is linked to positive and negative numbers in mathematics.

Assessment

Assessment is seen as an essential part of teaching and learning, and the importance of giving parents a clear idea of their children's progress is emphasised. (See section on assessment, page 43.)

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

Information and communication technologies are an important part of living and working in the modern world. ICT, particularly computers, can make an important contribution to successful learning.

Children's early learning

What is learning

Learning can be described as any experience that contributes to the child's development. In that sense, learning begins before birth, and the rate of learning is quicker in the early years than at any other time in the child's life. New sights, new sounds, new tastes and new feelings are a part of everyday experience. The young child also develops relationships with parents, brothers and sisters, and other people who are frequent visitors to the home.

The child's earliest learning

The child's earliest learning happens through the senses, in handling things, and in learning to move and use the body in different ways. This is all part of the process through which the child learns about himself or herself and about other well-loved people. It leads to a gradual growth in the child's understanding of the world.

Most importantly, the child learns an enormous amount of language at this stage. In beginning to talk, the child uses language to name things and to describe simple actions. He/she gradually understands and learns more and more through listening and talking to parents, brothers and sisters, and others.

In play, the child uses language to describe what he/she is doing and to explain it to himself or herself and to others. Using language in this way helps the child to understand the world and how he/she fits into it.

The ability to talk and to understand what others say has a great influence on the child's general learning. Although a great amount of learning takes place through the senses and through physical experience, language is very important in helping the child to name, to sort and to classify all this information.

Much of this learning happens through day-to-day contact in the home. It happens, in the first place, because of the child's sense of wonder and curiosity about his/her surroundings. However, talking to children, playing with them and encouraging them can play a key role in stimulating learning. Parents and others can help the child's early learning by allowing plenty of time for talk and play.



Talking to young children helps them to learn.

What can I do to help my children to learn before they go to school?

Talking and listening

- talk to your children and encourage them to talk
- listen to them and respect what they have to say
- talk to them about what happens in television programmes you watch with them

Stories, reading and books

- read and tell them stories, say nursery rhymes and poems, and encourage them to talk about what they hear
- encourage them to tell stories and to repeat rhymes and poems
- make sure there are books in the home (picture books, picture books with captions, simple story books, etc.), and encourage children to handle them, look through them and talk about them

Play and activities

- encourage children in make-believe play and play with them
- play games that involve physical activity with your children
- let them play with water, sand and other materials
- involve them in activities around the kitchen, and encourage them to talk about the activities

The environment

- take them for walks and point out and name flowers, trees and other items that arouse their interest
- point out and talk about things in the urban environment such as signs, names, types of shops, statues and monuments

Music and art

- sing to them and with them, and encourage them to sing
- play singing games with them
- play music for them, get them to clap and dance to the rhythms, and talk to them about the music
- encourage them to draw pictures and to talk about them, and display their drawings and pictures in the home.

How can I help my children learn when they go to school?

Recent research has shown a strong connection between success in school and the type of support parents can give to their children. The findings of this research emphasise a number of important things that you as parents can do to help your children to do well in school.

Your child and the school

- take an interest in your children's progress in school
- talk to them about what happens in school
- talk to them about what they are learning
- help your children with their homework in an appropriate way (see the section on homework towards the end of the booklet)

Your expectations

- have high expectations of your children but always recognise their particular strengths and weaknesses
- praise and encourage them

Stimulating children and widening their horizons

- read to your children, tell them stories, and encourage them to talk about the characters in the stories and what happens to them
- bring your children on outings, to concerts, to plays (including those presented by local amateur groups), and become involved with them in different leisure activities

Contact with the school

- have an active and helpful relationship with the school
- have regular communication with your children's class teachers
- participate in and attend school activities.

How can I support the implementation of the curriculum in school?

The role of parents in implementation

Parents can make a big contribution to the education of their children in school. This is why they have been given a distinct role in supporting the implementation of the curriculum.

The school plan will identify ways in which parents can be involved in organisational planning for the curriculum. This might include arranging for a grandparent to come and talk to a class about his/her experience of the past, as part of the history curriculum. It could also involve parents in helping to arrange and supervise out-of-school activities, like exploring the local environment.

As well as having a voice in organisational planning, there are many other ways in which parents can help in implementing the curriculum successfully. You could

- visit the school to see your children's work on display
- keep the school informed about relevant experiences, or difficulties the child may have
- help the school to identify natural environments, buildings and other features of the locality that might be relevant in the curriculum, for example a stream, features of a house, a bridge
- identify places and events of local historical interest
- support Irish-language activities in school
- lend items to the school that illustrate features of your own and your parents' life and experience, for example old photographs, or utensils and tools that are not used any more
- help to involve other parents and members of the community, who are musicians and artists, in school activities
- attend school and classroom music events
- offer to help with the organisation and supervision of the school library
- offer to help with the organisation of book fairs and other language-related events.

How can I help my children at home in the different subject areas?

There are many things you can do in the home to help children to learn in every curriculum area.

The next section of the booklet outlines the new emphases in the different curriculum areas and subjects and suggests some ways in which you can assist your children's learning.

Gaeilge

Irish for communication

The approach to Irish in the curriculum is based on the use of language for communication. In every Irish lesson children will be encouraged to use the Irish they have learned in real and enjoyable situations.

The most important thing is that the children will be able to have a simple conversation in Irish and that they will be able to understand spoken Irish and read and write short texts in Irish.

The children will use short phrases and short answers to questions in the context of role-playing, games and other activities. They will have great fun using a little Irish successfully rather than trying to use more difficult vocabulary that may prevent them from communicating effectively.

The new Irish curriculum is very exciting and should result in children's being able to use simple Irish in a range of settings. However, the language needs positive support from the parents if the children are to benefit from what they learn in school.

Here are some ways that parents could help to support the Irish language at home.

- Even if you have no Irish, your child could have fun teaching you some. If a parent asks 'What's the Irish for ...?' the child can enjoy being the teacher.



Reading and
talking together

- If you have knowledge of Irish you can use it in simple ways once or twice a day. For example, going up the stairs with a small child you could say

suas, suas, suas ... on every step
and
síos, síos, síos ... coming down.

When the children are being dressed a rhyme like
Lámh, lámh eile a haon a dó, Cos, cos eile
could be used.

Using Irish words when asking for something at the table can be helpful.
For example

Bainne, arán, tae, más é do thoil é

can be followed naturally with
Go raibh maith agat.

- Children should be encouraged to sing the Irish songs they learn at school. The child will respond if you start the first few words. Children love action songs and rhymes, and they usually learn many of these in the infant and junior classes.
- You could encourage your children to watch the cartoons on TG4 on Saturdays and Sundays. It does not matter if the child doesn't understand the language. It is worth remembering, too, that children can often understand language without being able to use it. Children love cartoons and will get the gist of what is going on from the pictures and the sound effects. Older children might enjoy the quizzes for children, the fun games for adults, and sports programmes.

Using Irish in an enjoyable way

- You can play a game with Irish phrases that can be seen in the environment. In the city this could take the form of

What do you think *Oifig an Phoist* means?
What do you think *Bruscar* means?
What does *An Lár* mean?
What does *Stáisiún* mean?
What is *Bus Átha Cliath*?
What is *Bus Éireann*?
Where would you see *Go minic anseo, go tapaidh ansiúd*?

What are the Irish names of some of the streets you know?
How many signs in Irish have you seen today?

- Towns and place names can be used in a similar way.

Sráid (a street), *Cearnóg* (a square), *Lough* (loch, a lake), *Contae* (county), *Knock* (cnoc, a hill), *Tully* (tulach, a hill), *Kill* (cill, a small church), *Down* (dún, a fort or castle)

Helping to make Irish relevant

Although Irish is very visible in schools, the children need the support of their families and the wider community outside school if they are to see it as relevant to ordinary life.

It would help to give Irish meaning as a living language if children can see it used to give and receive messages.

- You could look at your children's books from school and admire them and ask the children to tell you about them.
- You could buy a video in Irish and look at it with your children, or buy books for small children and read them with them.
- If you feel more confident in using Irish you could make a habit of using particular phrases at meal times or at bedtime:

*Cá bhfuil Máire? Tá an tae réidh!
Tá sé a hocht a chlog, leaba anois!
Oíche mhaith, codladh sámh!*

- If it were possible, the whole family could go to the Gaeltacht in the summer. Various courses and holiday programmes are available, many of which are activity-based and involve children attending language classes in the mornings.

English

The English curriculum links oral language, reading and writing activities in order to help children to achieve more general language learning goals.

The importance of oral language

Oral language is seen as the language activity that binds all the other elements of the curriculum together. In the early stages great importance is given to the development of good listener-speaker relationships. However, talking, answering questions, responding verbally to a variety of experiences and taking part regularly in discussion are central to the curriculum at every level.

The approach to reading

The approach to reading throughout the school will be significantly different. What you as parents will notice most readily is that your children's reading experience will no longer be confined to a class reader. They will be encouraged to read a wide range of different types of books.

Children in the infant classes need to experience a rich variety of emergent reading activities in preparation for formal reading. These will be directed, in the first place, to building up the child's vocabulary and ability to use language. As well as building a strong oral language base children will experience a print-rich environment in the classroom, they will hear stories read to them and they will also be involved in reading large-format books (big books with large print) with the teacher. Other activities include saying and chanting rhymes, playing games involving words that rhyme, and breaking words into syllables. This will help children to develop an awareness of the different sounds in words. Great stress is also placed on developing children's ability to recognise the relationship between letters and sounds.

Throughout these early years the emphasis will be on engaging the child in these vital emergent reading activities. These activities will lay the foundation for formal reading, which will take place later, normally sometime in the senior infant class.

From the earliest stages children will be encouraged to read for meaning and as they grow older they will experience an ever-wider variety of reading matter. They will be encouraged to handle books, to browse through them, and to respond to what they read in many different ways. In this way they will build up the skill of understanding fully what they read, develop an appreciation of the content, and come to see that reading is an activity that is both useful and enjoyable.

Writing

In conjunction with learning to read, children will be encouraged, from the beginning, to write for different purposes and for different audiences. Writing a thank-you letter to Granny is different from writing a story. They will also discover how to improve their writing through discussing it with the teacher. In this way they will learn to correct their own writing and so become independent writers.

Many of the suggestions given previously for children's early learning are just as useful when they go to school. You can help in other ways too.

Talking and listening

- encourage them to talk about their interests and activities, and about what they are reading

Books and reading

- buy books as presents—a library or a good bookshop can provide valuable advice about books suitable for different reading levels
- have plenty of colourful and attractive books in the home and encourage your children to use them and to take good care of them
- read regularly to them
- show interest in what they are reading and praise them
- encourage them to read newspapers and talk to them about what they read
- bring with your children to the local library

Writing

- encourage your children to write to pen pals
- encourage them to keep a diary.



Mathematics is an important part of many jobs around the home.

In the Mathematics curriculum children at all levels will have experience of all five areas of the curriculum, Number, Algebra, Shape and space, Measures, and Data. Great importance is still given to traditional features of mathematics, such as memorising number facts (tables). However, the development of estimation skills is strongly emphasised, with children being encouraged to work out what the answer might be.

The curriculum also stresses real-life problem-solving and gives children plenty of experience in handling materials such as weights, money, liquids, beads and counters. Children will be involved in activities that will help them to appreciate that mathematics is not only essential for daily living but can also be great fun.

Here are some ideas you could try out that would help your children's learning in mathematics.

Problem-solving

- Encourage your children to take part in solving problems. You can find good examples in simple puzzle books. You could also get them involved in solving problems directly connected with their own lives. An example of this, suitable for children in senior classes and relating to the elements of shape, space and measure in the curriculum, would be:

How can we make a greeting card?
 How will we make the card fit into the envelope?
 Could we make an envelope?

Songs and rhymes

- Teach your children rhymes and number songs you know yourself, and encourage them to repeat the ones they learn in school.

Games

- Play board games with them. These involve counting, putting things in order, taking turns, the notion of before and after, and working out how many more are needed. This will also help their language development.
- Play card games with them that involve matching and recognising numbers. These are some of the most basic mathematical ideas.

The environment

- Encourage them to find and name shapes in the environment. This can keep them amused when you are stopped in traffic in the car or on the bus: How many squares can you see? How many circles are there?

In the home

- Involve your children in weighing ingredients when preparing food, or measuring when you are doing odd jobs around the house. Children love to help by measuring or writing down measurements. They will enjoy the activity and learn mathematics in a real situation.
- If you are organising a party, or any meal, you can include children in working out the amounts that will be needed. How many are at home for tea today? How many sausages will we need if we give everybody three? How many burgers will we need? How many burger buns?
- Create opportunities that allow children to handle money and to work out what can be bought with different amounts, for example

How many pennies are there in ten pence?

What can I buy with 50p, £1.00, £3.00?

How many ways can 14p be made up?

5p+5p+2p+2p

10p+2p+2p.

Board games
involve counting,
sequencing and
taking turns.



Social, environmental and scientific education (SESE)

SESE begins in the infant classes

Social, environmental and scientific education is made up of history, geography and science. Through SESE children learn how to understand the world around them. They also learn about the past and how it has made us what we are.

One of the new features of the SESE curriculum is that children begin to learn about history, geography and science from the infant classes. They begin by exploring their home background. Teachers need to be made aware of individual home circumstances, where these are relevant, in order to treat this area with sensitivity. Later, the local environment is explored and then the wider world. There is a strong emphasis on hands-on approaches and on skills development.

There is an exciting science curriculum that will appeal to children's natural curiosity and that emphasises practical investigation. They will learn about living things, forms of energy such as light, heat, electricity and magnetism, different forces, the characteristics of different materials, and caring for the environment.

You can help your children's learning in SESE in a number of ways.

Visiting places

- take your children to visit places that are interesting in terms of history, geography and science, when they are old enough to appreciate and benefit from the experience

Books, toys and television programmes

- encourage your children to read books about history, geography and science
- encourage them to play with Meccano, Lego or chemistry sets
- identify suitable television programmes about history, geography and science that they can watch



Parents and children
can learn about
the past together.

The seasons, plants and animals

- encourage children to be aware of how changes in the seasons affect plant and animal life, and involve them in work in the garden and with plants and window boxes in the house
- encourage children to be interested in and kind to pets

Talking to older people

- encourage grandparents and older people in the community to talk to your children about the past

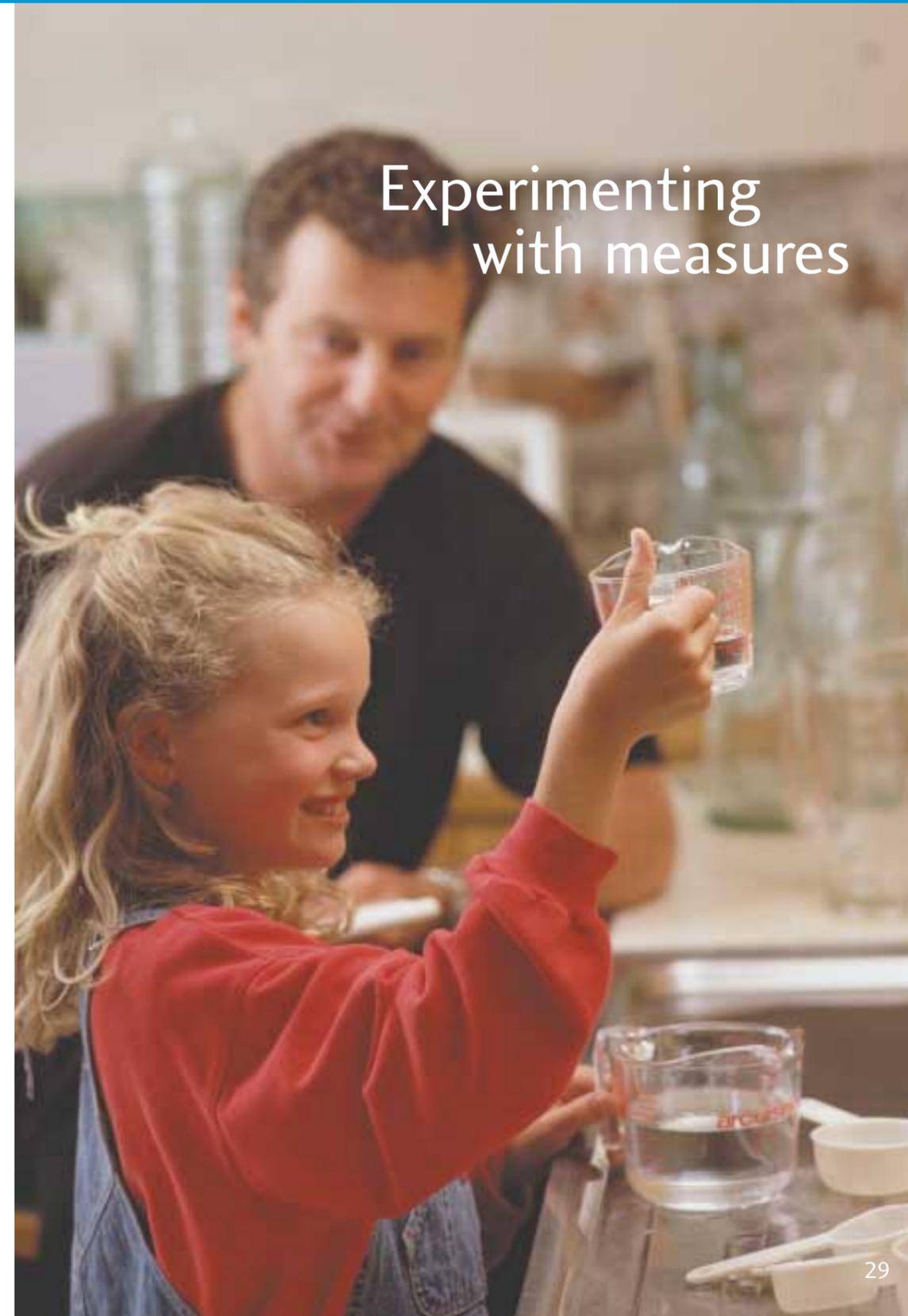
Helping in the school

- be willing to help the school if you have relevant expertise

Science and technology

- help children to be aware of how science explains the workings of common features of life in the home, for example a bicycle, a car, the water system, the fridge, a zip, the boiling of water
- involve children in designing and making things around the home, for example a shelf or a bird table
- encourage your children to use the computer (including the internet and e-mail) in ways that will help their learning.

Experimenting with measures





Making art in
the home can be a
shared experience.

Arts education comprises visual arts, music and drama.

Visual arts

Visual arts will give children opportunities to express themselves through drawing, painting, print-making, using colour, modelling in clay, constructing things using different materials, and working with fabric and other textiles. As well as expressing themselves in these different ways children will also be encouraged to respond and react to a variety of pieces of art.

Music

There are three main areas in the music curriculum: listening and responding to music, performing, and composing. Children will listen to a wide variety of music and respond to it in different ways. They will sing songs and learn to read music through song-singing activities. Composing will involve children in exploring sound by allowing them to play with simple musical ideas using different musical instruments. In this way they will be encouraged to create their own compositions.

Drama

Drama stimulates children's imagination in an exciting way. In the early stages it is approached through make-believe play. It is always based on story, and children will create the drama through their own words and actions. This provides them with a different way of learning and knowing, and gives them new insights and understanding. Drama is a special type of learning experience.

Here are some of the ways you can help your children's learning in arts education.

Artistic experiences

- give children plenty of artistic experiences, such as showing them interesting pictures and bringing them to plays and concerts, including local amateur performances, school performances, outdoor pageants, and parades
- encourage children to express themselves using a range of materials and tools, such as paint, crayons, clay, pens, pencils and fabrics
- draw their attention to interesting features of the environment both in the town and in the country, for example particular features of a building such as an archway or a fanlight above a door

Musical activities

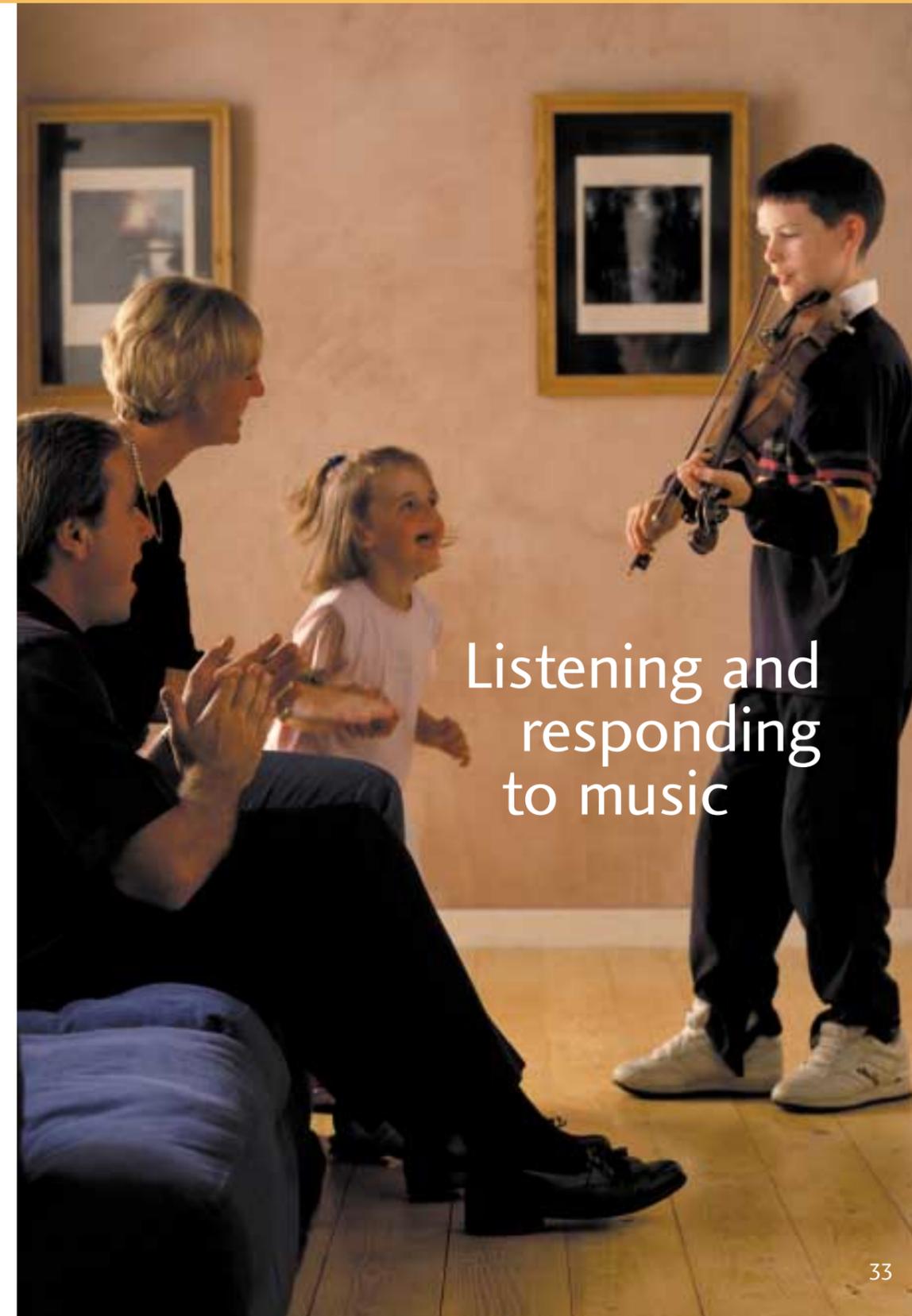
- sing to your children and clap rhythms, particularly to babies and young children
- sing songs they have learned in school with your children
- listen to music together, encourage them to listen actively, and talk to them about the music
- play with home-made instruments, such as putting dried peas in a tin and shaking it to the rhythm of a piece of music

The school and home

- give children opportunities to learn a musical instrument and allow them time and space to practise and play it
- display and discuss their school work in the arts with them
- attend school and classroom music events
- discuss your children's drama experiences in school with them

Make-believe play

- encourage make-believe play and dressing up, and keep a collection of clothes they can use for this purpose.



Listening and
responding
to music



Parents can encourage children to be active.

Physical education (PE)

A healthy, active life

Physical education contributes to children's overall development by helping them to lead full, active and healthy lives. It also gives children opportunities for learning through the medium of movement and dance. The PE curriculum stresses the importance of enjoyment and play, and all children are encouraged to take part in as many activities as possible.

A curriculum suitable for all schools

The curriculum outlines a wide range of activities that can take place in all schools, and it is flexible enough to enable schools to tailor their PE programmes to suit their own needs and circumstances. These vary from school to school, but every child will have the opportunity to take part in a balanced range of physical activity. New elements include outdoor and adventure activities and water-based activities.

You can help your children's development in PE in a number of ways.

An active lifestyle

- have a positive attitude to physical education and sport
- set children an example by having an active life-style, by taking them for walks, by taking part in sports, and by playing games with them
- take them on outdoor and adventure activities such as camping, swimming, and visits to an adventure playground
- foster your children's self-esteem by acknowledging their own particular achievements in a variety of physical activities

Helping in the school

- assist with the school sports day and with Sport for All Day

Dancing

- encourage your children to learn and practise Irish dancing and other types of dance.



Shared experiences
foster an
understanding of others.

Social, personal and health education (SPHE)

The importance of SPHE

Social, personal and health education is concerned with the personal development of the child and with his/her health and well-being. It is, therefore, one of the most important areas of the child's education. It helps children to understand how to care for themselves and it fosters in them a sense of responsibility for their own actions.

Skills and attitudes

SPHE is also concerned with helping children to develop skills, attitudes and self-esteem that will bring the greatest fulfilment and happiness to their lives. It is an important part of all school and classroom activity, but it is also given its own individual space in the timetable.

Care and respect for others

SPHE helps children to develop a sense of care and respect for themselves and for other people. It also promotes responsible social behaviour, helping children to relate successfully to others, and to work with others in resolving conflicts.

A sense of community

Through SPHE children develop a sense of belonging to a community. They are encouraged to understand their own culture and traditions and to appreciate other cultures and the different ways people live.

SPHE and RSE

Relationships and sexuality education (RSE) is now a part of SPHE. Schools will also include other programmes, such as Stay Safe and Walk Tall, in their SPHE programme.

The importance of home school links

SPHE cannot be separated from the child's life in the home or from the influence of the home. It is very important, therefore, that the home and the school work closely together in helping the child's social, personal and health development.

Parents can contribute to the social, personal and health development of the child by

- keeping themselves fully informed of the content of the SPHE programme and of the approaches to the teaching of it in school
- being consistently aware of the importance of helping in the development of values and attitudes
- encouraging and affirming children in their efforts
- encouraging children to take care of themselves through good hygiene and healthy eating habits
- stressing the importance of taking plenty of exercise—walking, cycling, skateboarding, swimming, etc.
- impressing upon children the dangers involved in the misuse of different substances such as alcohol and drugs
- helping them to learn about the changes that take place in their bodies at various stages of development
- stressing the importance of family, how people should get on as a family, and how members of the family should care for each other
- talking to children about the importance of friendship—how necessary friends are, how we should be loyal to friends, how we sometimes fall out, and the valuable lessons that can be learned from making up
- helping children to be involved in taking responsible decisions and in making good choices
- helping children to be aware that they are part of a wider community in which they should play their part.



Other issues of interest to parents

Children with special needs

When a child starts school an important relationship is created between adults at home and adults in school. The education of the child becomes a shared venture. For children with special needs, it is particularly important that a good relationship is formed between parent and teacher. This will help to create a happy and effective learning environment for the child.

It is important, therefore, that you maintain close links with the school. As parents you know your own child best. You know his/her ups and downs and are usually the first to notice that something is not quite as it should be. Your contribution to planning learning programmes is very much valued and encouraged. In order to develop the child's potential to the full both teacher and parent need to be consistent in their approach. By following up what is happening at school you can help your child to practise and reinforce new skills.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

Information and communication technologies can make an important contribution in every curriculum area. Where it is appropriate, parents should encourage children to use the internet, e-mail, word-processing and other computer programs to add to the knowledge and skills they acquire in school.

Where there is no computer in the home, the public library can be an excellent resource for children who wish to search for information for a variety of purposes. Children using the internet should be supervised at all times.

Homework

Homework and learning

It is important that there are close links between parents and the school with regard to homework. The school's homework policy should be worked out in co-operation with the parents' association. Homework has a particular part to play in helping children to learn. It should

- be part of a carefully thought-out learning programme
- have a purpose, such as allowing children to complete a task which they have begun in school, or giving them the opportunity to apply what they have learned in other situations
- be suitable to the capabilities of the children—they should be able to attempt homework within a reasonable timeframe
- be properly explained to children in advance
- be checked by the teacher—credit should be given for personal effort.

The role of the parent

As a parent, you have an important role to play in

- encouraging your children's work
- observing their work
- looking over completed work and signing it.

It is very important that you help your children with their homework in the most useful way. Try to make sure that children make an honest effort to do the homework without assistance. If they have a difficulty your help should generally take the form of prompting and guiding them towards completing the task that is set. If you have given them a reasonable amount of help and they still cannot complete the task you can then help best by writing a note to the teacher telling him/her of the child's difficulties.

Some practical suggestions

You can also help by

- setting suitable times for doing homework that take account of other needs, such as recreation and family circumstances
- setting a reasonable amount of time for homework
- making sure children have the proper physical conditions for doing homework—a quiet time, a clear table, helpful books such as dictionaries
- getting in touch with the school at an early stage if the child is having difficulties with homework.

Other issues of interest to parents

Textbooks

The function of textbooks

The function of textbooks is to help children's learning and to assist teachers in reaching the learning goals of the curriculum. The curriculum places great emphasis on oral work and on learning by doing. Parents will, therefore, see a new relationship between textbooks and learning. Both the content of textbooks and the way they are used will change. Textbooks will be used as a resource to support the many different approaches to learning that the curriculum recommends. Rather than relying on a single textbook in a particular curriculum area, the teacher may use a range of books from the class library.

The approach to reading

The approach to the teaching of reading, for example, will be based on

- a lot of oral language work
- experiencing a print-rich environment that includes plenty of signs, labels, pictures with captions, and books
- acquiring a basic sight vocabulary—common words children need for reading
- developing a knowledge of the conventions of print
- reading large-format books (big books with big print) with the teacher in a group.

In line with this approach, children will normally begin to use a formal reading scheme some time in senior infant class.

Other curriculum areas

Irish reading will not begin before second class. In mathematics, because of the emphasis on practical work, much less use will be made of textbooks generally but especially in the junior classes.

In history, geography and science the emphasis in the curriculum is on exploring the environment and on developing skills such as observing, investigating, looking at evidence, measuring and recording. This will involve children in learning through activity rather than learning from textbooks. Because of this, textbooks in SESE and the way they are used will change.

It is important that parents are aware of this new relationship between textbooks and the curriculum and also that they are familiar with school policy in relation to textbooks.

Assessment

What is assessment?

Assessment is the means by which teachers keep track of children's progress in learning. Through assessment the teacher can build up a picture of the learning needs of the child and plan future work accordingly. Assessment is also used to identify children with learning difficulties so that they can be given the support and assistance they need.

Communicating with parents

A systematic approach to assessment will enable the teacher to build up a record of children's learning and give parents a clear picture of how their children are progressing. It also helps children to become more self-aware as learners and to develop powers of self-assessment.

The range of assessment

All areas of the curriculum and all the different aspects of learning will be assessed. Assessment will also take account of the child's self-esteem, behaviour, social interaction, and a wide range of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.

Different methods of assessment

The curriculum proposes the use of a variety of assessment tools, ranging from the informal to the formal. These include

- teacher observation
- class work and homework
- work samples, portfolios and projects
- curriculum profiles
- diagnostic tests
- standardised tests.

It is intended that in planning assessment, schools and teachers will select those methods that best meet their needs at a particular time. Through assessment teachers can make children's learning more successful, identify any difficulties a child may be having at an early stage, and at the same time provide parents with a full and clear picture of their children's progress in every area of the curriculum.

For further information

This document gives a brief summary of the Primary School Curriculum. Further information may be obtained

- by keeping in regular contact with the school and with your children's teachers
- by becoming involved with your local National Parents Council - Primary
- by reading the curriculum. Copies are available in public libraries and from

Government Publications Sale Office,
Sun Alliance House,
Molesworth Street,
Dublin 2.

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Primary School Curriculum

Your child's learning

Guidelines for parents

The Primary School Curriculum (1999) is a landmark in Irish education. It is designed to meet children's learning needs in primary school, to prepare them for later education, and to enable them to lead fulfilled lives as adults.

It suggests a greater role for parents in contributing to their children's learning, both in the home and in school.

Most importantly, it sets out a model of co-operation between parents and schools that can add a significant dimension to children's learning.



These guidelines were prepared by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment for the Department of Education and Science.



Junior and senior infants 2

MATHEMATICS

Your child learns to understand and solve problems with the Mathematics Curriculum. Your child is busy with early mathematical activities such as sorting, matching, comparing and ordering different objects. For example, you might see your child arranging toys in lines on the floor or organising toys in groups according to different types, colours or sizes. These activities give your child a strong foundation for learning in:

- Number (including counting, comparing and ordering)
- Algebra (including copying and adding to patterns of colour, shape, size and number using beads or blocks, or by drawing and colouring, for example, 2 blue, 1 red)
- Measurement (including working with length, weight, capacity, time and money)
- Shape and space (including working with 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional shapes)
- Data (including sorting objects and understanding and making charts and graphs).

You can help your child to learn at home by:

- asking your child to help you with sorting and matching activities at home, for example, tidying toys into the right boxes, sorting the washing into bundles such as putting all the towels together or all the white clothes, matching socks when you're putting clothes away or helping to put the shopping away in the right presses. Talk to your child while you are doing these activities together and ask your child how he/she knows something matches or should go in a particular place
- teaching your child counting rhymes and songs and making up actions together to go with the words. Your child can also learn old counting favourites from grandparents and other family members. Children love counting rhymes such as *One, two, buckle my shoe, This old man or A haon, a dó, a trí, lúcha beaga buí.*

SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND SCIENTIFIC EDUCATION (SESE)

In SESE (history, geography and science) the emphasis is on **connecting learning with the child's immediate environment**. In history, children's curiosity about the past is awakened by **exploring their personal and family history**, for example, by listening to stories about when their grandparents were young. In geography and science, the local and wider environment provides many opportunities for children's **investigations which help them to understand and care for the world** around them. In SESE, **your child uses investigative skills** such as *observing, questioning, investigating and experimenting, estimating and measuring, classifying recording and communicating* and so **works like a Scientist, Historian and Geographer from a young age**.



You can help your child to learn at home by:

- talking to your child about important events in his/her own life, such as, the day that he/she was born, when he/she came home from the hospital, his/her first steps, first tooth and so on
- helping your child to notice and discuss how changes in the seasons affect the weather, plant and animal life, for example, the clothes we wear in the Winter/Summer, buds appearing in Spring and leaves on the trees in Summer
- discussing what happens through heating and cooling and discovering things that melt and/or freeze, for example, ice-cream, butter, chocolate, water and ice.

Information for parents

Junior and senior infants 3

ARTS EDUCATION

The three subjects visual arts, music and drama give children opportunities to **develop artistic and creative skills** by participating in different kinds of activities, for example, drawing, painting, constructing, dramatic play, singing, clapping or exploring the sounds made by different musical instruments. The **focus is not so much on the work your child produces (the product) but on what your child learns by engaging in creative activity (the process)**. This curriculum area encourages your child to listen to, look at and respond to the music, artwork and dramatic expression of others in the class, as well as the work of older children and adults.



You can help your child to learn at home by:

- singing and clapping the rhythms of favourite songs with your child and encouraging him/her to share new songs with you that have been learned in school
- keeping a collection of clothes and hats that can be used for dress up play
- making a collection of empty cartons, boxes, paper, crayons, paints, playdough, pens, pencils, glue, old fabrics and so on, to allow your child to express him/herself artistically.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Children love all kinds of physical activity. Physical education in the infant classes helps your child to learn about and develop more control over his/her movements, to learn how to co-operate with others and to develop important social skills such as sharing, relying on others and teamwork. Your child also learns directions in a fun way which helps with reading and writing, and in finding his/her way around the school! Your child participates in different physical activities such as:

- Athletics (including running, jumping and throwing)
- Dance (including exploring, creating and performing dance)
- Gymnastics (including balancing, moving in different directions and moving using apparatus such as hoops and mats)
- Games (including ball handling, kicking, carrying and striking and playing simple playground games)
- Outdoor and adventure activities (including walking, following directions and following simple trails).¹

These activities help your child **to understand and appreciate physical activity**. Physical education starts your child on an active way of life.

You can help your child to learn at home by:

- encouraging your child to play with toys that will help him/her to develop physically, for example, construction toys or playdough
- encouraging your child to be active, for example, walking, running, and jumping and playing games. Encourage your child to attend or take part in local sport activities which will help him/her to feel a sense of belonging to the community.

¹In aquatics children learn about safety in the water and how to move in the water through play and using their arms and legs. To suit individual school circumstances, the curriculum advocates that children should have opportunities to develop water based movement skills at some point in their primary schooling.

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SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE)

Social, Personal and Health Education, or SPHE, deals with **your child's personal development, health and wellbeing**. It helps children to **understand how to care for themselves, how to respect and relate to others, and how to deal with different feelings**. It helps your child to **learn and develop a sense of responsibility for his/her actions**. SPHE includes **Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)** – an important part of all children's development. **Each school has an RSE policy** which outlines what will be taught in RSE and when certain content will be introduced.

The SPHE Curriculum helps your child to:

- care for him/herself
- to learn basic hygiene skills, such as, washing hands before eating
- to develop growing independence, such as, putting on own coat and shoes
- to deal with the newness of school life by, for example, taking turns and sharing.



SPHE helps your child to explore and respect diversity and to appreciate differences in people by learning how to relate to and respect others. Your child also learns to develop a sense of place in the school and local community, to care for the local and wider environment and to become familiar with different types of information media.

You can help your child to learn at home by:

- talking to your child about feelings and helping your child to name and recognise feelings and realise that it is okay to have different feelings about different things
- encouraging your child to recognise and care for him/herself and his/her own things at home and at school, for example, washing hands before eating, hanging up own coat, putting away own lunchbox, tidying toys away
- developing healthy eating habits through providing a healthy lunch for school and at other mealtimes. Breakfast is a particularly important meal as it starts your child on a healthy day.

Ask your child's teacher about other ways you can help your child to learn at home in the infant classes. Ask other parents what works well for them.

Helping young children to develop positive learning dispositions

Connections to *Aistear* and *Síolta*

Aistear

Themes: Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, Exploring and Thinking
Guidelines for good practice: Learning and developing through interactions (pp.27-51), Learning and developing through play (pp.57 and 103-106), Supporting learning and development through assessment (pp.72-102)

Síolta Standards

1: Rights of the Child, C1.1, 1.2, 1.3

6: Play, C6.7

7: Curriculum, C7.2, 7.6

Research Digests linked to the above *Standards*

Aistear's themes describe what children need to learn from birth onwards and outlines learning in **four interconnected aspects: skills, attitudes and values, knowledge and understanding, and dispositions.** **Skills** for children like communicating, mark-making, cutting, climbing, and problem-solving, **attitudes and values** like respect for themselves and others, care for the environment, and positive attitudes to learning and to life, **knowledge and understanding** like classifying objects using colour and size, or learning that symbols such as letters or numbers have meaning.



What is a disposition?

Aistear defines dispositions as 'enduring habits of mind and action. A disposition is the tendency to respond to situations in characteristic ways' (*Aistear*, 2009, p.54).

Positive **dispositions** mentioned in *Aistear* are **independence, curiosity, concentration, creativity, responsibility, resilience, patience, perseverance, playfulness, imagination, being interested in things, enjoying problem-solving, being a good listener, assessing and taking risks, being friendly, wanting to communicate, being accepting of others and of differences, being considerate, being happy, cooperating with others.**

Aistear also describes children's learning in terms of **dispositions** that children need in order to achieve their full potential. Dispositions, such as **curiosity, independence, resilience, and perseverance** are often described as innate or natural character traits that children possess from birth. However, children's inborn dispositions vary and it is important to remember that adult-child interactions and relationships, and the experiences children are exposed to can have an impact on the development of positive learning dispositions.



Why are dispositions important?

Learning dispositions have an impact on a child's overall ability to learn and progress. Dispositions develop alongside and in conjunction with children's acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and understanding. For example, a group of children constructing with wooden blocks are developing the physical skills of grasping, placing and stacking, and learning about shape and size, while at the same time developing the positive disposition of **concentration** and rejoicing in their problem-solving **skills** as they build. They may be learning too that we do not always succeed the first time, that we may have to try again and again as the blocks come tumbling down or as another child runs by and collapses their tower, and this helps them to develop the dispositions of **patience, perseverance and resilience**.



Dispositions can be **positive or negative** - some dispositions are less helpful than others for children's learning and development. Dispositions are not fixed and they can be encouraged and strengthened, or weakened over time. Practitioners should try to reinforce positive dispositions. For example, children who are never given the opportunity to dress themselves or to tidy up will tend to rely too much on the adult and can develop **learned helplessness** (a negative disposition). By encouraging children to be responsible for their own belongings and by getting them to help sweep up or put things in the recycling, practitioners are helping them to develop the positive dispositions of **independence** and **self-reliance**. If a child is naturally **anxious** and wary of new situations or people, practitioners can encourage the child to be more **adventurous** and **flexible** by introducing changes gradually, explaining what will happen before change occurs and by giving lots of reassurance.

Dispositions can be encouraged or discouraged, and strengthened or weakened, through experience and through interactions with others and the environment.

How can I encourage positive dispositions?

Learning dispositions have an impact on a child's overall ability to learn and progress. By being aware of the kind of dispositions that are helpful, practitioners can plan for a supportive environment and interactions that will encourage positive dispositions. For example,

- model the disposition
- show that you value the disposition
- provide opportunities for children to develop dispositions (time, space, equipment or encouragement).
- take individual differences and preferences into account, for example by introducing changes gradually, or by giving extra support to a child who needs it.

More detail on how you might encourage the development of positive dispositions is outlined below.

Encouraging independence and resilience:

- Provide an environment that enables children to be more **independent** - accessible storage, picture labels on shelving and boxes, low sinks for hand-washing, low-level coat and apron racks, and space for personal items.
- Provide children with tasks to develop responsibility e.g. helping set up activities, turning off lights, distributing drinks, tidying away the props, paints and toys etc. (**independence**)
- Allow children to choose activities and make decisions (at an appropriate level) - *Do you want to go inside now or stay outside for a bit longer?* (**independence**)
- Wait before you offer help, allow the child time to find a solution, and if there is still a difficulty, ask the child *Which part would you like help with?*
- Suggest strategies and model ways of coping with the inevitable failures and disappointments in life in order to develop **resilience** - both acknowledging children's feelings and perhaps suggesting an alternative strategy:
 - *We were planning to have a picnic today, but it's much too wet. What do you think we could do instead? Maybe we could have our picnic inside today, and go to the park tomorrow?*
- With older children, it might be good to use drama/role play/puppetry sometimes to encourage and model certain dispositions.

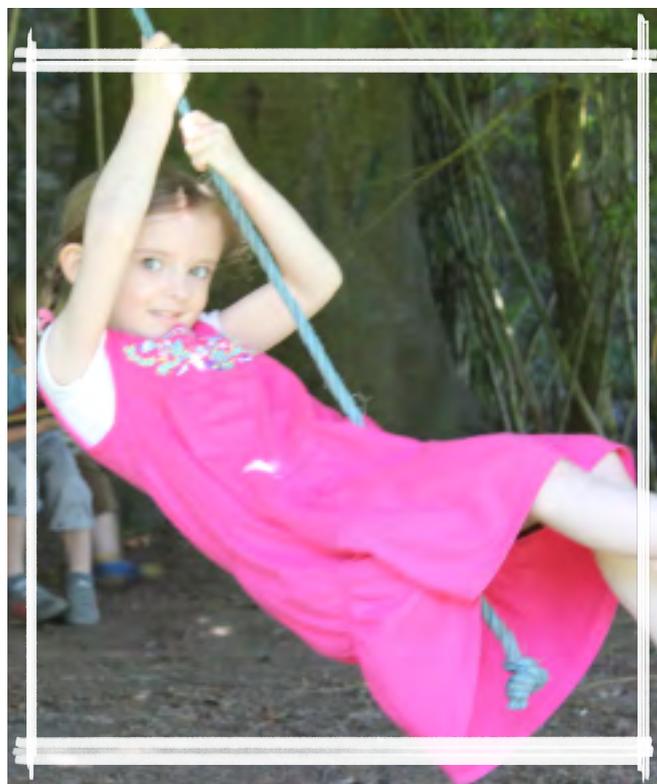
Encourage concentration and perseverance:

- Show that you value the disposition, by noticing and commenting on it. When a child has spent a long time focusing on something, or has finally managed to complete something you could say: *I saw you working hard on that- it looks great now!*
- Encourage children to **problem-solve** for themselves:
 - *We don't have enough cups for everyone, what shall we do?*
 - *How can we get the water wheel to turn?*
- Provide encouragement to **persevere and try again**, as needed:
 - *Nearly there – one more step and you'll be at the top.*
 - *Oh no, the ramp for the cars didn't work again, what else could we try?*
- Give children space and time when they are absorbed in a task or activity, and make sure they are not disturbed unnecessarily by other children or by adults:
 - *Don't disturb Sean and Lia just now, they are concentrating really hard on getting all those shapes into place.*
 - *We will add a bit of time here so that you can finish making the construction before we head back inside.*

Encourage curiosity and a willingness to learn:

- Follow the child's lead - notice what they are interested in and respond to their questions.
- Provide a variety of opportunities to experience and explore different objects and environments, and talk about what you and the children see, feel, and do:
 - *Feel the bark on the cherry tree- it's much smoother and shinier than the oak tree, isn't it?*
 - *What's making that noise, I wonder?*

- Model **curiosity, and a willingness to learn**: *That's an interesting bug you've found. I don't know what it is. I haven't seen one of those before. I wonder how we could find out more about it?*
- Encourage children to **think of different ways that they might solve a problem**, rather than immediately providing a solution:
 - *What could we find that would be long enough to bridge the gap? Where could you look for something like that? Which friend might be able to help?*
 You might give clues rather than providing an immediate answer - *I can see it from here, it's near something blue, it's not on top of the table.*
- Show that you are **interested** in lots of different things, and share your own interests. For example, a love of gardening, baking, athletics or playing a musical instrument.





- Provide new and interesting activities over time as well as familiar ones, or rotate activities in one part of the setting while keeping children's favourites (**enjoying new things, enjoying exploring**). See the sample learning opportunities in *Aistear's* themes for ideas.

Encouraging creativity, collaboration and other dispositions

- Provide opportunities for the kind of interactions that will allow the child to put their dispositions like **cooperation, collaborating with others, being social** into action. Encourage children to cooperate, by giving lots of opportunities for interactions with peers, and for working in pairs or small groups on tasks or projects:
 - *You and Lana really worked well together to build the house. Would you like to sit together for snack?*
 - Have pair rotas for some jobs etc so that children get to mix.
- Experiences like art, water and sand, and play with open-ended and loose materials like stones, twigs or shells, all encourage **creativity and imagination**.
- Allow children to use materials in different and innovative ways, or to combine different materials (**creativity, imagination**).
- Listening to stories and reading together encourages **concentration, imagination, curiosity**. Providing a quiet comfortable

book corner and sharing books with children encourages them to see books and reading as something to be enjoyed.

Strategies and interactions like these will help children develop holistically, so that as they acquire the skills and knowledge they need, they are also developing positive dispositions that will benefit them both now and in the future. It's also important to explain the importance of positive learning dispositions to parents and to encourage them to watch out for and support them at home.



Assessing dispositions

Aistear's guidelines on *Supporting learning and development through assessment* (2009, pp72-102) discuss the importance of observing what children do, make and say over time, and using this information to plan for future experiences. The Guidelines (p. 74) suggest that the adult should look for evidence of the child's progress across **four interconnected aspects as outlined above: skills, attitudes and values, knowledge and understanding and dispositions.**

Dispositions can be difficult to assess and it may only become clear that a child possesses a certain disposition after getting to know a child over a period of time. Observing children as they interact and play allows us to see how they demonstrate their dispositions and it is important to include dispositions in assessment as **positive dispositions** are being increasingly recognised as being crucial for children's learning and development!

Information for parents

Helping your young child with maths

From birth your child has been learning about maths. Maths is everywhere around us. Talking to your child and letting him or her take part in everyday activities like going to the shop, cooking, or even setting the table, helps your child with maths. Knowing simple nursery rhymes, getting dressed, learning to take turns or enjoying pretend games, such as working in a post office or restaurant, all help your child to understand number, pattern and shape, measuring and sorting.

You can help your child to solve maths problems every day by, for example, working out how to share sweets equally, by making sure everyone has a knife and fork at dinner time, or by helping him or her to measure out enough paper to wrap a present. Even when your child starts school, you can continue to play a key role in helping him or her to understand and enjoy maths.

Here are some tips on how you can do this:

- Give your child containers to play with.
 - Talk about: holds more/less or empty/full.
 - Try activities such as baking or playing with sand/water.
- Encourage your child to tidy up toys.
- Try comparing them: This toy is heavier/lighter, or bigger/smaller than.
- Make patterns using buttons or clothes pegs.
 - Talk about: pattern in colour, size and shape.
- Say simple counting rhymes together: *Ten Green Bottles*.
- Give your child maths objects to play with: measuring tapes, rulers, phones, watches, jugs, weighing scales.
- Look at the clock: time for school/bed.
- Ask your child to help with sorting: matching socks, or putting things in the fridge/press.
- Look at shapes: *How many circles can you see in the kitchen? What shapes can you find in the garden?* Look at books and pick out different shapes.
- Draw attention to the days of the week and time of the day: today, yesterday, tomorrow, morning, night.

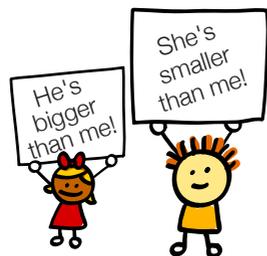
- Look at numbers: on cars, buses, in shops. Have number hunts to see who can spot the most numbers.
- Measure your child: How tall is he/she? What is his/her shoe size? Use words like big/small, wide/narrow, tall/short.
- Play counting games: counting up and down stairs. Play simple games using a dice: *Snakes and ladders*, *Bingo* or *Hopscotch*.
- Draw or make shapes using sand, pasta, crayons, cardboard cut-outs. Talk about them: square/circle, straight/curved.
- Make a pretend shop using tins and packets of food.
- Use real or pretend money.
- Talk about: *How many? How much? What change did we get?*

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

3: Talking about measurement

The language you use helps your child to learn maths. Some of the words you use every day also have a specific meaning in maths. Children need to learn to use words accurately as they talk about maths. For example, they often say, *he's bigger than me*. Do they mean he's taller or older? Knowing the language of maths can help children to be more precise about what they are thinking and about what they mean.

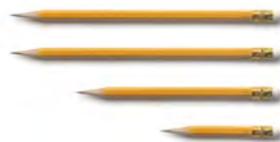


As a parent you can help your child by using the correct maths language yourself. Look at the video **Comparing weights** and see how that parent helps her child.

Some more examples

Let's take a look at some examples of the language you might use when measuring with your child.

When children are measuring the length of something encourage them to say: *This one is long; this one is shorter; this is the shortest; these two are the same length.*



When talking about weight use words like heavy, heavier and heaviest or light, lighter and lightest rather than talking about the **size** of the object (big or small). Watch the video **Comparing weights**.



If you are pouring water or milk, talk about full and empty; the glass holding less than the cup; the jug holding more than the eggcup; the glasses that hold the same amount.

See www.ncca.ie/parents for more information including video clips.

→ Parents → Primary → Junior and senior infants

Helping your child with maths in JUNIOR INFANTS

Enjoy maths with your child

Watch your child using and enjoying maths while playing, for example when setting the table for Teddy's party, using shapes to build things, or talking about the highest step, the heaviest box and the longest skipping rope.

Maths is everywhere around us and is part of your child's daily life. You can help your child to understand and enjoy maths through simple games and everyday activities such as saying rhymes like *Two Little Dickie Birds* or *One Two, Buckle My Shoe*, naming colours and shapes you see around you and counting objects, for example, *how many steps did we climb?*



About this tip sheet

There are three sections in this tip sheet.

1: What your child is learning in school tells you about the maths your child will learn in junior infants.

2: How your child learns at home gives you tips to help your child with maths. There are short video clips with further suggestions. You can watch these by visiting the parents' section of the NCCA website at www.ncca.ie/parents.

3: Talking about measurement gives you examples of the language you can use when helping your child with maths.

When your child is ready for more challenging activities, take a look at the tip sheet and videos for senior infants.



INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

1: What your child is learning in school

Here is some of the maths your child will learn in junior infants in primary school.

- **Match** objects that go together, for example shoes and socks; a pencil for each child.
- **Sort** groups of objects, for example *put all the blue blocks together; put all the apples in the bowl.*
- **Say the numbers 1 to 10** in the correct order counting forwards and backwards.
- **Recognise** the written numbers 1 to 5.
- **Write** the numbers 1 to 5.
- **Tell at a glance** the number of objects in a group up to 5.
- **Make and count a group of objects** up to 5.
- **Add two groups** of objects to a total of 5.
- **Count how many are left** in a group when some are taken away.

Your child will also learn to:

- **recognise** and make simple **patterns** using shapes, beads, and lots of other objects, for example



- **sort and name shapes** such as square, circle, triangle, rectangle.



- **compare objects** using words such as heavy and light, long and short, longest and shortest, full and empty, nearly full and nearly empty.
- **talk about time** using words such as before and after, early and late, and night and day.
- **recognise and use coins** up to 5 cents. Recognise which coin is which and start to understand the value of coins, for example, that you can swap five 1 cent coins for one 5 cent coin.



INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

2: How your child learns at home

Match and sort objects

Match socks or gloves. Sort toys into groups by colour, by shape... Ask your child: *How would you sort them?*

Recognise the written numbers 1 to 5

Pick a number for the day and look out for it when you go out.

Add two groups of objects to make a total of 5

Ask your child to get you 2 apples, then 3 more. *How many altogether? How many ways could I share 4 cakes between you and your brother? How could I share them fairly between you both?*

Recognise and make simple patterns

Play clapping games. Draw attention to patterns on clothes such as stripes or spots. Look for patterns around you such as on tiles or curtains.

Talk about time

Ask questions such as: *What do you do before you go to bed? After swimming? What do you think will happen next in the story? What day is it today?*

Say the numbers 1-10

Play a rocket game by counting 1 to 10 and then counting back again from 10 to 1 and saying 'blast off'. Try starting from a different number such as 9 and count back to 1.

Careful counting

Encourage your child to count objects carefully by taking time to touch each item when counting and saying the number name at the same time.

Tell at a glance the number of objects in a set or group up to 5. Play dice games. Match similar amounts of dots as in the game of Dominoes.

Compare objects by weight

Ask your child to help you sort the shopping. *Can you find the heaviest item, the lightest item, two items that weigh about the same amount?*

Recognise and use coins up to 5 cents

Play shop. Price items up to 5 cents. Give your child a purse with some coins and talk about what you could buy. *Which coin is worth the most? The least? What can you buy with 5 cents?*

Information for parents

Helping your young child to read and write

Since your child was born you have been teaching him or her to communicate. By speaking and listening to your child, by talking and reading to him or her, by pointing out words and notices at home or out and about, you have introduced your child to the world of language - spoken and written. Through playing with your child, he or she learns new words, and learns to think and to talk about his or her thoughts and feelings. For example, pretending to be a nurse or a shopkeeper, scribbling on re-cycled paper, or looking at and talking about picture books, all help your child to speak, to listen, to read and to write. Even when your child starts school, you continue to have a key role in helping him or her.

Here are some tips on how you can do this:

- Listen to your child. Nod or smile to show you are interested. Try not to interrupt while your child is speaking.
- Encourage your child to talk and tell you about things: *friends, toys and hobbies or what he or she has been doing in school.*
- Enjoy listening to and speaking to your child. Try: *listening to and singing songs or reading and saying nursery rhymes.*
- Play games: *I spy with my little eye something beginning with the sound 'ch' that rhymes with 'more'.*
- Make a book with your child using words and pictures: *My Family or My Favourite Things.* Use photographs, old birthday cards or cut-outs from magazines.
- Enjoy books together. Draw attention to: *holding the book the right way up, turning the pages, moving your finger from left to right, making connections between pictures and words.* Ask questions: *What ...? When ...? Why ...? What if ...?*
- Set up pretend play topics at home: *an office (old phone, paper and something to write with) or a shop (food items, dress-up clothes, shoes, pretend cash register, pencil, paper).*
- Enjoy cutting, gluing and sticking with your child.
- Help your child to: *make marks, trace, and copy patterns, colour, draw or even try their own writing.* Use pencils, crayons, chalk or markers. Try forming letters with play dough or in sand. Make a to-do list, thank you cards or a sign for his or her bedroom.
- Draw your child's attention to pictures, signs, letters and words when out and about: *'No dogs allowed' (in the park) or, 'Baggage collection' (in the airport).*
- Visit the library. *Choose, look at and talk about books together.*
- Let your child see you reading magazines or books and writing letters, e-mails or a shopping list.



Learning and developing through play

Tip-sheet for parents of young children (2½–6 years)

Why play?

Lucy and Robbie are playing outside. Their neighbours, Mariuz and Paula, arrive. The four children set about making a ‘tent’ by hanging an old curtain over a fence and a garden seat. They then make a list of all the camping items they need. Lucy gets plastic containers and lollipop sticks for cooking while Mariuz gathers twigs for a camp fire. Robbie and Paula find coats and old cushions to make beds. Soon, Lucy and Mariuz are Mam and Dad and are taking their children, Robbie and Paula, on a camping trip that lasts for the whole afternoon. Sound familiar to you? Yes, that’s because children love to play with family and friends.

Play is often described as children’s ‘work’. Playing helps your young child to

- **build relationships** – by being with others; sharing and taking turns; solving problems and negotiating like when two children or more want the same toy; being a leader and a follower; finding out how to join in play with others; learning about others’ feelings
- **be creative** – when he/she makes outfits from old clothes; builds an apartment block out of junk material; makes a bowl from homemade play-dough and paints and decorates it with glitter for a sparkly look
- **read, write and learn about numbers** – when he/she ‘reads’ and tells stories; makes menus for the café or information booklets, posters and prescriptions for the veterinary clinic; pays for things in the pretend shop; writes down the scores of the matches for the news report; measures how many blocks are needed to build the road
- **think** – when a plan has to be made so the toy tractor can drive over the slippery mud; when deciding what items can be used to make a den; when figuring out how a sloped roof can be made and attached to the house of blocks
- **use language** – when he/she sings; says rhymes; tells jokes; takes on different roles in pretend play such as the hairdresser, the waiter, the security guard, or the dentist; explains the rules of a game
- **use small and large muscles** – when he/she builds an airport with Lego; cuts with scissors; draws pictures; makes things from play-dough; runs; jumps; plays ball games; climbs; cycles; skips; threads beads onto wool; makes chains from daisy flowers.

Read on for ideas from *Aistear* on how you can help your young child learn through different types of play. You can use many of these ideas outside as well as inside.

Physical play

- Play games outside like *Hide and Seek*, football, frisbee, hula hoops, skittles (fill plastic bottles with sand or small stones).
- Encourage and help your child to use climbing frames, slides and swings.
- Join in as your child runs, hops, jumps over and crawls under or into objects, balances, cycles with or without stabilisers, and throws bean bags.
- Introduce your child to games you liked when you were a child like *Ring-a-ring a Rosy*, *Red Rover*, skipping with a rope, and *Hop-scotch*.
- Dance to different kinds of music; play musical statues or do actions to songs like the *Hokey Pokey*.
- Do puzzles, jigsaws, threading, sewing, or building together with blocks.
- Help your child to make a hidey-hole or a den. For example, use a blanket to hide a space under the stairs; throw a sheet over the branches of a tree or over a table or a few chairs; have a large box for a den. Watch your child turn the den into a spaceship, a cattle shed, a cinema. The possibilities are endless!

Play is important to me,
and it is important for my learning
and development.



Let me
experience different
types of play.

Games with rules

- Rules in games become very important to young children. Often children make up these 'flexible' rules themselves. For example in pretend play *everyone has to knock before coming in, or girls are not allowed drive the digger!* When taking part in pretend play follow the rules your child makes.
- Give your child lots of opportunities to play games with rules, for example *Snakes and Ladders*, card games, *BINGO*, computer games, and word and number games. Join in and have fun playing with your child.

Creative play

- Most children love making things. You can help by providing items such as crayons, paints, chalks, different types of paper, chubby pencils, old rolls of wallpaper, newspapers, magazines, old birthday cards, used postage stamps, paper plates, glitter, glue, scissors, scraps of fabric, cardboard boxes and tubes, and used wrapping paper and ribbons.
- Do projects together, for example make a model of a spaceship using a shoe box or make a bus using a large cardboard box; make cards for special occasions; create a collage from pictures cut out from magazines.
- Make instruments and use them to sing some of your child's favourite songs. For example, with a little imagination, and using cellotape, a shoe-box, a kitchen roll tube and some elastic bands you can make an amazing guitar!
- Paint together. Add glitter to your paintings for a magical touch or add lots of water and blow the paint on your paper to make funny shapes and patterns.
- Collect lollipop sticks and make things from them.

Sometimes
I like to play on my own
or with other children, and
at other times I like you
to play with me.

Language play

- Play language and memory games like *I spy*, *Words beginning with ...* (each person adds a new word beginning with a particular letter to the list), or *I went to the shop and I bought ...* (each person adds an item to the list).
- Find rhyming words like *fat, pat, hat*, or use nonsense words like *ban, chan, gan*.
- Say tongue twisters like *She sells sea shells by the seashore*.
- Say nursery rhymes together and add lots of actions.
- Tell jokes, even the *Knock, knock* ones!
- Have a prop that helps you tell your child's favourite story. For example, in *The Gingerbread Man* make a sock puppet of the fox, or in the story *Little Bear* use a small teddy.
- Read and talk about stories using comments and questions: for example, *Hmmm, I wonder what that is. What would happen if ...?*
- Make up stories together. Listen to your child's stories. Let your imaginations flow!

Pretend play

- Provide items that can help your child pretend to be other people like the bus-driver or postperson, or to be an animal, fairy or superhero. For example give him/her shoes, wallets, bags, jewellery, clothes, scarves, hats, lengths of fabric, cardboard wings, and capes. Take photos of him/her in role.
- Children also love to use everyday items in their play, for example containers, brushes, dust-pans, clocks, gardening tools, boxes, money, shopping bags, old hairdryers, kettles and toasters (with flexes cut off), measuring tapes, weighing scales, plastic bottles, old phones and cameras, old duvets and pillows, and used baby clothes for dressing dolls and teddies. A small stick can be a syringe in the doctor's surgery; a sweeping brush can be a horse; stools can be seats on a train!
- Give your child glue, cellotape, paper, pens, cardboard boxes, feathers, and so on so that he/she can make things like a mask, a telescope, a menu, and food for the sheep for the pretend play.
- Join in the play and take on the role that your child gives you – the witch, the pilot or the baby. Follow your child's lead.

You can help me to learn
all sorts of things
when we play together.

Playing with your young child

Here are some tips which you might find useful as a parent.

1. Give your child **time** to play every day.
2. Provide **things** for your child to play with.
Recycled materials like boxes, household items and old clothes are often more fun than bought toys and equipment, and they cost less.
3. **Join in** the play. Take on a role, make jokes and be **playful**.
4. Make **space** for play. As your child gets older he/she will probably spend more time playing with a particular thing or in a particular role, so having a place where your child can leave items and continue playing with them the next day is important.
5. When chatting, **ask** what your child was playing that day. Show that you **value play** whether it's at home, with the childminder, in pre-school, in playgroup or in primary school.
6. **Tell** your childminder or the staff in the pre-school, playgroup or primary school about the games, activities, nursery rhymes, and books your young child enjoys.

Pre-school and primary school

Play matters and not just while your child is at home. It is also an important way for your child to learn when in pre-school, playgroup and primary school. *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, 2009* (www.ncca.ie/earlylearning) and the *Primary School Curriculum, 1999* (www.curriculumonline.ie) both highlight how important play is in helping young children to learn and develop.

Remember, play helps your young child learn many new skills and ideas, and build new information about how the world works. And very importantly, play is a fun way for your child to do all this. **Enjoy playing together.**

Information for parents

Supporting your child to become bilingual

Connections to *Aistear and Síolta*

Aistear

Themes: Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, Exploring and Thinking

Guidelines for good practice: Learning and developing through interactions (pp.27-51)

Síolta Standards

1: Rights of the Child, C1.1, 1.2, 1.3

5: Interactions, C5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5

Research Digests linked to the above *Standards*

A good foundation in one language is very important for children's development and learning. For babies, toddlers and young children, this is the language (or languages) your child first hears, the language spoken at home by parents and family. Being able to talk with confidence in his/her home language will help your child to learn English. To support your child's language development, **continue to use the language you feel most comfortable with**. The best way to help your child is to talk to him/her as much as possible. The quality of interaction with your child is very important, so take time to talk and listen to your child.

Your child will learn English through interactions, play, daily routines, and songs and books in his/her early childhood setting. This may take some time, and children often go through a **'silent' period** for **several months** in the new setting **before they begin to speak English**. This is normal.

Bilingualism means using two languages, for example, English and French.

Multilingualism means using more than two languages, for example, English, French and Irish.

When your child begins in an early childhood setting, you can support him/her by:

- teaching the adults in the setting **some words in your home language** which your child will recognise, for example, the words for *hello, goodbye, toilet, drink*, and so on.
- helping the adults in the setting to **pronounce your child's name properly**, if necessary.
- sharing simple songs or rhymes** in your home language. You may want to record these so your child can listen to them during the day.
- sharing **children's books** in your home language with the setting.
- taking part in cultural activities** in your child's setting when the children are learning about different countries and cultures in the world, for example, national holidays or New Year celebrations.

You can support your child at home by:

- singing songs and **telling stories** in your home language. Try to find books in your home language and read these to your child regularly.
- listening to your child and giving him/her **time to talk and think**.
- **making comments** and asking questions in your home language during daily activities, for example, *Let's zip up your jacket, it's very cold outside*.
- **playing** with your child and following his/her interests, for example, if your child loves trains build a track and talk about what you do whilst playing, *I'm pushing the train down the track*, or bring your child on a visit to the local train station to explore real carriages and engines.
- **modelling (naming) new words** for your child in your home language, for example, in the bath talk about things floating and sinking, point out the drain or plug, use descriptions such as *wet, soaking, splashing* and so on.
- repeating back what your child says to **fix speech and word errors**, for example, your child says, *I see bu dar*, and you say, *Yes, you see a blue car*. Do not correct your child by saying, *No, it's not a bu dar*.
- **extending** what your child says by adding a new idea or making the sentence longer, for example, your child says, *Washing my hands*, and you say, *You're washing your hands with soap to make them clean*.
- **repeating words** he/she says in English in your home language, to help make the connection between these two words.
- **limiting television** and other electronic devices.

Your positive attitude towards your home language will help your child feel proud to be able to speak more than one language.

Starting School

Guidelines for Parents/Guardians of Children
with Special Educational Needs

NCSE 2016



The word 'parent' in this document should be taken to include guardians of children.

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Introduction

Starting 'big school' is a significant milestone in any child's life...

Starting 'big school' is a significant milestone in any child's life and naturally as a parent, you want to support your child in any way you can. Most parents have some anxieties about how their child will manage school. This can be especially true for parents of children with special educational needs who may have additional concerns.

For example, you may worry about whether your child with special needs will be welcome in your local school or able to go there? Will your child need extra teaching support? Will your child be able to take care of him/herself in school? Will the school be able to meet your child's needs?

These questions and more may arise when your child is starting primary school, even though he/she may already be attending a preschool. Your child will also have his/her own concerns and will need extra help at this time. Similarly schools are keen to ensure that they are ready to meet children's needs once they start school.

This pamphlet is a guide to assist you as you plan for your child to start school.

Important steps in planning for your child to start school

There are a number of steps involved in planning for your child to start school. These steps are summarised below. Further information and advice about each step is provided in the sections that follow.

- Step 1:** Choose a school – as soon as possible
- Step 2:** Find out about the school’s enrolment procedures
- Step 3:** Plan with the school
- Step 4:** Prepare yourself and your child for change

Step 1: Choose a school

The first decision you must make is which school your child will attend. This can be a big decision for all parents. You need to take time to think about your child's needs and to explore your options.

Most parents choose to send their child with special educational needs to the local primary school and research findings are clear that inclusion works for the majority of these children. All mainstream schools have a learning support teacher service to give extra help to children with learning needs. All schools can apply for extra teaching support and/or SNA support for students with disabilities who require such support. School transport is provided for students with special educational needs who are attending the nearest recognised: mainstream school, special class/special school, that is or can be resourced, to meet their special educational needs.

A small number of parents, whose children have more complex needs, may want to consider whether their child would be better attending a **special class** in a mainstream primary school or a **special school** (See section: Placement Options for Children with Special Educational Needs)

Most children with special educational needs attend their local mainstream primary school.

There are people who can guide you in making your decision, for example:

- School principal.
- If your child is deaf/hard of hearing or is blind/visually impaired, he/she may be linked with a Visiting Teacher who will be able to assist you in preparing for your child to start school.
- Health professionals involved with your child (for example, HSE speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, psychologists or physiotherapists) will be able to outline the type of educational setting that may best suit your child at this time.
- Your local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) can assist by giving you information on the educational options that are available in your area, for example, mainstream classes, special classes or special schools. SENOs provide a direct service to the parents of children with special educational needs and to schools within designated geographical areas.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) holds information meetings for parents of young children with special educational needs, in the year before they start school. Parents tell us that they find it useful to attend this meeting as they hear about the various educational supports and settings that are available for their children. Your local SENO or HSE Disability Network Team will be able to provide you with details of when the meetings are held in your area – contact details are included at the end of this pamphlet.

As parents of a child with special educational needs you should expect that in school:

1. Your child is made to feel welcome.
2. Your child's teachers are knowledgeable about special educational needs.
3. Teachers are willing to learn about your child's particular needs.

When choosing a school you may find it helpful to:

1. Gather all the information you can about possible schools in your local area.
2. Make a list of the schools where you think you would like to send your child.
3. Find out as much as you can about each school. You can do this by talking to other parents, looking at websites and speaking to preschool staff.
4. Seek advice and guidance from professionals involved with your child, including your local SENO.
5. Read the NCSE Guide for Parents and Guardians of Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs: Choosing a School. This guide is available on the NCSE website at: <http://ncse.ie/information-booklets-pamphlets-2>.
6. You may wish to arrange to visit schools so that you are better informed when deciding where to send your child. Many schools hold open days that parents can attend or you could make an appointment to visit the school. It is always a good idea to have some questions written down so that you do not forget to ask a particular question during your visit.

Here are some questions that you may find it helpful to think about or ask when visiting a school:

1. Will the school have a place for my child?
2. How will the school support my child?
3. As a parent, how can I help the school to support my child?
4. How will my child be included in school/class activities with other children?
5. My child requires medication during school hours, how will this be managed?
6. What forms of home-school communication will be available?
7. Is there a specific person in the school with whom I can raise any difficulties that may arise?
8. If needed, will special school transport be available for my child?

Is there a specific person in the school with whom I can raise any difficulties that may arise?

Step 2: Find out about the school's enrolment procedures

When you have decided on your chosen school, you need to apply to the school for a place. Schools can have different rules and regulations about how children are enrolled. Many schools set a closing date by which a child must be enrolled. You can find out about this from the school principal or from the school's website.

A very small number of parents can sometimes have difficulty finding a place for their child in a local primary school. This can happen when schools are over-subscribed i.e. the school has more children wanting to enrol than places available in the school. It can also sometimes happen that there may not be a place available in a special class or special school for your child.

If you are unable to find a school place for your child, there are people to help you. All parents can contact the Educational Welfare Service. Contact details for their services are available on the Tusla website at: <http://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/education-and-welfare/>.

As your child has special educational needs, you can also contact your local SENO for assistance. His/her contact details are available on the NCSE website at: <http://ncse.ie/seno-contact-list>.

If you are unable to find a school place for your child, there are people to help you.

Step 3: Plan with the school

Your child with special educational needs is likely to make a more easy and successful start in school when careful planning and preparation is in place. Once your child has a confirmed place in a school, it is useful to start planning for his/her arrival at the school.

Schools often hold a planning meeting before children with more complex special educational needs start school. This is good practice. The planning meeting should include you as the parent, the school principal, if possible the class teacher and as necessary other professionals who have been involved with your child before he/she started school.

At this planning meeting, you can let the school know about your expectations for your child's education and any particular anxieties your child has about starting school. It is also important to give the school any information that might help the school to meet his/her needs. This includes any relevant professional reports (e.g. reports written by psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and so on) as these can help to ensure that the school is aware of your child's strengths, abilities and needs. This information can also help the school to decide if school policies need to be developed or revised around caring for a child with special educational needs or medical needs, e.g. behaviour policies or administration of medications policy.

The school staff may find it helpful to consult with relevant professionals who work or have worked with your child. The relevant professionals may include visiting teachers for children who are blind/visually impaired and those who are deaf/hard of hearing, preschool staff, psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists or physiotherapists and so on.

Planning and preparation help your child to make an easy and successful start in school.

Where a child has a serious medical condition, the school may wish to consult with your doctor. The school will seek your permission to contact these professionals. If necessary, some of these professionals may visit the school to assess the adaptability of its environment. You may wish to discuss who in the new setting will have access to any confidential information about your child.

All of this information will assist the school to develop an individualised support plan for your child. Many different types of plans can be described as support plans for example, a general plan for support, a behavioural plan, an individual learning profile, an individualised educational plan, a personalised learning plan and so on.

As appropriate, a support plan may include information on your child's needs as follows:

- Learning needs
- Social and communication needs
- Care needs, for example, dressing, toileting, mobility and medication needs
- Sensory needs such as over sensitivity to noise, textures, lights
- Physical needs that require environmental adaptations such as adaptations to the school building, adapted seating or other specialised equipment. If necessary, the school may consult occupational therapists and/or physiotherapists about adaptations to the environment.

The plan can make clear how and with whom parents can communicate should any queries or concerns arise. It is also good to agree a joint approach for any difficulties that may arise. The school should make clear how relevant information from professional reports will be shared with teachers.

Schools also use the information and professional reports to apply, on your behalf and with your consent, to the NCSE for additional supports for your child, where these are necessary. Such additional supports can include: resource teaching, transport, assistive technology and access to special needs assistant support.

Schools also submit relevant applications to the Department of Education and Skills for necessary adaptations to school buildings, specialist equipment and so on. The school principal needs copies of professional reports to make such applications.

As a parent, you can help the school to plan by:

- Arranging to have your child's professional reports forwarded to the school, as the school will need these to apply for any additional supports for which your child is eligible. This will mean that the necessary supports can be in place before your child starts school.
- Giving your permission to the preschool to pass on their knowledge and information about your child to the primary school – his/her likes and dislikes, strengths and achievements along with what works best to support him/her to learn.
- Sharing your own knowledge and experience of your child's strengths, abilities and difficulties and what works best in helping your child to learn. This information could be very useful to the staff in the new school to allow them to plan for your child.

Parents and schools should exchange relevant information to assist planning for students with special educational needs.

Step 4: Prepare for Change

It takes time to prepare for the changes ahead. You will need time to prepare your child for the school you have chosen; to prepare yourselves as parents to let your child become more independent; to allow time for any adaptations that have to be made to the school building, or other supports to be in place. It is good to make early contact with your child's school so that planning and supports are in place when your child arrives in school.

Many children have their own worries about starting school. Some children with special educational needs can be particularly anxious about making changes. It is good to try and find out what, if any, your child's particular concerns are. It may be that he/she is worried about making friends; managing in the play-ground; managing the toilet; keeping up in big school. Some children are worried that their teacher may be cross if they are not able to understand or follow instructions.

Children need time to be children and to play and enjoy the holidays before they start school!

There are many ways that you, as a parent, can help your child to make a successful transition into school. However it is important to get the balance right between preparing your child for school and not overwhelming him/her by focussing too much attention on starting school. Children need time to be children and to play and enjoy the holidays before they start school! Here are some ideas that might help you to prepare your child. As a parent, you will know which of these might suit your child best.

You can support your child by talking about starting school, listening to his/her worries and answering any questions he/she may have. You can explain about any supports he/she may have in school and any new arrangements around uniform, lunch or after school activities.

Arrange to meet up with some other children who will be starting school on the same day. Make sure that he/she is familiar with the school by showing him/her the school you have chosen. You can do this simply by walking or driving past the school and letting your child know that it will be their 'big' school.

Schools usually have a day when all new children go to visit the school. In some cases, schools arrange for children with special educational needs to have an extra visit so that they can become even more familiar with the school surroundings. This is an opportunity to ask if you can take photographs of the school, classroom, entrances, yard and teachers and so on. You could then make a little booklet or photo file about the school and use this to talk with your child over the summer.

Encourage him or her to become as independent as possible before he/she starts school. If the school has a uniform, you could buy this in advance so that your child becomes familiar with how it looks, the textures of the material and so on. Help him/her to practice listening to and following instructions at home. If possible, make sure that he/she is toilet trained and is able to put on, take off and hang up their own coat and open his/her lunch-box. You can also think about what he/she will be able and willing to eat independently for lunch in school.

Your child will be less anxious if he/she knows how to behave when they get to school. You can explain to him/her about lining up in the school yard and play games that involve taking turns. You can practice activities such as jigsaws, drawing and colouring at a table. This will help him/her to be able to sit at a desk and focus on an activity at school.

The following two websites have very useful suggestions for parents to help their young children to learn:

- The parents' section of Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum at: www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Parents/Early_Childhood/Early_Childhood.html.
- NALA's Help My Kid Learn at: www.helpmykidlearn.ie. This useful website is for parents of 0-12 year olds. Information is divided across five different age groups: 0-2 years, 3-4, 5-7, 8-9 and 10-12 years.

You can also help your child by preparing yourself to let him/her go. Starting school is a big day for both children and their parents! It will help your child if you manage your own anxieties and they see that you are confident that he/she will manage in school. This will help your child to settle down and feel comfortable in the new setting. In turn this will promote a sense of belonging and self-worth. This can take time and your child will require your support and patience.

NCSE publications to assist parents

The NCSE has published a general **Information Booklet for Parents of Children with Special Educational Needs**, a booklet on **Choosing a School** and **nine information leaflets on particular areas of special educational needs**, to explain how the education system supports students with special educational needs.

Starting school
can be a big day
for some children.

The information leaflets cover: general learning disabilities; specific learning disabilities; emotional and/or behavioural difficulties or disorders; physical disabilities; blind/visual impairment; specific speech and language disorder; deaf and hard of hearing; and autism spectrum disorder. There is also a leaflet to explain the SNA scheme.

The information booklets and leaflets are available from your local SENO or on the NCSE website at www.ncse.ie.

Placement Options for Children with Special Educational Needs

Most children with special educational needs attend their local primary school in a **mainstream class** with other children of different ability levels and with additional support, as necessary.

Some children with more complex special educational needs attend a **special class** in their local mainstream school. These classes have lower pupil teacher ratios, for example, a class for children with a moderate general learning disability will have one teacher for every eight students. Students enrolled in these classes may be included in the regular mainstream class for a part of the day or the week, in line with their strengths and abilities.

Special schools are generally for children with very complex special needs who wouldn't manage in a mainstream school even for part of the week. Special schools have very small class groups.

If your child is in an ASD early intervention class, it doesn't automatically follow that your child needs to go into a special class in primary school. This matter should be discussed with relevant people such as teachers, HSE professionals, school principal, SENOs.

Useful Contacts

NCSE SENOs: Through your school or at:	www.ncse.ie
Health Centre:	www.hse.ie
Department of Education and Skills:	www.education.ie
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Aistear Curriculum:	www.ncca.ie/
National Adult Literacy Association (NALA) Help My Kid Learn:	www.helpmykidlearn.ie
National Parents Council (Primary):	www.npc.ie
Special Needs Parents Association:	www.specialneedsparents.ie
Tusla:	www.tusla.ie
Visiting Teacher Service: (for children who are blind/visually impaired or deaf/hard of hearing)	http://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/Visiting-Teacher-Service

