

# YOUR CHILD in the Primary School

TIPS FOR PARENTS

**into** 

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# Foreword

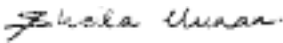
Dear Parent,

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

We hope that this book will give you an understanding of the modern primary school and how it works.

Primary teachers believe that sharing with you the detail of the day-to-day workings of the primary school adds value to the essential and crucially important partnership between parents and teachers in the education of our young people. Throughout the country our teachers work closely with parents. This publication recognises the importance of keeping parents fully involved and informed about the primary school. It is a practical manifestation of partnership between school and home.

We hope that you will find the booklet useful. This newly updated edition of *Your Child in the Primary School* is based on our experience, over many decades, of working closely with children and parents.



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# From Home to School

From birth, children learn naturally and informally from their parents and from their environment. Parents are often anxious to see some results of formal learning soon after the child starts school. Children will start to read and write at their own pace. Just as they walk and talk at different ages – they also read and write when they are ready to do so themselves. It is not necessary for children to be able to write or recognise letters before coming to school. It is far more important for parents to prepare children so that they will look forward to starting school.

## Help prepare your child for learning

**POSITIVE ATTITUDE** It is important to create a positive attitude towards learning. If children have this positive attitude then they will try to become involved in the learning process.

**CURIOSITY** The natural inquisitiveness of children should be encouraged. It is central to the learning process. Children will be encouraged to ask more questions when they get positive and encouraging responses.

**SELF CONFIDENCE** If children are confident about their abilities and capabilities then they will be more willing to take on new challenges.

**LISTENING** Children should be encouraged to develop good listening skills. Instruction and directions are given continually at school so children need to be good listeners if they are to participate fully in school life.

**INTERACTING WITH OTHERS** Children need to learn how to be sociable, how to share and take turns. They also need to learn respect for others and to be aware of the feelings of others.

**INDEPENDENCE** In order to take part fully in school life children need to have developed a good level of independence.

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

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

**Act out roles** – pretending they are someone else. Children love to pretend that they are nurses, doctors, mothers, fathers or shopkeepers and such opportunities enable them to use language.

**Play with objects** – sand, water, jigsaws, boxes and bricks and other toys.

**Engage in physical play** – such as ball games, skipping, chasing games.

**Social play** is essential for good development. Not only do children learn many social and emotional skills through play with their peers, they also acquire a variety of linguistic skills.

Choose **toys** carefully. Children should have blocks to build, simple jig-saws or basic construction toys. Encourage them to build and make use of odds and ends such as paper-plates, used packets, cartons or egg boxes.

**LANGUAGE** The role of language in education is so important and cannot be overemphasised. Language is essential for developing reading and writing skills and is also a vital part of the social and emotional development of children. In developing your child's language skills encourage your child to:

- Listen
- Explain
- Tell
- Talk
- Question
- Retell

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

Time given to language development will be rewarded in the future educational development of your child.

Activities which will assist you to develop language include:

- encouraging your child to name objects in a room or place that are of a particular size, shape or texture;
- asking your child to describe a particular incident which has taken place such as a visit to the doctor/dentist or a visit to a farm/zoo;
- assisting your child to categorise objects;  
*name all the food on the table;*  
*name all the vegetables in the fridge;*  
*name all items in the fridge that are not vegetables;*
- assisting your child to use language to reason in various situations;

*why do you wear a coat in cold weather?*

*why do you need to put on suncream in warm weather?*

- helping your child to use language to describe past, present and future events;

*what will you do when you go to your granny and grandads?*

- encouraging your child to express his/her feelings;

*how did you feel when your dog died?*

*how would you feel if Santa Claus did not bring you any toys at Christmas?*

- Use of language in reacting to various situations;

*what would you do if your granny gave you lots of money?*

Opportunities can also be given to help children to use language to solve problems, to give directions, to indicate the position of objects, to tell you about things that have happened to them during the day.

- Rhymes and Riddles are a good way of encouraging language development.
- Reading to your child will also assist language development.

Irish, as both language and subject, is most often new to children beginning





school. From time to time, use words or short sentences in Irish to help introduce children to the Irish language. This will be of assistance in easing their handling of a second language. Familiarity with expressions such as “más é do thoil é”, “go raibh maith agat”, and “maith an cailín/buachaill” will be invaluable to them in coping with the new demands of school.

Help your child to identify *colours*. This could also lend itself quite easily to the use of Irish as it may involve single word terms only, such as “dearg” “bui” or “bán”.

Children with English as an additional language need much practise and repetition. Encourage them to view children’s programmes on TV, learn nursery rhymes, use English when playing with friends and label items around the house in English (e.g. fridge, cup, plate).

**READING** Read to your child regularly. This encourages a love of books and creates an interest in *reading*. Ensure that reading is an enjoyable experience. Don’t prolong the reading when the child has lost interest – short enjoyable experiences are best. Again, reading to children in Irish or English may serve a positive end in making their more formal encounter with a second language that bit easier for them. (Remember to keep it simple!)

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

Encourage them to repeat what happened in the story and to talk about their favourite bit. Play “what do you think would have happened if...!” games, or “what would you have done if you were ... ?”

Enjoy *nursery rhymes* together.

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

**WRITING** Young children need to develop the right muscles in their hands before they can begin to write properly. You can help this development by encouraging them to do things that involve using their hands such as drawing, cutting paper or using play dough. You should provide

- large sheets of paper and chubby crayons for scribbling, drawing, colouring in, tracing or copying;
- scissors for cutting paper (be sure to use scissors that are safe for children to use);
- activities which involve pouring, stirring, mixing or rolling (play dough);

- dolls or teddys with clothes that can be buttoned, laced, zipped and tied;
- encourage them to dress themselves.

Allow your child to use the hand he/she chooses naturally. Being left handed will not cause any problems in school!

**BASIC MATHS** You can help your child become familiar with the ideas they will need to understand when they are introduced to *basic maths* in school. Allow your child to help you sorting cutlery, setting the table, counting out the correct number of spoons or forks. Allow your child to help you divide sweets among friends. Help your child to sort and match objects on the basis of:

*size* – put all the small objects in the box;

*shape* – put all the round objects on the table;

*colour* – put all the red items on the chair;

*texture* – put all the smooth items in the box;

*function* – put all the items which roll together;

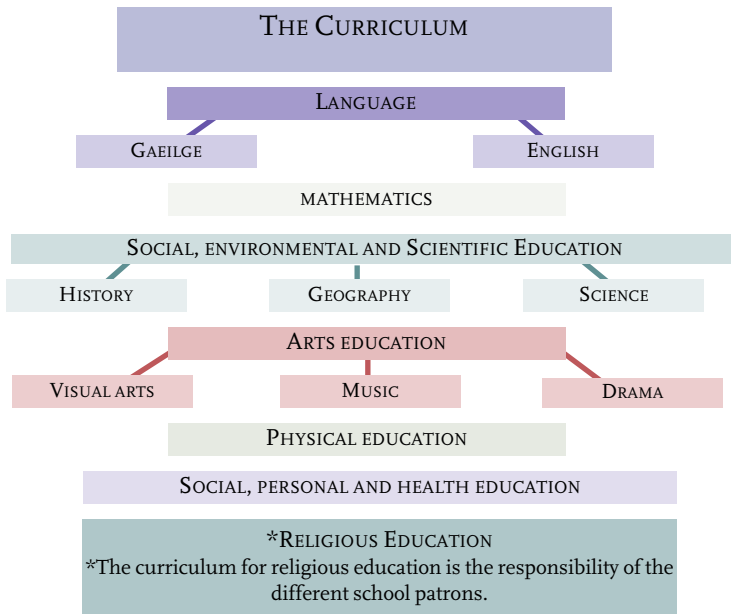
*material* – put all the wooden items together.

Again, the incidental use of the Irish number terms is easy here as, just like with colours, it entails the use of single words, “aon”, “dó”, “trí”.

**Encourage your child to collect things** from the park or beach on walks, like shells, cones, pebbles, nuts and feathers. They can have fun later sorting and classifying the different objects. Try the same thing with collections of buttons, badges or lids, and other odds and ends from around the house. The use of Irish to identify single-word items, such as clothing (“geansaí”, “sciorta”, “bríste”) or food (“úll”, briosca”, “ceapaire”) and of personal belongings (“mála” “leabhar” “lón”) can also help subsequent understanding.

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

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



The curriculum is laid out in seven curriculum areas – some areas consist of just one subject, others contain more than one subject. There are twelve subjects in all.

More information on the Primary School Curriculum is available from: *Your Child’s Learning: Guidelines for Parents*, which can be purchased from Government Publications Sale Office, Molesworth Street, Dublin 1, or downloaded from the website of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie). The NCCA has also produced a DVD and booklet entitled *The What, Why and How of children’s learning in primary school*. See [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie) for details.

**DEVELOPMENT OF SELF CONFIDENCE AND SELF ESTEEM** If children are confident about their abilities and capabilities then they will be more willing to take on new challenges. Parents can enhance their children’s self esteem by becoming aware of and noticing their abilities, talents, interests and skills and then drawing attention to them. Parents should praise their children frequently and give them opportunities to demonstrate their abilities.

Praise and encouragement shape behaviour and promote learning. When children are praised they learn that they are special, can take pride

in their achievements and become aware of their talents and abilities. If parents view children in a positive manner then they will view themselves in a positive light also. When children are aware that parents approve of their actions or activities then their level of self esteem will be enhanced.

**THE USE OF LANGUAGE IN PROMOTING SELF ESTEEM** An extremely important factor in the development of children's self esteem is the language used by parents. The numerous interactions which parents have each day with their children provide children with feedback in relation to who they are. It pays dividends, therefore, if children are given feedback in the language of self esteem. Such feedback contains three elements.

1. A description of the behaviour.
2. Parents' reaction to the behaviour.
3. Acknowledgement of feeling.

It is important to point out the difference between the child's worth and his/her behaviour. In other words, a child is not a good child because s/he tidies the kitchen or a bad child because s/he spills milk on the carpet. Children are good because they are special to the parents who love and care about them. By describing behaviour, children get an accurate picture of how their actions affect others, rather than confusing their behaviour with their basic worth as individuals.

The following example outlines how the language of self esteem can be used to correct children. "I notice books and toys all over the kitchen floor" (description of behaviour). "When the kitchen is tidy we will have dinner" (reason for behavioural change). "I know you are tired and hungry at the moment" (acknowledgement of feeling). "I want the toys put away and the books placed neatly on the shelves" (statement of expectation).

These steps involve direct clear communication and avoid language which could undermine a child's self esteem.

The use of the language of self esteem in correcting children is worthwhile as children are more likely to respond favourably when they are given reasons for the correction.

If children participate in the daily routine at home they will *feel confident* about dealing with the school situation. If you are constantly saying, "Don't touch" you are saying, "Don't learn". If your children feel you have confidence in them they will feel they can achieve.

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# Preparation for School

Starting school is a milestone in the life of a child and often a time of stress and anxiety for parents. Parents can do much to reduce such anxiety – both for themselves and their child. This preparation should begin some months before the child starts and should be carried out gradually.

It is an enormous change for a child to have to share a room with up to 30 other children and one adult. There is much that parents can do, however, to prepare children to cope with separation and socialisation and to help them get over their initial fears. The following may help:

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

# Making life manageable for the Junior Infant

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

- If your child cannot tie *laces* and needs to change *shoes* – perhaps for PE – shoes with a velcro fastener will enable him/her to change quickly and independently.
- Ask yourself whether or not your child can manage his/her *clothes* by him/herself. Zips may be easier than buttons for example. *Elasticated* trousers can be easier than zips or buttons.
- If your child needs to bring a *lunch* – choose a lunch box and flask that s/he can open easily. Carton drinks are easier and safer than bottles. Again make sure that the school bag can hold these.
- Give some thought to lunches too. If your child wants to bring oranges to school, for example, only peeled oranges should be included. This will make your child less dependent on the teacher. Set yogurts may help avoid unnecessary spills.

All of the above, if given a little thought, can help your child feel capable of dealing with classroom routine. It also helps the teacher enormously. It is impossible for a teacher to tie and untie 30 pairs of runners!

## Pupils with Special Educational Needs

Since September 2005, a new system was put in place by the Department of Education and Science to cater for pupils with special educational needs. All schools have received a teaching allocation, based on enrolment, to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and mild general learning disabilities.

As well as this, schools can also get extra teaching resources for individual pupils with more serious learning disabilities. The National Council for Special Education has employed a number of Special

Educational Needs Organisers throughout the country to help process individual applications for either teaching or Special Needs Assistant support for children with more serious learning disabilities. As well as this, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) has a network of educational psychologists for the assessment of pupils. NEPS is still being developed and not all schools have access to the service yet. These schools may be able to arrange assessments with a private psychologist.

Parents of pupils with identified special education needs should discuss the support available from the school with the school principal.

## The First Day

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

On the big day, if you are feeling upset, don't show it. Leave your child with the teacher, and tell him/her you will be back at the appropriate time to collect him/her. If your child is upset, trust the teacher. The teacher is very experienced and knows how to *comfort* an anxious child. Sometimes a small toy from home can be a comfort.





When the child arrives in school s/he will meet many children. There may be the *familiar faces* of friends from the neighbourhood as well as former classmates from pre-school. There will also be new faces.

Due to the increased *integration of children with special needs* into mainstream schools, there may be children in the class with special needs. Likewise, there are likely to be *children from other cultures* in their new class. Ireland is becoming increasingly multi-cultural and your child is likely to meet children from other cultures during his/her primary school life. Your child will take some time to familiarise him/herself with all these new faces but, after a time, you will find that your child will soon make new friends.

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

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

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

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

## The School Day

Parents should be aware of the normal times of opening and closing the school and what happens when there are changes to *the timetable*.

Parents must accept responsibility for their children when it is found necessary to allow them home during school hours.

All parents will be aware that even the most closely supervised children will have accidents occasionally. This is true of both home and school. If your child has an accident at school the teachers will respond in a caring and professional manner.

Teachers often feel that parents have been misled on the issue of compensation for accidental injuries. There is no automatic entitlement to compensation for accidents in the school anymore than there is for accidents in the home or elsewhere.

## The School Year

The primary school year has 3 terms. The first term is from the beginning of September to Christmas, the second is from early January to late-March/April (Easter) and the third is from Easter to the end of June each year. In order to avoid problems for families which can be caused by variation in closure arrangements where children are attending different schools, breaks at Christmas, Easter and mid-term in the first and second terms have been standardised.

The following standard closures will apply in primary schools for the school year 2011/2012



## School Year 2011/12

**OCTOBER 2011 MID-TERM BREAK** All schools will close from 31 October to 4 October 2011 inclusive.

**CHRISTMAS 2011** Schools will close on 22 December 2011 which will be the final day of the school term. Schools will re-open on 9 January 2012.

**FEBRUARY 2012 MID-TERM BREAK** Primary schools will close from 16 to 17 February 2012 inclusive. (Primary schools may use 3 discretionary days to extend this break to an alternative option of a 5 day break).

**EASTER 2012** All schools will close on 30 March 2012 which will be the final day of the school term. All schools will re-open on 16 April 2012.

In addition, a small number of discretionary days is available to schools to close as suits local circumstances. Each school usually produces a list of days when the school will close for holidays or for other reasons. Parents are given a copy of this list. If the school has to close unexpectedly or finish the school day early your child will be given a note, in advance, from the school. Make sure you look in your child's school bag every day for such notes.

# School Attendance

Under the Education Welfare Act (2000) you must make sure that your child attends school regularly. When your child is absent from school for any reason you must notify the school of the reasons for the absence.

The National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) is responsible for promoting and monitoring school attendance. The school must inform the NEWB when a pupil is absent for more than 20 days in a school year or when a pupil is not attending regularly.

In cases of serious non-attendance an Education Welfare Officer will make all reasonable efforts to ensure regular school attendance.

The NEWB has produced a leaflet for parents entitled *Don't let your child miss out (on a good start in life!)*. It is available to download from [www.newb.ie](http://www.newb.ie)

# Health and Hygiene

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

You should check *your child's hair* regularly for head lice. Watch out for worms. Inform the teacher or principal immediately if these are seen on your child.

*Children who are sick* should not be sent to school. You must consider the other children in the class.

Health Service Executive (HSE) Areas in Ireland provide a school screening programme and a school immunisation programme for children attending public primary schools. Private primary schools may request the service and the HSE Area may extend the service to these schools.

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

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

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

Details of the School Screening Programme and School Immunisation programme are available at [www.doh.ie](http://www.doh.ie), at [www.citizensinformation.ie](http://www.citizensinformation.ie) and at [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie).

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

## Administration of Medication

If your child has *a particular health problem* such as an allergy, asthma, epilepsy or diabetes you should advise the school. The school should be

made aware of the name and address of your family doctor. If your child needs medication on a regular basis, proper and clearly understood arrangements for administration of medicines must be made. While teachers in schools act 'in loco parentis', there is no obligation on them to either administer medicines regularly or to supervise children taking them. It should not create a problem however, if teachers are willing, have the permission of the board of management, have the written approval of parents and have been trained. Teachers generally do their best to make provision for children who are ill, but ultimately will not do so if this in any way jeopardised the safety and welfare of any child in their care.

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

## Head Lice

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

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

You should check your child's hair regularly in this way for head lice. If your child has head lice you should inform the teacher or principal and treat the hair immediately. Everybody, including you, other members of the family and schoolfriends, should be checked for lice. The reality is that anybody could catch head lice. Head lice are not choosy about what type of hair they go for. In fact, they tend to prefer clean rather than dirty hair! Head lice are very easy to treat. Lotion or shampoo treatments can be bought from pharmacies without a prescription.

## Healthy Eating

Children form their eating habits for life from an early age. They will, of course, always have their own preferences but you can have a lasting influence by starting them on the right road.

A good *diet* and plenty of *sleep, fresh air and exercise* are essential to the growing child. Allow plenty of time in the morning for your child to eat a healthy breakfast. Choose lunches carefully. Sandwiches and fruit are healthier than sweets and biscuits. Some schools have a 'no sweets' policy. If this is the case you should comply with this and explain it simply



HEALTH PROMOTION UNIT, DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

to your child. Health education is part of the school curriculum. In school, children will be encouraged to make good choices in relation to food. Your choice for them should not conflict with this.

Eating habits, started in childhood, will influence your child's chances of a healthy life. A good variety of nourishing foods is important from the start to ensure a healthy growing child. Children's lunches sometimes tend to be low in fibre and high in fat and sugar. To change your child's eating habits for the better, it is best to do so gradually. Start by substituting sweets or biscuits with pieces of fresh fruit one day a week in order to make your child's lunch more healthy and better for teeth. Then move on to two, three, and four days a week before eventually doing so for the full school week.

The food pyramid will help you choose a healthy and varied diet for your child.

## **Breakfast**

For school children, breakfast is perhaps the most important meal of the day. Not only does breakfast break the child's long overnight fast and help concentration, it also lays down the foundation for healthy eating for the rest of the day. Try a wholegrain or bran-type cereal with chopped fresh fruit on top with milk, an orange or unsweetened fruit juice and some wholemeal bread, toasted or plain.

## **Lunch**

Lunch should provide one-third of your child's food requirements for the day. The simplest and most effective way to plan a healthy lunch is to include in your child's lunchbox one food from each of the four main shelves in the Food Pyramid – "Bread, Cereals, Potatoes"; "Fruit and Vegetables"; "Milk, Cheese, Yogurt"; and "Meat, Fish and Alternatives".

## **Tips To Get Children To Eat More Fruit and Vegetables**

Children often prefer fruit and fruit juice to vegetables. As long as they eat a variety of fruit each day, they will get all of the vitamins and minerals they need.

Bring your children shopping and, when you can, let them choose their own fruit and vegetables. That way they feel in control of what they eat and will get a sense of being 'grown up'.

Children love easy to eat fruit like mandarins, small apples and bananas. Keep your fruit basket well topped up!

Children often prefer raw vegetables. So offer carrot or cucumber sticks, tomatoes or any favourite raw vegetable as snacks! These can also be wrapped and put into lunch boxes. To encourage children to eat vegetables, hide them! Grate vegetables into stews, soups and casseroles. Offer children sweet vegetables like sweetcorn and carrots in preference to strong tasting vegetables like cabbage or parsnip.

Add chopped fruit to breakfast cereals.

For a simple dessert at any time of the day, chop an apple, banana or orange together for a tasty fruit salad that children will love. Preparing it themselves adds to their enjoyment.

## School Lunch Ideas

- Wholemeal bread with cheese slice and tomato + 1 banana + sugar free squash.
- Pitta bread with cooked ham, low-fat mayonnaise, lettuce and cucumber + orange segments + milk.
- Burger bun with chicken, relish, lettuce and grated carrot + dried fruit + yoghurt + water to drink.
- Toasted wholemeal bread with cooked beef, tomato and cucumber + small apple + milk.
- Cooked pasta with tuna, lettuce, tomato and carrot + 2 mandarins + yoghurt + unsweetened pure fruit juice.
- Salad box with cooked rice, lettuce, tomato, cheese cubes, celery sticks, carrot sticks + dried fruit + water.
- White roll with mashed hard boiled egg, lettuce and cucumber + handful of grapes + sugar free squash or milk.
- Wholemeal bap with lean grilled bacon, tomato and sweetcorn + peach + milk.
- Crackers with cheese slices, sliced peppers, grated carrot + apple and orange segments + water.

Lunch suggestions from *Food & Nutrition Guidelines for Primary Schools* available from [www.healthinfo.ie](http://www.healthinfo.ie)

Check with your school if yoghurts are allowed.



## Websites

Some useful websites for information regarding healthy eating for children, recipes and food safety information are:

|  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <a href="http://www.healthinfo.ie">www.healthinfo.ie</a>           | Health Promotion Unit                 |
| <a href="http://www.bordbia.ie">www.bordbia.ie</a>                 | Bord Bia                              |
| <a href="http://www.bim.ie">www.bim.ie</a>                         | Bord Iascaigh Mhara                   |
| <a href="http://www.irishheart.ie">www.irishheart.ie</a>           | Irish Heart Foundation                |
| <a href="http://www.ndc.ie">www.ndc.ie</a>                         | National Dairy Council                |
| <a href="http://www.safefoodonline.com">www.safefoodonline.com</a> | Safefood, Food Safety Promotion Board |
| <a href="http://www.fooddudes.ie">www.fooddudes.ie</a>             | Healthy Eating Programme              |
| <a href="http://www.coeliac.ie">www.coeliac.ie</a>                 | Coeliac Society of Ireland            |
| <a href="http://www.diabetesireland.ie">www.diabetesireland.ie</a> | Diabetes Association                  |

## Bullying

Bullying is a problem which children may encounter and one which is of great concern to parents and teachers. It is a problem which requires co-operation between schools and parents in seeking solutions. It can be physical, verbal or emotional and may be carried out by groups or by an individual.

Much of the advice in previous chapters has emphasised the importance of building *independence and confidence* in the child. The importance of talking to and listening to children has also been stressed. These are important factors in helping the child to deal with early approaches from a bully.

Children need to have the confidence to say 'No' in a good assertive tone of voice if they are bullied for lunch or possessions. Children who are confident of their abilities and of their appearance are also more likely to shrug off a taunt or a jibe. They also need to know that they have the right to tell an adult about a problem. Bullies will select children whom they feel can be kept quiet.

Building self esteem and a quiet sense of confidence is equally important for the child who is a bully, as it is for the potential victims.

Why do some children become bullies? This can happen for many reasons and may include the following:

- They may be bullied themselves by parents or brothers or sisters at home.

- They may feel inadequate and lack confidence in themselves.
- They may feel under pressure to succeed at all costs.
- They may find it difficult to socialise with their peers and so pick on younger, more vulnerable children.
- They may be very spoilt and go totally unchallenged at home.
- Some children become involved in bullying by acting as bystanders or supporters of a bully. If this is the case, it must be pointed out that they are equally guilty of bullying.

*If your child is a bully* it is important to acknowledge that fact and help him/her to overcome this. One of the most difficult problems faced by schools in tackling bullying is getting the child (and parents) to acknowledge the fact that she/he is involved in such behaviour.

## What to do

1. Try to find out if this is a temporary response to something else in the child's life such as a new baby, a bereavement or stress at home.
2. Talk to your child and try to get your child to understand how the victim feels. Help your child to socialise by inviting other children to play or to go on outings. Don't respond by being a bully yourself. Hitting and verbal attack will make the situation worse. You will need to deal with this problem over a period of time.
3. Talk to the child's teacher. You will find teachers willing to help. It is important that you and the teacher take the same approach to the problem.
4. Bullies often suffer from a lack of confidence. Don't compare your child's achievement with others. Praise helpful, kind behaviour at every opportunity.
5. Children should be taught to accept differences in others. If your child always seems overly critical of others help by making positive remarks about other children.
6. You may need help if your child has a serious behavioural problem. The school or your doctor can refer him/her to the Child Guidance Clinic if necessary.

## If your child tells you s/he is being bullied

1. Stay calm and don't overreact no matter what you are feeling. Your reaction may convey a sense of anger or disappointment to the child and could be counter-productive. Children who are bullied often feel a sense of failure and guilt. Your response should explain that they are not at fault and that this is a problem which can be overcome.
2. Teaching the child that s/he has the right to say 'No' and to carry him/herself in a confident way will deal with many situations. Establish the right to tell and talk about the problem.
3. Talk to the teacher. Bullying is a hidden activity and with classes of up to 30 it can be difficult for teachers to detect. Teachers need the support of parents in tackling this problem.
4. If the bullying is physical, don't tell your child to hit back. Schools cannot encourage children to engage in violent behaviour and conflicting advice will only confuse the child. Also, telling a vulnerable child to hit back is asking the impossible of them and will only add to their sense of failure when they find they cannot do so.
5. Children can be vulnerable and need help to socialise. You can facilitate this by inviting children to play and by enlisting the help of other parents.
6. It is important to tell children that some situations are impossible and that safety must come first. Advise your child that sometimes, if threatened, it would be better to give money or possessions, get away and tell. It is important in a situation like this to praise a child for using commonsense.
7. Some children attract bullies because of poor personal hygiene or habits. If this is the case it can be easily overcome with help from you.

## Possible signs that a child is a victim of bullying

- May begin to do poorly at school.
- May have unexplained bruises or scratches and may be evasive when questioned about them.
- May begin to bully other children in the family.
- May be unwilling to go to school or walk to and from school.
- May come home regularly with books or clothes torn or missing.

# Interculturalism

Teachers recognise that schools play a very important role in forming positive attitudes in children to people of different cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds or skin colour. In particular, teachers are aware of the need to develop and implement anti-racist policies and practices and to promote interculturalism in schools. For adults and children coming to a new culture there is a degree of culture shock. Children may be striving to acquire understanding and fluency in English. Children from other countries will be encouraged by teachers to maintain a strong connection to their own culture and their own language while at the same time learning about Irish culture and language.

Teachers try to include and involve parents of ethnic minorities in their children's education. Child-rearing practices and expectations about children differ throughout the world. Open discussion between teacher and parents help to prevent misunderstandings and are of benefit to all concerned. Parents are actively encouraged to participate in school life and contribute to class activities. Through story telling, song, dance, cookery demonstrations or by discussing the geography and history of their country they can contribute to children learning, in a most practical way, about the riches and diversity of other cultures. Parents may also be encouraged to engage in activities such as paired reading which will promote curricular development as well as improving inter-cultural relations. Involvement in the parents' association, sports training or school tours are other means by which parents can participate in school activities. For non-English speaking parents the school might be able to help them to find English language classes.

Parents might also consider involving their children in out of school activities: football, basketball, community games or swimming.

Every child has the right to feel safe from mocking, threats, verbal and physical abuse. If racist incidents occur in schools they will be dealt with in the same way as any other form of unacceptable behaviour. The children who have behaved unacceptably will be counselled and the children at the receiving end of such behaviour will be given support.

If you are a parent with English as an additional language, information regarding the Irish school system is provided in a number of languages by the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA). Visit the RIA website at [www.ria.gov.ie](http://www.ria.gov.ie). Extracts are published on page 37 of this booklet.



The Department of Education also publishes information in several languages on [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

## Homework

Policy in relation to homework will vary from school to school. There are many approaches to homework and what applies in one school may not apply in another. Homework policy is part of the overall plan for the school and the variety of schools means that all schools will not operate

the same policy. If your child's school has a policy of giving homework the following routine should be established early.

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

Much debate has taken place in recent years on the *effects of television/ play stations etc* on young children. Parents are often concerned about how much viewing time should be allowed. The reality is that most children watch TV or play computer games and, in moderation, this is not a bad thing. Children can learn a great deal and language can be enhanced through television. Don't allow them to watch unsuitable material. Children in senior classes should be aware of what is going on in the world so encourage them to watch and talk about news items. This will add to their general knowledge and command of language. Do not allow children to watch television while doing homework.

## Home–School Communication

For schools to do what is best for your child it is very important to have good home-school communication. Parents are the primary educators of their children and their co-operation and support are essential to the school. This fact was given formal recognition some years ago when the Department of Education and Science introduced the Home–School Liaison scheme to some schools. In these schools Home–School Co-Ordinators were appointed from among the teaching staff to encourage

parents to participate more fully in their children's education and to become more involved in the life of the school. This scheme is still restricted to a small number of schools, however, and most schools rely on other means to communicate with parents.

Each school has its own way of communicating with parents. A one-teacher rural school will do things differently from a large urban school. Some schools, unfortunately, are still housed in overcrowded and sub standard buildings while others have excellent modern buildings and facilities. Some schools serve areas of socio-economic disadvantage, while others operate in wealthy areas. Each school, therefore, will use a form of communication which best suits its needs and those of parents.

For general information schools usually issue *notices or newsletters* to parents through the children. It is important that you check your child's schoolbag regularly for notes. If left unchecked younger children may produce these weeks after they are relevant!

Schools hold *parent-teacher meetings* at some stage during the school year. It is important that you attend these to keep in touch with your child's progress. It is also important that your child sees you are interested in his/her progress in school.

Each school must prepare a *code of behaviour*. The principal of the school will provide the parents of each child with a copy of this code and will enlist parents' co-operation in ensuring this code is followed.

If your child is experiencing *a particular problem* it is essential that you communicate this to the teacher. Family stress caused by an illness, a new baby, a bereavement or a separation may result in the child becoming disruptive or withdrawn in school. It is unfair to expect the teacher to deal with a child who is upset if the teacher does not know there is a problem. Letting teachers know will allow them to help your child to cope and to make allowance for that distress.

If you feel your child has a problem you should arrange to see the teacher. It is impossible for teachers to give parents their full attention if they arrive unexpectedly at the classroom door. *Making an appointment* allows the teacher to make arrangements for the supervision of the class. This also allows the teacher to give you his/her full attention.

# Boards of Management

## CONSTITUTION OF BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT

The Constitution of Boards of Management is as outlined below.

For schools with more than one teacher:

- (i) Two direct nominees of the Patron.
- (ii) Two parents of children enrolled in the school (one being a mother, the other a father), elected by the general body of parents of children enrolled in the school.
- (iii) The principal teacher (or acting principal teacher) of the school.
- (iv) One other teacher on the staff of the school, elected by vote of the teaching staff.
- (v) Two extra members proposed by the nominees, (i) – (iv) above.

For schools with one teacher:

- (i) One direct nominee of the Patron.
- (ii) The principal of the school.
- (iii) One parent elected from parents of pupils enrolled in the school.
- (iv) One extra member proposed by the nominees, (i) – (iii) above.

**FUNCTIONS OF THE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT** Boards of management are responsible for the direct governance of schools. The duties of the board of management include the following:

- the appointment of teachers and ancillary staff;
- approving school closures;
- approving teacher absences for a variety of reasons;
- the appointment of teachers to deputy-principalship and other posts of responsibility;
- ensuring compliance with relevant legislation; and
- ensuring that schools are adequately insured and maintained.

Specific duties of the Chairperson of the Board of Management include:

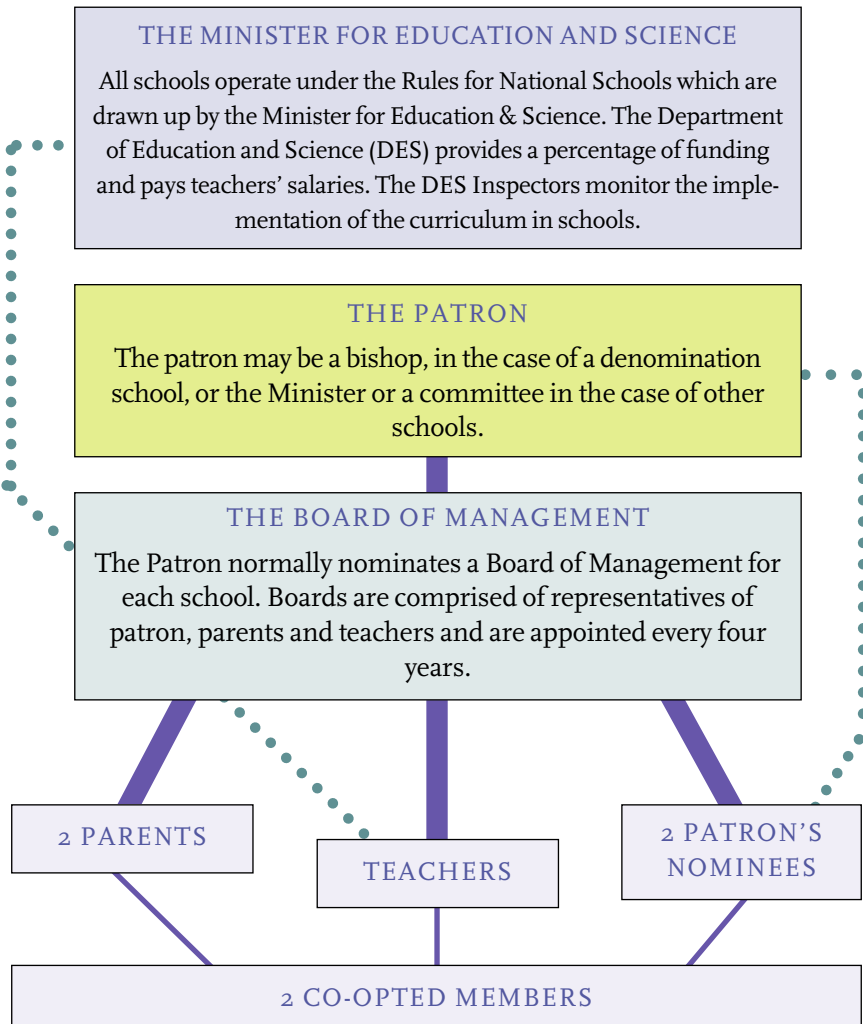
- acting as a correspondent with the Department of Education and Science and all outside bodies;
- presiding at board of management meetings;
- signing the monthly returns and annual statistical returns; and
- serving on the selection board for the appointment of teachers.



More information on boards of management is available in Boards of Management of National Schools – Constitution of Boards and Rules of Procedure, published by the Department of Education and Science.

# The Primary School

The structure of school management is set out in the following diagram.



# Information for Parents of Children with English as an Additional Language

In Ireland ALL children are entitled to free primary and post-primary education. Education in Ireland is compulsory from age 6 to 16 or until students have completed three years of second level (post-primary) education, under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000. In general, children who are at least 4 years of age on 1 September of a school year to approximately 12 years of age attend a primary school and children from approximately 12 years to 18 years attend a post-primary school.

**HOW TO ENROL YOUR CHILD IN PRIMARY SCHOOL** If you wish to enrol your child in a local school please contact the principal of the school by phone and arrange to meet with him/her. Do not go to the school for the first time without making an appointment. If you are worried your English is not good enough to communicate with the principal you may bring a friend with you to help. At the first meeting, you can ask the school principal to enrol your child. Applications for school enrolment should be made in writing. It should also be noted that some schools also insist that an application for enrolment can only be accepted following receipt of a completed school enrolment form and you should discuss this with the school principal. Where a school refuses to enrol a child, a copy of the decision, including the reasons for refusal should be received in writing. Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 provides that a parent may appeal against a decision to refuse to enrol a child in a school.

The National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) can assist you with placement where efforts to secure a place have not been successful. In dealing with any such request, the NEWB will require a copy of all correspondence with the relevant schools. Further details can be obtained from the NEWB by telephoning 01 837 8700; by e-mail at [info@newb.ie](mailto:info@newb.ie) or through the website at [www.newb.ie](http://www.newb.ie) <<http://www.newb.ie>> .

If a school is full another school in the locality will be suggested.

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

- the name, age and nationality of your son/daughter;
- your name, address and a contact telephone number where you can be contacted, if for example, your son/daughter becomes ill at school;



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

**ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF SCHOOLS?** Yes, primary schools are based on a particular religious ethos, for example, Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland, Muslim. In the ‘Educate Together’ schools a multi-religious ethos is found. Most schools teach the curriculum through English. Some schools teach the curriculum through Irish – which is the national language and first official language with English being a second official language. Single sex schools teach boys and girls separately. Other schools teach boys and girls together. It should also be noted that some primary schools are junior schools, catering for students from Junior Infants to 2nd Class while others schools are all through schools catering for students from Junior Infants to 6th Class.

**ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOL** Once your child is enrolled in a school he or she must attend school every school day. It is your responsibility and it is required by Irish law that you inform the school of your child’s absence from school because of illness or other exceptional circumstances. You should send a letter to the class teacher to explain the reason for your son’s/daughter’s absence or the reason why they have attended late or need to leave early.

A letter may say:

(Name of child) was absent from school yesterday (date) due to (reason).

Signed: (your name).

**THE SCHOOL DAY** A school day lasts 5 hours and 40 minutes. Classes usually start between 8.45 am and 9.30 am. Schools are open from Monday to Friday. Younger children may finish their school day one hour earlier than the children in the more senior classes. In the school day there is normally a mid-morning break and a lunch break. It is important to ensure that your child has food and drink for these two breaks. You should consult with the school principal about the food and drink requirements for school breaks. It should be noted that some schools have designated healthy eating days while others may forbid certain foods – e.g. crisps, fizzy drinks.’ If in doubt ask the principal or class teacher.

**SCHOOL BOOKS** If you cannot afford to pay the full cost of text books then ask the school principal if he/she can assist you with the purchase of school books. The Department of Education and Science provides an annual grant to schools to assist with *some* of the costs of text books.

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUPPORT** Experience to date has shown that young children learn English very quickly. It is normal to place a child, even if she or he has very little English, in a class with children of a similar age. The Department of Education and Science provides additional educational support to schools to enable the schools to provide extra English classes for children with an identified English language deficit.

**DISCIPLINE** Corporal punishment is not used in Irish Schools. It is illegal. Each school has a code of discipline. Sanctions used by a school are specified within this code.

**SCHOOL ETHOS** Irish Primary schools promote tolerance, mutual respect and an understanding of cultural, ethical, racial, social and religious diversity. They also promote the reality of difference within an intercultural society. The celebration of intercultural diversity is an important component of school life particularly through experiences in music, art, dance, and history.

The school is a multi-cultural environment. Every child's ethnic origin and religion is respected. It is expected that all children will also respect other children in the school.

**DURING SCHOOL HOLIDAYS** It is possible that your child may lose some of the English that he/she has learned during the school holidays. It is important, therefore, that children should use, read or listen to some English every day. Please try and find an opportunity for your child to use English. For example she or he:

- could watch a television programme and then tell you about it;
- could read a book aloud to you;
- could ask for items in the local shop; or
- could keep a daily diary with pictures and writing during the holiday period.

While it is important for your child to learn English, it is also very important that he/she does not lose the mother tongue of your family. Take every opportunity to use your mother tongue with you child and tell him/her about your native country.

A full version of the information leaflet for parents of children with English as an additional language is available from [www.ria.gov.ie/](http://www.ria.gov.ie/) publications in the following languages:

|          |          |         |         |            |
|----------|----------|---------|---------|------------|
| Albanian | Croatian | English | French  | Romanian   |
| Arabic   | Czech    | Polish  | Russian | Portuguese |