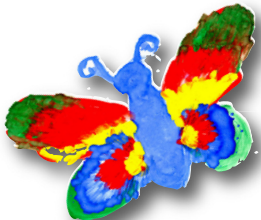




Your Child in the Primary School

TIPS FOR PARENTS



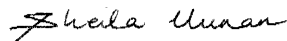
Foreword

Dear Parent,

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

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

We hope that you will find this booklet useful.



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From home to school...

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

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

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

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

You should check to see if there are places available – but be prepared that there may be a chance there is a waiting list or no space for your child. Research other schools around your area and make contact with them to find a place.

Resources

- ✦ National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
www.ncca.ie
- ✦ Department of Education and Skills
www.education.ie/en/Parents
- ✦ Citizens' Information
www.citizensinformation.ie



Help prepare your child for learning

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

CURIOSITY The natural inquisitiveness of children is central to learning. Children are encouraged to ask more questions when they get positive responses.

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

LISTENING Children should be encouraged to develop good listening skills. Instruction and directions are a big part of school life so children need to be good listeners.

INTERACTING WITH OTHERS Children need to learn key skills like how to share and take turns. They also need to learn respect for others and to be aware of the feelings of others.

INDEPENDENCE In order to take part in school life children need to have 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, all of which helps them to use language.
- /// **Play with objects** – sand, water, jigsaws, boxes and bricks and other toys.
- /// **Engage in physical play** – ball games, skipping, chasing games.

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 importance of language in education cannot be over-emphasised. Language is essential for developing reading and writing 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 to children and encourage them to talk. Give them time to explain or describe events to you. Avoid interrupting, even if you know what they are going to say. When talking to your child, don't economise with words. Don't use baby talk.

Activities that may assist to develop language include:

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

what shape is the book on the shelf?

what does the rug feel like?

- /// ask your child to describe a particular incident which has taken place such as:

what did you see at the zoo today?

what happened at the dentist today?

- /// ask your child to categorise objects:
 - name all the food on the table;
 - name all the vegetables in the fridge;
 - name all items in the fridge that are not vegetables;

- /// assist your child to use language to reason in various situations:
 - why do you wear a coat in cold weather?
 - why do you need to put on suncream in warm weather?

- /// help your child to use language to describe past, present and future events:
 - what will you do when you go to the playground?
 - what happens when we go to the supermarket?

- /// encourage your child to express his/her feelings:
 - how did you feel when your dog died?

- /// use of language in reacting to various situations:
 - what would you do if granny gave you lots of money?

Help children to use language to solve problems, to give directions, 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 also assists language development.

Irish, as both language and subject, is most often new to children beginning school. From time to time, use words or short sentences in Irish to help introduce children to the Irish language. This will help them handle a second language. Familiarity with expressions such as “más é do thoil é”, “go raibh maith agat”, and “maith an cailín/buachaill” will be a help to them with school.

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

Children learn their first language in the home, and research shows that it is not unusual for non-English speaking pupils to enter a ‘silent period’ when they begin school. This could be caused when a child suddenly finds themselves surrounded by a different language, different surroundings and different people. Adding routine English phrases as much as possible and encouraging them to speak in English around the house can really help them with school.

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

Reading

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

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 talk about 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 ...?”

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 plasticine clay.

You can give them:

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

Maths

You can help your child become familiar with the ideas they will need to understand when they start maths in school. Allow your child to help you sort cutlery, set the table, count 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 – place all the small objects in the box;

shape – put all the round objects on the table;

colour – put all the red items on the chair;

texture – put all the smooth items in the box;

function – collect all the items which roll together;

material – gather all the wooden items together.

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

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

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

Confidence and self esteem

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

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



Using language to build self esteem

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

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. 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.

Resources

- Department of Education and skills.
www.education.ie
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_assessment/Parents
- Schooldays
www.schooldays.ie/articles/primary-irish-resources
- National Parents' Council
www.npc.ie
- Help my Kid Learn
www.helpmykidlearn.ie
- Handwriting for Kids
www.handwritingforkids.com
- Read Today
www.readtoday.com
- Reception and Integration Agency
www.ria.gov.ie
- Jesuit Refugee Service Ireland
www.jrs.ie/hearing-voices/school
- Early Childhood Ireland
www.earlychildhoodireland.ie
- Literacy Association of Ireland
www.reading.ie
- Children's Books Ireland
www.childrensbooksireland.ie

Preparation for school

Starting school can sometimes be a time of 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. However, there is much that parents can do.

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 normal.
- ✦ Introduce your child to another junior infant, if possible have her/him around to play during the holidays. It is important for your child to see some **familiar faces** on the first day.
- ✦ **Children should be able to** put on and take off coats and hang them up, use the toilet and flush it properly, wash their hands and tidy up their crayons and colouring books. Play 'pretend school' with your child. Help to practice putting things in and out of the school bag and to open and close their lunchbox.
- ✦ Teach them to use a handkerchief or tissue, share toys and take turns.
- ✦ Label 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 children cannot tie **laces** and needs to change **shoes** – perhaps for PE – shoes with a velcro fastener will enable them to change quickly and independently.
- /// Ask yourself whether or not children can manage their **clothes** by themselves. Zips may be easier than buttons for example. **Elasticated** trousers can be easier than zips or buttons.
- /// If your child needs to bring a **lunch** – choose a lunch box and flask that 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. Set yogurts may help avoid unnecessary spills.
- /// Try to get your child up a little earlier, as this will ensure a stress free morning.

The curriculum

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

The curriculum aims to:

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

Resources

- /// National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Primary-Education/Primary_School_Curriculum/
- /// Curriculum Online
www.curriculumonline.ie/Primary



The Primary School Curriculum

Language

- /// Gaeilge
- /// English

Mathematics

Physical Education

Arts Education

- /// Visual Arts
- /// Music
- /// Drama

Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE)

- /// History
- /// Geography
- /// Science

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

- /// Social Personal and
Health Education

Note: Religious or ethical education is the responsibility of the different school patron bodies.

Children with special education needs

All schools have a teaching allocation to meet the needs of pupils with special needs. As well as this, schools can also get extra teaching resources for individual pupils with more serious learning disabilities.

Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), throughout the country process individual applications for either teaching or **Special Needs Assistant** (SNA) 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.

Parents of pupils with identified special education needs should discuss the support available from the school with the school principal. Learning support teachers are generally available to all primary schools.

Resources

- ⌘ Department of Education and Skills
www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/NEPS-Home-Page.html
- ⌘ Citizens Information
www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/primary_and_post_primary_education/going_to_primary_school/special_needs_education_primary_schools.html

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 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 the child you will be back at the appropriate time to collect him/her. If your child is upset, trust the teacher. The teacher is 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.

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

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

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

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

Dealing with the emotional side

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

The school day

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

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 three terms. The first term is from the end of August/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, breaks at Christmas, Easter and mid-term in the first and second terms have been standardised.



School year 2017/2018

October 2017 mid-term break All schools will close from Monday, 30 October to Friday, 3 November 2017 inclusive.

Christmas 2017 Schools will close on Friday, 22 December 2017 which will be the final day of the school term. Schools will re-open on Monday, 8 January 2018.

February 2018 mid-term break All primary schools will close on Thursday, 15 February 2018 and Friday, 16 February 2018. (Primary schools may use three discretionary days to extend this break to an alternative option of a 5 day break for the period from Monday, 12 February 2018 to Friday, 16 February 2018 inclusive.

Easter 2018 All schools will close on Friday 23 March 2018 which will be the final day of the school term. All schools will re-open on Monday, 9 April 2018.

In addition, a small number of discretionary days are 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 your school has a website, do check it regularly for updates regarding closures, half days etc. If the school has to close unexpectedly or finish the school day early your child will be given a note, in advance, from the school. Make sure you look in your child's school bag **every day** for such notes.

School year 2018/2019

October 2018 mid-term break All schools will close from Monday, 29 October to Friday, 2 November 2018 inclusive.

Christmas 2018 Schools will close on Friday, 21 December 2018 which will be the final day of the school term. Schools will re-open on Monday, 7 January 2019.

February 2019 mid-term break All primary schools will close on Thursday, 21 February 2019 and Friday, 22 February 2019. (Primary schools may use three discretionary days to extend this break to an alternative option of a 5 day break for the period from Monday, 18 February 2019 to Friday, 22 February 2019 inclusive.

Easter 2019 All schools will close on Friday, 12 April 2019 which will be the final day of the school term. All schools will re-open on Monday, 29 April 2019.

Resources

- ⌘ Department of Education and Skills
www.education.ie/en/Parents/
- ⌘ School Days
[www.schooldays.ie/articles/school-calendar](http://www schooldays.ie/articles/school-calendar)
- ⌘ I.N.T.O year planner
www.into.ie/ROI/InfoforTeachers/SchoolYear/INTOYearPlanner/

School year 2019/2020

October 2019 mid-term break All schools will close from Monday, 28 October to Friday, 1 November 2019 inclusive.

Christmas 2019 Schools will close on Friday, 20 December 2019 which will be the final day of the school term. Schools will re-open on Monday, 6 January 2020.

February 2020 mid-term break All primary schools will close on Thursday, 20 February 2020 and Friday, 21 February 2020. (Primary schools may use three discretionary days to extend this break to an alternative option of a 5 day break for the period from Monday, 17 February 2020 to Friday, 21 February 2020 inclusive.

Easter 2020 All schools will close on Friday, 3 April 2020 which will be the final day of the school term. All schools will re-open on Monday, 20 April 2020.

School attendance

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

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

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

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

Resources

/// Tusla
<http://www.tusla.ie/services/educational-welfare-services>

Help with uniforms and books

Most schools require pupils to wear a school uniform as part of their admissions policy. Wherever possible generic rather than branded items will be specified by the school. If you feel you will struggle with the costs of school uniforms, you may be entitled to receive help from the Department of Social Protection. The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance can help towards the cost of uniforms and books for children.

Assistance is also available to help cover the cost of school books. The Department of Education and Skills has funds allocated to provide assistance with the cost of books. The scheme is available for families who find themselves in financial hardship, due to unemployment, illness, single parenthood, large families or other problems such as alcohol abuse. To find out more about the various schemes available, visit www.hse.ie.

Many schools have also implemented a book rental scheme which allows parents to rent their children's school books for that specific year.

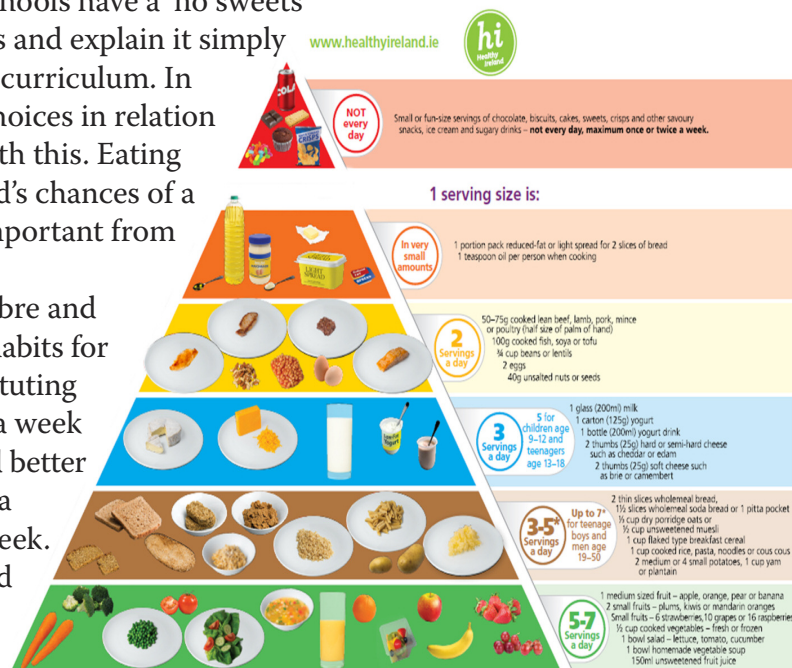
Resources

- ⌘ [Department of Social Protection](http://www.welfare.ie)
www.welfare.ie
- ⌘ [Health Service Executive](http://www.hse.ie)
www.hse.ie
- ⌘ [Department of Education and Skills](http://www.education.ie)
www.education.ie

Healthy eating

Children form their eating habits for life from an early age, so it is important that you start them on the right road. A good diet, plenty of sleep and exercise are essential for a 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 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 schoolweek. 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”.

Seven steps to creating healthy, varied and interesting lunchboxes

- ⌘ Include a wide variety of foods - starchy foods, protein, dairy, and fruit and vegetables.
- ⌘ Try to offer different foods every day - no one wants to be eating a ham sandwich five days a week!
- ⌘ Vary the types of bread e.g. pitta bread, bagels, wholemeal rolls - keep a stock in the freezer.
- ⌘ Cook extra rice/pasta in the evening - these can make interesting salads.
- ⌘ Theme your lunchbox on a different country, e.g. Italian – try a pasta salad, Mexican – filled flour tortilla wraps.
- ⌘ Home-made soup (in a Thermos flask) is great for cold days, while salads are light and refreshing for warmer weather. Both are packed with essential vitamins and minerals.

- Fluids are important for children – up to six cups of fluid should be encouraged daily. Milk and water are the best options. Straws and brightly coloured drinks bottles can make rehydrating more interesting!

You can get simple ideas for your child's lunchbox from the five day lunch planner below. For more information, see www.safefood.eu.

MONDAY								
1 medium bread roll with chicken and lettuce	+		+	Handful of carrot sticks	+	Pot of low fat yoghurt	+	
TUESDAY								
Small pitta bread with tuna and sweetcorn	+		+	½ wholemeal scone	+		+	Carton of milk
WEDNESDAY								
2 tablespoons of pasta with 1 tablespoon of dried fruit	+		+	2 crackers with low fat cheddar cheese	+		+	Carton of unsweetened fruit juice
THURSDAY								
2 slices of bread with cooked ham and lettuce	+		+		+	Yoghurt	+	
FRIDAY								
Tortilla wrap with chicken, sliced peppers and lettuce	+		+	Small tub of stewed fruit	+	6 cherry tomatoes	+	

Tips to get children to eat more fruit and vegetables

- Children often prefer fruit 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.



Useful websites

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

✎ www.healthinfo.ie	Health Promotion Unit
✎ www.bordbia.ie	Bord Bia
✎ www.bim.ie	Bord Iascaigh Mhara
✎ www.irishheart.ie	Irish Heart Foundation
✎ www.ndc.ie	National Dairy Council
✎ www.safefood.eu	Safefood, Food Safety Promotion Board
✎ www.fooddudes.ie	Healthy Eating Programme
✎ www.coeliac.ie	Coeliac Society of Ireland
✎ www.diabetes.ie	Diabetes Association
✎ www.hse.ie/healthyeating	Health Service Executive
✎ www.healthpromotion.ie	Health Promotion
✎ www.npc.ie	National Parents Council
✎ www.healthyfoodforall.com	Healthy Food for All

Health and hygiene

Resources

Health Service Executive
www.hse.ie/eng/health/immunisation/

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dental services to children attending primary school are also provided. They are screened in second, fourth and six 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 these to spread. Unfortunately, they are extremely mobile and can pass from one individual to another by head to head contact.

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

You should check your child's hair regularly for head lice. If your child has head lice you should inform the teacher or principal and treat the hair immediately. Everybody, including you, other members of the family and 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 easy to treat. Lotion or shampoo treatments can be bought from pharmacies without a prescription.

Bullying

Bullying is a problem which children 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 sections 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 be able 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.
- ⚡ They may feel under pressure to succeed.
- ⚡ They may find it difficult to socialise with their peers and so pick on 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 s/he is involved in such behaviour.

What to do

- /// Try to find out if this is a temporary response to something else in the child's life such as a new baby, a bereavement or stress at home.
- /// Talk to your child and try to get your child to understand how the 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 things worse. You will need to deal with this problem over a period of time.
- /// Talk to the child's teacher. You will find teachers willing to help. It is important that you and the teacher take the same approach to the problem.
- /// Bullies often suffer from a lack of confidence. Don't compare your child's achievement with others. Praise helpful, kind behaviour at every opportunity.
- /// Children should be taught to accept differences in others. If your child always seems overly critical of others help by making positive remarks about other children.

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

- Stay calm and don't overreact no matter what you are feeling. Your reaction may convey a sense of anger or disappointment to the child and could be counter-productive. 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.
- 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.
- Talk to the teacher. Bullying is a hidden activity and with classes of up to 30 it can be difficult for teachers to spot. Teachers need the support of parents in tackling this problem.
- If the bullying is physical, don't tell your child to hit back. Schools cannot encourage children to engage in violence and conflicting advice will only confuse the child. Also, telling a vulnerable child to hit back is asking the impossible of them and will only add to their sense of failure when they find they cannot do so.
- Children can be vulnerable and may need help to socialise. You can facilitate this by inviting children to play and by enlisting the help of other parents.
- It is important to tell children that some situations are impossible and that safety must come first. Advise your child that sometimes, if threatened, to get away and tell. It is important in a situation like this to praise a child for using commonsense.
- Some children attract bullies because of poor personal hygiene or habits. If this is the case it can be overcome with help from you.
- Cyberbullying can become a problem as children get older. Useful information and answers to frequently asked questions are available on webwise.ie

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.

Resources

- ⌘ Department of Education and Skills
www.education.ie
- ⌘ National Parents Council
www.npc.ie
- ⌘ School Days
[www.schooldays.ie/articles/bullying](http://www schooldays.ie/articles/bullying)
- ⌘ Office for Internet Safety
www.internetsafety.ie
- ⌘ Webwise
www.webwise.ie

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

Parents are actively encouraged to participate in school life and contribute to class activities. Through storytelling, 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.

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.

Resources

- ⌘ Living in Ireland
www.livinginireland.ie
- ⌘ Show Racism the Red Card
www.theredcard.ie
- ⌘ Jesuit Refugee Service Ireland
www.jrs.ie
- ⌘ National Youth Council
www.intercultural.ie
- ⌘ Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration
www.integration.ie
- ⌘ Equality Authority
www.equality.ie
- ⌘ Department of Education and Skills
www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Intercultural-Education-Strategy/Intercultural-Education-Strategy.html
- ⌘ English as an additional language
www.pdst.ie/eal

Homework

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

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

Much debate has taken place in recent years on the effects of television/game consoles etc on young children. The reality is that most children watch TV or play computer games 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.

Each school has its own way of communicating with parents and will use a form of communication which best suits its needs and those of parents.

For general information schools sometimes 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. Most primary schools will have a website – check the website regularly for up-to-date information.

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

The board of management

The board of management/manager(s) is the body of persons or the person appointed by the patron to manage the school. The patron is the person recognised as such by the Minister for Education and Skills.

The board of management includes representatives of parents, teachers, trustees or patrons, the principal and the community. You can read more about the boards of management at www.education.ie.