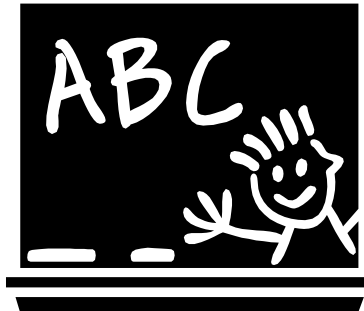




Booklet for Parents of Infants Starting School



Foreword

Fáilte romhat agus roimh do pháiste.



Starting school will be the first big change in the life of your child. Up to this your child has felt safe and secure with you in the home and family but now your child is facing the wider world of classroom and school. This may seem a big step for someone so small but most children manage it without any great fuss or stress - and in fact take to it like ducks to water.

However, it is also a time when parents and teachers should take special care to ensure that the transition from home to school is as smooth as possible. If the child's first experience of school is one of happy involvement, a very good foundation will have been laid for fruitful school years ahead.

It is important too, particularly during the first year that parents understand what the aims of the school are, as many may be expecting too much in the way of academic achievement.

We know from experience that parents are very anxious to help in any way possible. We have, therefore, included some ideas for the home,

which should stimulate the child's interest and nurture his/her desire to know more.

With these aims in mind we have put together this little booklet as a general guide for parents. It deals briefly with the period before your child comes to school and his introductory stage in Junior Infants.

We trust you will find it helpful and that your child will be happy and fulfilled with us.

Getting Ready for Learning

Children are natural learners. They have an inbuilt curiosity and an eagerness to know more about everything – about themselves, about others and about the world around them. And they learn fast – but only when they are ready and their interest is aroused.

Because they come against putting they are not yet too soon can switch same time we must get moving as soon as



to us so young we must guard pressure on them to learn what ready for. Demanding too much a child off completely. At the cultivate readiness so that they can possible.

The **rates of progress of children can vary greatly.** We try to give them an opportunity to move ahead at their own pace or as near to it as possible.

Our first year in school therefore, is mainly about settling in, relating to others, making friends, feeling happy and gradually getting used to the routine of the school. On the learning side the emphasis is on getting children ready for learning by –

- Developing their **oral language** and expression.

- **Sharpening their senses**, especially seeing, hearing and touching.
- Developing **physical co-ordination** especially of hand and fingers.
- Extending their **concentration span** and getting them to **listen attentively**.
- Learning through **play** – the most enjoyable and effective way.
- **Co-operating** with the teacher and other children.
- Performing **tasks by themselves**.
- **Working with others** and sharing with them.
- Teaching each child to **accept the general order**, which is necessary for the class to work well.

Before Your Child Starts...

You should ensure that your child is **as independent as possible** - physically, emotionally and socially. If your child can look after themselves in these areas they will feel secure and confident and settle in readily.

It would help greatly if your child is able to-

- **Button and unbutton their coat** and hang it up.
- **Use the toilet without help** and manage pants buttons
- Also **encourage personal hygiene** and cleanliness. Your child should know to flush the toilet and wash their hands, without having to be told.
- Use their hanky when necessary.
- **Share** toys and playthings with others and "take turns".
- **Tidy up** and put away their playthings.
- Remain contentedly for a few hours in the home of a relation, friend or neighbour. If they had this experience, then separation from their parents when he starts school will not cause them any great anxiety.



Preparing for the 'Big Day'

The child's first day at school is a day to remember for the rest of his life. **You can help to make it a really happy one for him.**



- **Tell your child about school**

beforehand, casually, and talk about it as a happy place where there will be a big welcome for your child and they will meet new friends.

- Your child will like to have **a new uniform and new bag** when they begin. These helps your child identify more readily with the school and other children.
- Your child's books will be taken the first day of school and the teacher will hold on to them until such time as they are needed. This minimises books getting lost. Please have your child warned of this fact; in case they think they will never see the books again. All books/copies must be marked with your child's name and must be covered. Your child will only feel important if they have something in his school bag, so perhaps you could buy a copy or colouring book for they, which they could use at home.

The Big Day



Coming in...

When you arrive at the classroom, **be as casual as you can**. He/she will meet the teacher and the other children and will be shown their chair.

Hopefully they will be absorbed in his new surroundings. So having assured them you will be back to collect them, wish them goodbye and **make your getaway without delay.**

Packed Lunches

Lunch is an important meal for school going children. It should provide one third of their recommended daily allowance of nutrients without being high in fat, sugar or salt. It should also provide dietary fibre (roughage).

The **traditional packed lunch of milk and sandwiches is under attack from a range of convenience foods** like crisps, sweets, biscuits, chocolate and soft drinks. Parents and teachers are concerned about this trend but some find it difficult to come up with popular healthy alternatives. We will **ask you to encourage a healthy lunch right from the start**. Also, please, only give your child something you feel he/she can easily manage to eat. Children are not normally very hungry at school, so a little snack will do.



Start with the Basics

A healthy packed lunch should contain bread or an alternative, a savoury filling which provides protein, a suitable drink and some fruit and/or vegetables.

A Word about Milk

Growing children should get approximately one pint of milk a day, or its equivalent as cheese, yoghurt or milk pudding. This ensures that they get enough calcium, which is essential for healthy bones and teeth. If a child does not drink a glass of milk at lunch, encourage him or her to have a carton of yoghurt or a small helping of cheese instead.

Going Home

- Be sure to **collect your child on time**. Children can become very upset if they feel they are forgotten.
- Keep out of view until the children are released.
- If at any time the collecting routine has to be changed ensure you tell the child and the teacher.

Handling the Upset Child

In spite of the best efforts of both teacher and parents a small number of children will still become upset. If your child happens to be one of them don't panic. Patience and perseverance can work wonders.



A Word of Advice

- **Trust the teacher.** She is experienced and resourceful and is used to coping with all kinds of starting –off problems.
- **Try not to show any outward signs of your own distress.** Sometimes the parents are more upset than the child and are the main cause of his anxiety.
- When you have reassured your child, leave as fast as possible. The teacher can distract and humour your child more easily when you are not around.
- Check back discreetly in a short while. You will invariably find that calm has been restored.
- **You must be firm from the start.** Even if a child is upset you must insist that your child stay for a short time-even ten minutes. Your child must never feel that they are winning the psychological battle of wills.

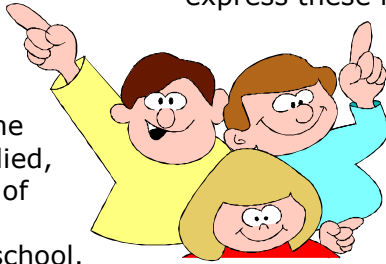
As Time Goes on...

- School begins at 9.20a.m. To ease the child into the school routine we have a policy where Junior Infants go home for the first two weeks at 12.30p.m. (so no lunch). After that they go home at 2.00 p.m. Please make sure that your child is collected at 2.00 p.m. as the teacher needs that hour between 2.00 p.m. and 3.00 p.m. to prepare for the next day. **Get your child into the habit of being in good time for school from the beginning.** Mid-morning break: 11.00 a.m. to 11.10 a.m.
- Children need plenty of rest after the effort and excitement of a day at school. You should ensure that your child gets to bed early and has a good night's sleep.
- When your child has settled in and hopefully, looks upon school as a "home from home" do continue to show interest in their daily adventures. Give your child an ear if your child wants to tell you things-but don't pester your child with questions.
- Mind that you take some of their "stories" with a pinch of salt.
- If your child's progress is slow do not compare your child adversely with other children while your child is listening. **Loss of self-esteem can be very damaging to your child.**
- Be careful too about criticising the teacher in your child's presence. Remember that she is his mother figure while your child is at school and for your child's own well being it is important that your child has a good positive image of her.
- This last caution applies to your child's image of the school as well. **Your child's school is always "the greatest"-whatever its faults.**
- Your child is not going to be a model of perfection all the time-thankfully. You should try to have patience with their shortcomings and praise for their achievements.
- Children often "forget" or relay messages incorrectly, so **please, check your child's folder each night for notes.**
- You have received a book list outlining the books and other bits and pieces your child will need for the year.

Some Important Areas of Early Learning

Developing his Command of Spoken Language.

It is important that the child's ability to talk is as advanced as possible. It is through speech that your child communicates his/her thoughts and feelings, his/her needs and desires, curiosity and wonder. If your child cannot express these in words they will tend to remain silent and will often withdraw from the learning activity of the class. This can be the first sign of failure in the school system and must be remedied, if at all possible. That is why a lot of attention is given to language development in the first years of school.



You Can Help....

- Talk to your child naturally and casually about things of interest that you or he/she may be doing-at home, in the shop, in the car, etc. Remember that all the time he is absorbing the language they hear about them. It takes him/her a while to make it his/her own and to use it for his/her own needs.
- Try to make time to listen when he/she wants to tell you something that is important to him/her. But don't always make your child the centre of attention.
- Answer your child's genuine questions with patience and in an adequate way. Always nurture your child's sense of curiosity and wonder.
- Introduce him/her gently to the ideas of why? How? When? Where? If? etc. These demand more advanced language structures.
- Your child will have their own particular favourite stories that your child never tires of hearing. Repeat them over and over again and gradually get him/her to tell them to you.

First Steps in Reading

Ability to read is the foundation for all future progress in our school system. However, learning to read is a gradual process and a lot of preparatory work must be done before a child is introduced to his first reader.

We very deliberately do not rush or push children into reading. We get them ready for it over an extended period. Reading is something to be enjoyed. It should never start as a chore for the



small child.

You can Help..

- Have attractive colourful books in the home.
- Read him/her a variety of stories from time to time. He/she will get to associate these wonderful tales with books and reading.
- You must convey to your child gradually that books are precious things. They must be minded and handled carefully and put away safely.
- Look at the pictures with your child and talk to him/her about what they say.
- Read your child nursery rhymes. Your child will learn them off their own bat. Don't try to push your child.
- Above all, don't push your child with their early reading. You may turn him/her against it for evermore.
- Remember that the teacher is the best judge of what rate of progress is best suited to each child.
- Sing the alphabet song with your child, so that he/she at least heard of the letters. If he knows what each one looks like, all the better.

Understanding Maths

First a Word of Warning

Maths for the small child has nothing to do with “sums” or figures or tables or adding and subtracting. These will all come much later. Maths is really part of the language he uses in understanding and talking about certain things in his/her daily experience e.g.

- Your child associates certain numbers with particular things – two hands, four wheels, five fingers etc.
- Counting – one, two, three, four, etc.
- Colours – black, white, red, green, etc.
- Prepositions (telling position) and their opposites: over/under, before/after, inside/outside etc.
- Matching/Sorting – objects of the same size/colour/texture/shape etc.
- Odd One Out – difference in size/colour etc.

Understanding of these concepts comes very quickly for some children. For others it takes a long time. Be patient. You cannot force Maths understanding on a child.

But You Can Help...

- In the course of your ordinary daily routine in the home, in the shop, in the neighbourhood you should use suitable opportunities to casually introduce the maths vocabulary referred to above. E.g. How many cakes? The glass is full/empty. We turn left at the lights.
- The child gets to understand Maths best by handling and investigating and using real objects. This has been your child’s natural method of learning since he was a baby. This at times can be a nuisance but if it allows him/her to do the learning himself the final result is well worth it.

Gaeilge

All children enjoy learning another language besides their own language. They have no difficulty in picking it up because it fascinates them as another code of communication.

They are free of any hang-ups about Irish unless they become aware that the home attitude towards it is not good. **So please be careful**

that anything you say does not give a negative attitude to your child.

We would want his parents to give every encouragement and help to the small ones in their efforts to acquire Irish. If they learn new words in school encourage them to use them at home. Use little Irish phrases or words now and again. Children are delighted to find out that their parents are into their new code as well. If they must learn Irish, let them enjoy it and master it to the best of their ability.

Getting Ready For Writing

Making letters on paper is not easy for the small child. Your child must learn to hold the pencil properly and make regular shapes. Your child's hand and finger muscles are only gradually developing at this stage.

You Can Help...

- They must develop the ability to get the hand and eye working together. This is very important. Get your child manipulating toys like:
 - (a) Jigsaws, Lego, beads to thread etc
 - (b) Plasticine (Marla) to make his/her own shapes
 - (c) A colouring book and thick crayons
 - (d) Sheets of paper that he/she can cut up with a safe scissors
- When he/she begins to use a pencil make sure that he holds it correctly at the start. It will be difficult to change him/her later.
- He may be making block letters at home even before he comes to school. This is fine. But when he starts making lower case letters at school you should try to get your child to discontinue the blocks and practise his new system whenever he feels like it. Consult the teacher about this.
- Don't discourage left-handedness. If that is his definite natural inclination, don't attempt to change him.

Other Areas of the Curriculum

The child in juniors learns a lot through many other activities, which do not need any elaboration here. His/her general development is enhanced through Art & Craft, P.E., Music, Nature and of course through Religious Education.

In regard to the last area its moral and social aspects are covered right through the school day e.g. kindness to others, sharing with them, saying we are sorry, being aware of God through the beauty of nature etc.

The children learn their prayers and bible stories gradually. Again, as in the other areas we referred to already, the child will benefit from practising at home what he has learned at school. He can then make his own contribution to the usual family prayers.

Social skills are very important. We encourage good manners at all times, please/thank you, addressing teachers properly, being courteous to fellow students and teachers. It is important to ask your child whom he played with at school and to ensure he isn't alone, also encourage mixing rather than being dependent on one friend only.

Rough behaviour is totally discouraged in the playground.

Parting Thoughts

Who is the Boss?



Bit by bit the child will get used to the general discipline of the classroom. He will get to understand very quickly that in certain

important matters an instruction from the teacher must be obeyed promptly and without question.

Teacher and Parent

At the early stages some parents meet the teacher almost daily and this is a very desirable thing. However, if there is something in particular that you would like to discuss you can arrange to meet her at a time when you both can have a little peace and quiet.

Easy Does It

There are lots of ideas and suggestions in this little book as to how you can help your child. **We are not advocating that you do ALL of these with your child in a systematic way.** But if you find from time to time that he/she enjoys a fun approach to certain aspects of learning then we would say – give it a go – but remember **don't overdo it.**

Our Hope

We are offering this Guide to Parents as a little practical help in dealing with the education of their children at the very early stages. We will be very happy if you dip into it from time to time and find something in it of value to you and your child.



“Mol an óige, agus tiocfaidh sí”