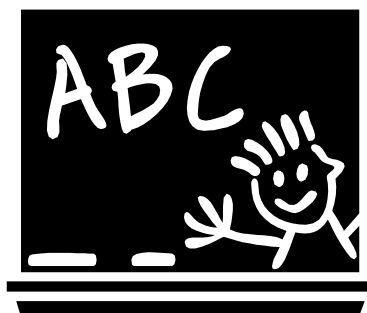


St. Canice's NS

Booklet for Parents of Infants Starting School



III Introduction

Fáilte romhat agus roimh do pháiste.
(Welcome to you and your child)



Starting school will be the first big change in the life of your child. Up to this s/he has felt safe and secure with you in the home and family but now s/he 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 coming to school and their 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 to us so young we must guard against putting pressure on them to learn what they are not yet ready for. Demanding too much too soon can switch a child off completely. At the same time we must cultivate readiness so that they can get moving as soon as 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 **oral language** and expression.
- **Sharpening senses**, especially seeing, hearing and touching.
- Developing **physical co-ordination** especially of hand and fingers.
- Extending **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...

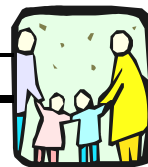
You should ensure that they are **as independent as possible** - physically, emotionally and socially. If they can look after themselves in these areas they will feel secure and confident and settle in readily.

It would help greatly if s/he 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 his or her 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 playthings.
- Remain contentedly for a few hours in the home of a relation, friend or neighbour. If they have had this experience, then separation from parents when starting school will not cause the child any great anxiety.

Preparing for the 'Big Day'



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

- **Tell them about school** beforehand, casually, and talk about it as a happy place where there will be a big welcome for them and they will meet new friends.
- **Don't use school or the teacher as a threat.** "If you behave like that for teacher s/he'll murder you" though said light-heartedly can make some children very apprehensive.
- You will have an opportunity to bring your child to the school in June to become familiar with this new environment.
- They will like to have their **new uniform, new school bag and lunch box** when they begin. These help the child identify more readily with the school and other children.

The Big Day

Coming in...



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

Hopefully they will be absorbed in the new surroundings. So having assured him/her 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 s/he can easily manage to eat.

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 them 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**. S/he 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 their anxiety.
- When you have reassured them, leave as fast as possible. The teacher can distract and humour them 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 they stay for a short time—even ten minutes. Children must never feel that they are winning the psychological battle of wills.

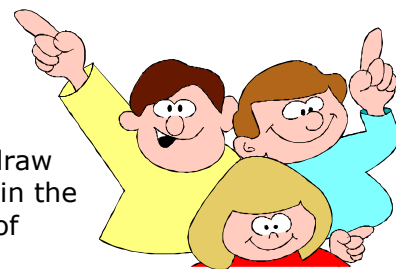
As Time Goes on...

- School opens at 8.40a.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. After that they go home at 1.30p.m. Please make sure that your child is collected at 1.30p.m. as the teacher needs that hour between 1.30p.m. and 2.30p.m. to clean up after the day. **Get them into the habit of being in good time for school from the beginning.** Mid-morning break: 10.30a.m. to 10.40a.m.
- Children need plenty of rest after the effort and excitement of a day at school. You should ensure that they get to bed early and has a good night's sleep.
- When they have settled in and hopefully, looks upon school as a "home from home" do continue to show interest in their daily adventures. Give them an ear if they want to tell you things-but don't pester them with questions.
- If his/her progress is slow do not compare them adversely with other children while they are listening. **Loss of self-esteem can be very damaging to children.**
- Be careful too about criticising the teacher in their presence. Remember that s/he is a parental figure while the child is at school and for their own wellbeing it is important that they have a good positive image of their teacher.
- This last caution applies to their image of the school as well. **Their school is always "the greatest"—whatever its faults.**
- They are 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 bag each night for notes.**
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Some Important Areas of Early Learning

Developing his/her Command of Spoken Language.

It is important that the child's ability to talk is as advanced as possible. It is through speech that they communicate their thoughts and feelings, their needs and desires, curiosity and wonder. If they 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 they may be doing-at home, in the shop, in the car, etc. Remember that all the time they are absorbing the language they hear about them. It takes them a while to make it their own and to use it for their own needs.
- Try to make time to listen when they want to tell you something that is important to them.
- Answer their genuine questions with patience and in an adequate way. Always nurture their sense of curiosity and wonder.

- Introduce them gently to the ideas of Why? How? When? Where? If? Etc. These demand more advanced language structures.
- S/he will have their own particular favourite stories that they never tire of hearing. Repeat them over and over again and gradually get them to tell the stories 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 their 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 them a variety of stories from time to time. They will get to associate these wonderful tales with books and reading.
- You must convey to them gradually that books are precious things. They must be minded and handled carefully and put away safely.
- Look at the pictures with them and talk to them about what they say.
- Read them nursery rhymes. They will learn them off their own bat. Don't try to push them.
- Above all, don't push them with early reading. You may turn them against it for evermore.
- Sing the alphabet song with your child, so that they have at least heard of the letters. If they know 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 they use in understanding and talking about certain things in s/he daily experience e.g.

- They associate 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 s/he 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 their natural method of learning since they were babies. This at times can be a nuisance but if it allows them to do the learning themselves the final result is well worth it.
- Board Games

Gaeilge

All children enjoy learning another 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 like 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 the new code as well. 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. They must learn to hold the pencil properly and make regular shapes. Their 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 them manipulating toys like:
 - - (a) Jigsaws, Lego, beads to thread etc.
 - (b) Plasticine (Marla) to make his own shapes
 - (c) A colouring book and thick crayons
 - (d) Sheets of paper that they can cut up with a safe scissors
- When they begin to use a pencil make sure that s/he holds it correctly at the start. It will be difficult to change later.
- They may be making block letters at home even before they come to school. This is fine. But when they starts making lower case letters at school you should try to get them to discontinue the blocks and practise the new system whenever s/he feels like it. Consult the teacher about this.
- Don't discourage left-handedness. If that is their definite natural inclination, don't attempt to change it.

Other Areas of the Curriculum

The child in juniors learns a lot through many other activities, which do not need any elaboration here. Their general development is enhanced through Art & Craft, P.E., Music, and 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 they have learned at school. They can then make their 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 they played with at school and to ensure s/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. They 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 him/her in a systematic way.** But if you find from time to time that they enjoy 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 síad”

(Praise the youth and they will blossom)