



Scoil Mhuire Moynalty



Booklet for Parents
of Junior Infants
Starting School
2015

Foreword

Fáilte romhat agus roimh do pháiste.



Starting school will be the first big change in the life of your child. Up to this he/she has felt safe and secure with you in the home and family but now he/she 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 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 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 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 he/she is **as independent as possible** - physically, emotionally and socially. If he/she can look after themselves in these areas he/she will feel secure and confident and settle in readily.

It would help greatly if he/she is able to-

- **Button and unbutton his/her 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/her hands, without having to be told.
- Use his/her 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 he/she had this experience, then separation from parents when he/she starts school will not cause him/her 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 life. 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 he/she will meet new friends.
- **Don't use school or the teacher as a threat.** "If you behave like that for teacher she'll murder you" though said light-heartedly can make some children very apprehensive.
- If you feel it would help, you could take them for a stroll to the junior classrooms and play area on an afternoon during June when the other children have gone home. He/she can browse around and become familiar with his new environment. On arrival you could drop in to meet the Principal with him/her and perhaps he/she could meet their teacher, as well.
- He/she will like to have **their new uniform and new bag** when he/she begins. These help them identify more readily with the school and other children.
- Your child's books will be taken from them, 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 readers must be covered. Your child will only feel important if they have something in their school bag, so perhaps you could buy a copy or colouring book for them, 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 he/she will be absorbed in their new surroundings. So having assured him/her you will be back to collect them, wish him/her 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.

The following examples are designed to help you provide quick, appetising, and nutritious lunches for your children.

Bread & Alternatives

Bread or rolls, preferably wholemeal.

Rice – wholegrain.

Pasta – wholegrain.

Potato Salad.

Wholemeal Scones.

Savouries

Lean Meat.

Chicken/Turkey.

Tinned Fish e.g. tuna/sardines.

Cheese, including Edam, blarney, cottage.

Quiche.

Pizza.

Fruit & Vegetables

Apples, Banana, Peach, Plum, Pineapple cubes, Mandarins, Orange segments, Grapes, Fruit Salad, Dried fruit, Tomato, Cucumber, Sweetcorn, Coleslaw, Celery.

Drinks

- Water is the preferred choice. Children are allowed to keep water on their tables to drink throughout the day.
- Milk, including low fat.
- Fruit juices.
- High juice Squashes, i.e. low sugar content.
- Yoghurt.

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.



Going Home

- Be sure to collect him/her 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 him/her, leave as fast as possible. The teacher can distract and humour him/her 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 he/she stay for a short time-even ten minutes. He/she must never feel that he/she is 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 month of September at 12pm (so no lunch). After that they go home at 2pm, please make sure that your child is collected at 2pm. **Get him/her into the habit of being in good time for school from the beginning.** Mid-morning break: 10.45am to 11am.
- Children need plenty of rest after the effort and excitement of a day at school. You should ensure that he/she gets to bed early and has a good night's sleep.
- When he/she has settled in and hopefully, looks upon school as a “home from home” do continue to show interest in his/her daily adventures. Give him/her an ear if he/she wants to tell you things-but don't pester him/her with questions.

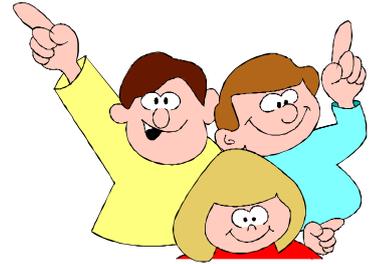
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- Mind that you take some of his/her “stories” with a pinch of salt.
- If his/her progress is slow do not compare him/her adversely with other children while he/she is listening. **Loss of self-esteem can be very damaging to him/her.**
- Be careful too about criticising the class teacher in the child’s presence. Remember that the teacher is a mother figure while your child is at school and for their own well being it is important that they has a good positive image of their teacher.
- This last caution applies to the child’s image of the school as well. **His/her school is always “the greatest”-whatever its faults.**
- He/she is not going to be a model of perfection all the time-thankfully. You should try to have patience with his/her shortcomings and praise for his/her achievements.
- Children often “forget” or relay messages incorrectly, so **please, check your child’s bag each night for notes.**
- There is an envelope scheme run in this school. It runs from the end of September to the end of May. Each family gets a box of envelopes with a number on it that is your ID number and each Monday an envelope in brought in with money(will be decided in September) in it and this goes towards your child’s Arts & Crafts, Insurance, School Trips, Swimming etc. At the end of the envelope year a statement is given to you outlining your child’s expenses and if there is any money over it will be returned to you then. **This is only used for your child’s expenses.**

Some Important Areas of Early Learning

Developing Their Command of Spoken Language

It is important that the child's ability to talk is as advanced as possible. It is through speech that he/she communicates his/her thoughts and feelings, his/her needs and desires, curiosity and wonder. If he/she cannot express these in words he/she 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/she 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 him/her the centre of attention.
- Answer his/her genuine questions with patience and in an adequate way. Always nurture his/her 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.
- He/she will have his/her own particular favourite stories that he/she 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/her 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 by

- 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 him/her gradually that books are precious things. They must be minded and handled carefully and put away safely.
- Look at the pictures with him/her and talk to him/her about what they say.
- Read him/her nursery rhymes. They will learn them off in their own time. Don't try to push them.
- Above all, don't push him/her with his/her 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 they know what each one looks like then 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/she uses in understanding and talking about certain things in his/her daily experience e.g.

- He/she 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 his/her natural method of learning since he/she was a baby. This at times can be a nuisance but if it allows him/her to do the learning themselves 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.**

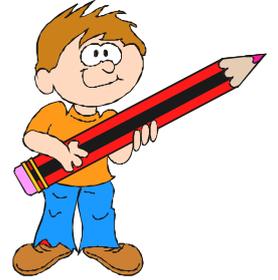
We would want his/her parents to give every encouragement and help to the small ones in their efforts to acquire Irish. If they learn new words in school encourage them to use them at home. Use little Irish phrases or words now and again. Children are delighted to find out that their parents are into 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. He/she must learn to hold the pencil properly and make regular shapes. His/her hand and finger muscles are only gradually developing at this stage.

You Can Help...

- He/she must develop the ability to get the hand and eye working together. This is very important. Get him/her 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/she may be making block letters at home even before he/she comes to school. This is fine. But when he/she starts making lower case letters at school you should try to get him/her to discontinue the blocks and practise his/her new system whenever he/she feels like it. Consult the teacher about this.
- Don't discourage left-handedness. If that is his/her definite natural inclination, don't attempt to change him/her.



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 they have learned at school. He/she 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 who they played with at school and to ensure he/she isn't alone, also encourage mixing rather than being dependent on one friend only. **Rough behaviour is totally discouraged in the playground.** You will find a list of school rules and policies in the enclosed School Booklet for Parents.

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 them 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 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 siad”