

## **Junior Infants - Starting School**

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.

However, it is also a time when parents and teachers need to take special care to ensure that the transition to school life 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 curriculum 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 children's interest and nurture the desire for knowledge.

### **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. 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 have a negative impact on a child's learning. At the same time, we must cultivate readiness so that each child can reach his/her own potential.

The **rates of progress** of children can vary greatly. We try to give each child an opportunity to move ahead at his/her own pace in so far as we possibly can.

The 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:

- Developing oral language and ability to express oneself.
- Sharpening senses, especially seeing, hearing and touching.
- Developing physical co-ordination especially of hands and fingers.
- Extending concentration span and promoting attentive listening.
- Learning through play – the most enjoyable and effective way.
- Co-operating with the teacher and with other children.
- Performing tasks by him/herself.
- Working and sharing with others.
- Getting each child to accept the general order, which is necessary for the class to work well.

### **Before Your Child Starts...**

A child who is physically, emotionally and socially independent will feel secure and confident at school and will readily embrace life in the classroom.

You can help by encouraging your child to:

- Button and unbutton his/her coat and hang it up.

- Use the toilet without help. This should include flushing and hand washing.
  - Share toys and playthings with others and 'take turns'.
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- Tidy up and put playthings away.
  - Remain contentedly for a few hours in the home of a relation, friend or neighbour. If children have had this experience, then separation from their parents when they start school will not cause them any great anxiety.

## **The Curriculum**

### **Some Important Areas of Early Learning**

#### Oral Language Development

It is important that a child's ability to talk is as advanced as possible. It is through speech that children communicate their thoughts and feelings, needs and desires, curiosity and wonder.

#### **You Can Help ...**

Talk to your child naturally and casually about things of interest that you may be doing at home, in the shop, in the car, etc. Remember that all the time children are absorbing the language they hear around them. It takes them a while to make it their own and use it to express their needs.

Try to make time to listen when your child wants to tell you something that is important to him/her.

Introduce a child gently to Why? How? When? Where? If? etc. Asking questions demands more advanced language structures.

#### **First Steps in Reading**

Ability to read is the foundation for all future learning. However, learning to read is a gradual process and much preparatory work must be completed before a child is introduced to a 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 meant to be enjoyable. It should never start as a chore for the small child.

### **How can you help?**

- Have attractive colourful books in the home.
- Read a variety of stories from time to time. Children will begin to associate these wonderful tales with books and reading.
- Children have their own particular favourite stories that they never tire of hearing. Repeat them over and over again and gradually get your child to tell you the story.
- You must gradually convey that books are precious things. They should be minded, handled carefully and put away safely.
- Look at the pictures and talk about what they say.
- Read nursery rhymes.
- Sing the alphabet song with your child, so that he/ she has at least heard of the letters. If he /she knows what each one looks like, all the better.
- Above all, don't push with early reading. You may turn your child against it for evermore.

## **Understanding Maths**

### **First a Word of Warning**

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

- Colours – black, white, red, green, etc.
- Prepositions (telling position), over/under, before/after, inside/outside etc.
- Matching/Sorting–objects of the same size/colour/texture/ shape etc.
- Patterns
- Odd One Out – difference in size/colour etc.
- Number (0 – 5)

Some children grasp these concepts very quickly. For others it takes a long time. Be patient. Mathematical understanding cannot be forced 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 could try to 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, etc.

Children associate certain numbers with particular things – two hands, four wheels, five fingers etc.

Counting – one, two, three, four, etc.

Setting the table

Drawing attention to shapes in the home and the environment.

The child's understanding of Maths is best developed by handling, investigating and using real objects. This has been his/her natural method of learning since babyhood.

### **Gaeilge**

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

Young children 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.**

Please help the 'small ones' in their efforts to acquire Irish. If they learn new words in school encourage them to use these at home. Use little Irish phrases or words now and again. Children are delighted to find out that their parents understand their new code as well.

## **Getting Ready For Writing**

Making letters on paper is not easy for small children. They must learn to hold the pencil properly and make regular shapes. Their hand and finger muscles are only gradually developing at this stage. They must develop the ability to get hand and eye working together (hand-eye coordination). This is very important.

## **You Can Help ...**

Encourage your child to manipulate toys like:

- Jigsaws, Lego, beads to thread etc.  
Plasticine (Marla) to make his/her own shapes.
- A colouring book and thick crayons. (In school, we use chubby crayons for most of the first year)
- Sheets of paper that he/she can cut up with a safe scissors.

When your child begins to use a pencil make sure that he/she holds it correctly from the beginning. It is difficult to change bad habits. Special pencils are available for early users.

Pencils are provided in school for school use.

Children may be making block capital letters at home even before coming to school. This is fine. But when they start making lower case letters at school, please try to encourage

them to discontinue the use of capitals and practise the new system.

Children who begin to show left hand dominance should be allowed to hold the crayon / pencil in the left hand.

### **Other Areas of the Curriculum**

The child in junior infants learns much through many other activities, which take place at school. Their general development is enhanced through Visual Art, P.E., Music, Drama, S.P.H.E., Science and, of course, through Religious Education.

**Social skills** are very important. Central to the school ethos is the belief that everybody will thrive in an atmosphere of courtesy, respect and understanding. Our goal is to foster the development of interpersonal and mixing skills and to encourage the use of good manners such as “please/thank you” throughout the school day.

It is important to encourage your child to mix with many new friends at school, rather than being dependent on one friend only. Teachers move the children to different places regularly to encourage the development of a wide circle of friends.

**SPHE** – Social, Personal and Health Education is part of the National Curriculum.

The aims are:

- To promote the personal development and well being of the child.
- To foster in the child a sense of care and respect for himself/herself and others and an appreciation of the dignity of every human being.
- To promote the health of every child and provide a foundation for healthy living in all its aspects.

- To enable the child to make informed decisions and choices about the social, personal and health dimensions of life both now and in the future.
- To develop in the child a sense of social responsibility, a commitment to active and participative citizenship and an appreciation of the democratic way of life.
- To enable the child to respect human and cultural diversity and to appreciate and understand the interdependent nature of the world.

As children progress through the SPHE programme, they will encounter a wide range of issues appropriate to their age grouping. These will include substance misuse, relationships, sexuality, child abuse prevention, prejudice and discrimination.

Aspects of the following programmes are used to enhance the teaching of SPHE:

- Stay Safe
- Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)
- Alive O
- Walk Tall

**Religious Education** – We encourage all children to partake in the Alive O Religious Programme. However, if you do not wish your child to participate please contact the class teacher.

Preparation for First Penance & First Eucharist takes place in Second Class and Confirmation in Sixth Class.

### **Computers**

While IT is not a curriculum subject, computers can be a helpful resource to pupils and teachers alike. As there is access to the Internet on the school computers, children are only allowed to use them in the classroom. Interactive whiteboards have been installed in all classrooms.



## **Preparing for the 'Big Day'**

The child's first day at school is a day to remember for the rest of his/her life.

**You can help to make it a really happy one for him/her.**

**Tell your child about school** beforehand, casually, and talk about it as a happy place where there will be a big welcome and many new friends. The school follows a very specific procedure when allocating children to the different junior infant classes. We consider gender, creed, age, nationality, special educational needs, number of siblings per class etc in order to ensure an equal balance in each class. It is not possible to consider requests to accommodate friends in the same class.

**Don't use school or the teacher as a threat.** Comments such as "I'll tell your teacher if you don't do as you are told", though said light-heartedly, can make some children very apprehensive.

Children like to have the **school uniform and a new bag** when they start school. These help a child to identify more readily with the school and with other children.

Parents who have no older children in the school are invited to an Information Evening in June. An Open Afternoon is also held where all children and their parents are invited to visit a Junior Infant classroom and meet the Infant teachers.

## **The Big Day**

### **Coming in...**

When you arrive at the classroom, **be as casual as you can.** Your child will meet his/her teacher and the other children. There will be activities at every table and each child will be encouraged to sit down and join in.

Hopefully each child will quickly become absorbed in the new surroundings. So having assured your son/daughter that you will be back to collect him/her, say goodbye and **make your getaway without delay**.

### **Handling the Upset Child**

In spite of the best efforts of both parents and teachers, 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 teachers** - They are experienced and resourceful and 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 this causes the children to become anxious. When you have reassured your child, leave as soon as possible. The teacher can distract and humour your child more easily when you are not around.

**You must be firm from the start.** Even if a child is upset you must insist that he/she stays for a short time - even ten minutes.

### **Going Home**

Be sure to **collect your child on time**. Children can become very upset if they feel they have been forgotten.

Keep out of view until the children are being dismissed.

If at any time the collecting routine has to be changed, please inform your child and the class teacher.

### **Junior Infants – First Week**

On the **first day**, Junior Infants come to school at **10.00am** and go **home at 11.30am**. In order to ease the transition to formal school, **Junior Infants will start at 08.30am and go home at 11.30am for the first two weeks approx.** After that, they go home at 1.10pm.

It is imperative that all children are punctual in the morning. The 20 minutes between 08.30am and 08.50am is a very important time in the school day. This is when the younger children have activity time or structured play. It is a time when teachers get to correct homework or hear children's reading.

There are two recreation periods in the school day, one from 10.20am to 10.30am and the other from 12.00 to 12.30pm.

Children need plenty of rest after the effort and excitement of a day at school. Try to ensure that your child goes to bed early and has a good night's sleep.

When the children have settled in and hopefully, look upon school as a "home from home", do continue to show interest in their daily adventures.

A child should never be compared adversely with other children while he/she is listening. **This may well damage self-esteem.**

## **Parting Thoughts**

### **Our Hope**

We value the partnership approach to Education. If you have worries or concerns, ideas or recommendations, feel free to contact the class teacher or any member of staff.

Please refer to the school booklet at [www.stpatricksns.ie](http://www.stpatricksns.ie) . It may well answer questions in the future.

We look forward to working with you and your child/children during the coming years.

***"Mol an óige, agus tiocfaidh sí"***