

**A Booklet for Parents of Infants Starting in
St Kevin's Junior National School**



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Fáilte romhat agus roimh do pháiste.



Starting school will be the first big change in the life of your child. Up to this they have felt safe and secure with you in the home and with their family but now they will face the wider world of the 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 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 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 **understand the class routines**, 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 they can look after himself in these areas he will feel secure and confident and settle in readily.

It would help greatly if he is able to-

- **Button and unbutton his coat** and hang it up.
- **Use the toilet without help** (please inform the school if your child is not toilet trained)
- Also **encourage personal hygiene** and cleanliness. Your child should know to flush the toilet and wash his hands, without having to be told.
- Use a tissue for their nose when necessary.
- **Share** toys and playthings with others and "take turns".
- **Tidy up** and put away his playthings.

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 him.**



- **Tell them about school** beforehand, casually, and talk about it as a happy place where there will be a big welcome for him and he will meet new friends.
- **Don't use school or the teacher as a threat.** "If you behave like that for teacher she'll will be disappointed" though said light-heartedly can make some children very apprehensive.
- If you feel it would help, you could take him for a stroll to the junior classrooms and play area on an afternoon during June when the other children have gone home. They can browse around and become familiar with his new environment. On arrival you could drop in to meet the Principal with them and perhaps he could meet his teacher, as well.
- A child will like to have **their new uniform and new bag** when they begin. These help a child identify more readily with the school and other children.
- Your child's books will be taken from them on 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 he thinks they will never see the books again. All books/twistables must be marked with your child's name.

The Big Day



Coming in...

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

Hopefully they will be absorbed in his new surroundings. So having assured your child 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.

The following guide is 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.

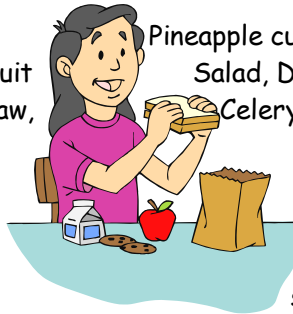
Quiche.

Pizza.

Fruit & Vegetables

Apples, Banana, Peach, Plum,
Orange segments, Grapes, Fruit
Cucumber, Sweetcorn, Coleslaw,

Pineapple cubes, Mandarins,
Salad, Dried fruit, Tomato,
Celery.



Drinks

Milk, including low fat.

Fruit juices.

High juice Squashes, i.e. low sugar content.

Homemade soup (use Bovril occasionally as it is salty).

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.

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. **A carton of cold Milk is provided daily by the school.**

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 him, leave as fast as possible.** The teacher can distract and humour him more easily when you are not around.
- **Check back discreetly in a short while.** You will invariably find that calm has been restored.

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- **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.
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As Time Goes on...

- School begins at 8.50.m. To ease the child into the school routine we have a policy where Junior Infants go home for the first week at 11.00a.m, second week at 12.00. (so no lunch). After that they go home at 1.30p.m. Please make sure that your child is collected at 1.30p.m. **Get your child into the habit of being in good time for school from the beginning.** Mid-morning break: 10.15a.m. to 10.30a.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 have 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 them an ear if they want to tell you things-but don't pester them with questions.
- Mind that you take some of their "stories" with a pinch of salt.
- If their progress is slow do not compare them adversely with other children while they are listening. **Loss of self-esteem can be very damaging.**
- Be careful too about criticising your child's teacher in their presence. Remember that she is your child's mother figure while they are at school and for your child's own wellbeing it is important that your child has a good positive image of her.
- This last caution applies to their image of the school as well. **Your child's school is always "the greatest"-whatever its faults.**
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- Children often “forget” or relay messages incorrectly, so **please, check your child’s bag/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. We would appreciate if the money for Art and Craft’s and the money for photocopying were paid before end of September. As the year goes on, there may be other demands on the purse strings, but they are optional. These include:

- School Photographs
- Sponsored Walk

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 a child communicates their thoughts and feelings, their needs and desires, curiosity and wonder. If a 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 they may be doing-at home, in the shop, in the car, etc. Remember that all the time children are absorbing the language they hear about them. It takes a while to make it their own and to use it for their own needs.
- Try to make time to listen when your child wants to tell you something that is important to them.
- Answer 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.
- Your child may have their own particular favourite story that they never tire of hearing. Repeat them over and over again and gradually get him 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 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 a variety of stories from time to time.
- You must convey to your child that books are precious things. They must be minded and handled carefully and put away safely.
- Look at the pictures and talk to your child about what they say.
- Read nursery rhymes. Children will learn them. Don't try to push your child.
- Above all, don't push your child with his early reading. You may turn your child 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 they at least heard of the letters. In time they will identify the sound and look of each letter.

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 we use in understanding and talking about certain things in their daily experience e.g.

- We associate certain numbers with particular things - two hands, four wheels, five fingers etc. Counting - one, two, three, colours: black, orange, 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.

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 the natural method of learning since your child was a baby. This at times can be a nuisance but if it allows a child to do their own learning 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 a small child. They must learn to hold the pencil properly and make regular shapes. Their hands 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 children manipulating toys like:

- (a) Jigsaws, Lego, beads to thread etc
 - (b) Play dough
 - (c) A colouring book and thick crayons
 - (d) Sheets of paper that they can cut up with a safe scissors
- When a child begins to use a pencil ensure that they hold it correctly at the start. It will be difficult to change this later.
 - A child may be making block letters at home even before they come to school. This is fine. But when they start making lower case letters at school you should try to get him 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 their definite natural inclination, don't attempt to change it.

Other Areas of the Curriculum

The child in junior infants 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, Nature and through Religious Education.

In regard to the last area, R.E, 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. If you have any concerns in relation to Religious Education please speak privately to your child's class teacher as we are mindful of personal choice.

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 they are not alone, also encourage mixing rather than being dependent on one friend only. **Rough behaviour is totally discouraged in the playground.** We introduce activities in the yard during big break for children to play with.

Parting Thoughts

Teacher and Parent

We are mindful that it takes time to adjust to school routines. As the teacher is getting to know you and your child's individual needs you may have concerns. A quick word in the line at morning time or at collection time at the end of the day is fine however, we ask that you are mindful of a teacher's responsibility to all children at this time therefore, if you have concerns that require a discussion with your child's teacher please arrange a

meeting with your child's teacher through the office. This ensures that time is given to both you and the teacher to discuss any concerns/issues.

Our Hope

We are offering this booklet to Parents as a little practical help in supporting the education of their children at the very early stages. We will We are 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"