



# Your Child in the Primary School

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*Tips for Parents*

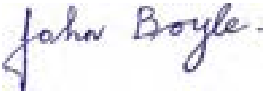
# Foreword

Dear Parent,

Your child is about to start school. Think of it! New friends, a new place, new sounds, new rules, more people; it is a whole new world. That is the first day. Every school day after that will be part of that new world of maturing, learning and growing.

We hope that this publication will give you an understanding of the modern primary school and how it works. Primary teachers believe that sharing the details of the day-to-day workings of the primary school is the first step in building a partnership between parents and teachers. Throughout the country teachers work closely with parents and recognise the importance of keeping parents fully involved and informed about primary school. This is a practical example of partnership between school and home.

We hope that you will find this booklet useful.



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# From home to school

From birth, children learn naturally and informally from their parents and from the world around them. In school, children will start to read and write at their own pace. Just as they walk and talk at different ages, they also read and write when they are ready.

It is not necessary for children to be able to read or write before coming to school. It is far more important that they look forward to starting school.

Children usually begin primary school at four to five years of age. All children are entitled to free primary and post-primary education.

The primary school, or national school, usually has a junior infants and a senior infants class, followed by 1st to 6th classes. There are many different types of primary schools and parents can choose the school they feel suits their child best.

You should check to see if there are places available – but be prepared that there may be a chance there is a waiting list or no space for your child. Research other schools around your area and make contact with them to find a place.

## Resources

- ⌘ National Council for Curriculum and Assessment  
[www.ncca.ie/en/primary](http://www.ncca.ie/en/primary)
- ⌘ Department of Education  
[www.bit.ly/3rGg12M](http://www.bit.ly/3rGg12M)
- ⌘ Citizens Information  
[www.citizensinformation.ie](http://www.citizensinformation.ie)

# Help prepare your child for learning

- ⌘ **Positive attitude** – it is important to create a positive attitude towards learning. If children have this, then they will try to become involved in the learning process.
- ⌘ **Curiosity** – the natural inquisitiveness of children is central to learning. Children are encouraged to ask more questions when they get positive responses.
- ⌘ **Self-confidence** – if children are confident about their abilities then they will be more willing to take on new challenges.
- ⌘ **Listening** – children should be encouraged to develop good listening skills. Instruction and directions are a big part of school life so children need to be good listeners.
- ⌘ **Interacting with others** – children need to learn key skills like how to share and take turns. They also need to learn respect for others and to be aware of the feelings of others.
- ⌘ **Independence** – in order to take part in school life, children need to have a good level of independence.



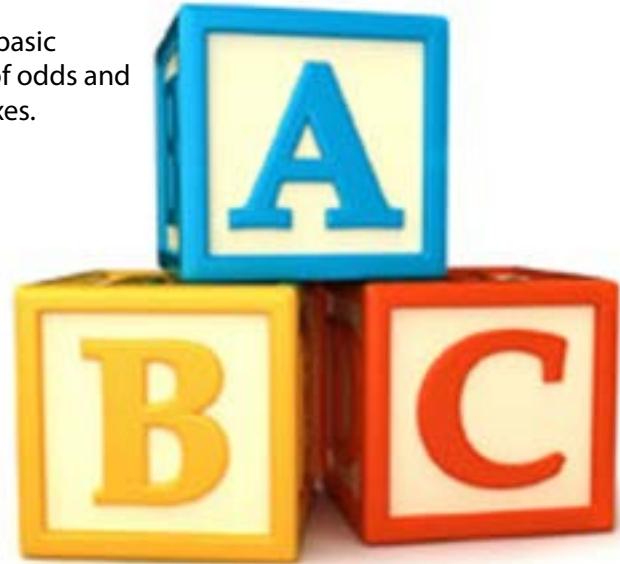
The following will help you develop your child's management of new skills:

## Play

Children learn through play and should be given lots of opportunities to:

- ✎ **Act out roles** – pretending they are someone else. Children love to pretend that they are nurses, doctors, mothers, fathers or shopkeepers, all of which helps them to use language.
- ✎ **Play with objects** – sand, water, jigsaws, boxes and bricks and other toys.
- ✎ **Engage in physical play** – ball games, skipping or chasing games.

Children should have blocks to build, simple jigsaws or basic construction toys. Encourage them to build and make use of odds and ends such as paper-plates, used packets, cartons or egg boxes.



## Language

The importance of language cannot be over-emphasised. Language is essential for developing reading and writing and is a vital part of the social and emotional development of children. In developing your child's language skills, encourage your child to:

- ⌘ Listen
- ⌘ Explain
- ⌘ Tell
- ⌘ Talk
- ⌘ Question
- ⌘ Retell

Listen to children and encourage them to talk. Give them time to explain or describe events to you. Avoid interrupting, even if you know what they are going to say. When talking to your child, don't economise with words. Don't use baby talk.

Activities that may assist to develop language include:

- ⌘ Encourage your child to name objects in a room or place that are of a particular size, shape or texture:
  - What shape is the book on the shelf?
  - What does the rug feel like?
- ⌘ Ask your child to describe a particular incident which has taken place such as:
  - What did you see at the zoo today?
  - What happened at the dentist today?

- ⌘ Ask your child to categorise objects:
  - Name all the food on the table.
  - Name all the vegetables in the fridge.
  - Name all items in the fridge that are not vegetables.
- ⌘ Assist your child to use language to reason in various situations:
  - Why do you wear a coat in cold weather?
  - Why do you need to put on suncream in warm weather?
- ⌘ Help your child to use language to describe past, present and future events:
  - What will you do when you go to the playground?
  - What happens when we go to the supermarket?
- ⌘ Encourage your child to express their feelings:
  - How did you feel when you fell over?
- ⌘ Use of language in reacting to various situations:
  - What would you do if granny gave you lots of money?





Help children to use language to solve problems, to give directions, to tell you about things that have happened to them during the day.

- ✎ Rhymes and riddles are a good way of encouraging language development.
- ✎ Reading to your child also assists language development.

**Irish**, as both language and subject, is most often new to children beginning school. From time to time, use words or short sentences in Irish to help introduce children to the Irish language. This will help them handle a second language. Familiarity with expressions such as ‘máis é do thoil é’ (please), ‘go raibh maith agat’ (thank you), and ‘maith an cailín/buachaill’ (good girl/boy), or ‘maith thú’ (well done) will be a help to them with school.

Help your child to identify **colours**. This could also lend itself quite easily to the use of Irish as it may involve single word terms only, such as ‘dearg’ (red), ‘buí’ (yellow) or ‘bán’ (white).

Children with **English as an additional language** need much practise and repetition. Encourage them to view children’s programmes on TV, learn nursery rhymes, use English when playing with friends and label items around the house in English (e.g. fridge, cup, plate).

Children learn their first language in the home, and it is important that children develop their language skills in their mother tongue at home. Research shows that it is not unusual for non-English speaking pupils to enter a ‘silent period’ when they begin school. This could be caused when a child suddenly finds themselves surrounded by a different language, different surroundings and different people. As language skills are transferable, children will gradually learn and acquire their new language in school.

A language support teacher may be available. You should check with your child’s school.

## Reading

Read to your child regularly. This encourages a love of books and creates an interest in reading, making it a lifelong learning experience. Ensure that reading is an enjoyable experience. Don't prolong reading when your child has lost interest – short enjoyable experiences are best.

Again, reading to children in Irish or English may serve a positive end in making their more formal encounter with a second language that bit easier for them. (Remember to keep it simple!)

Pay attention to the mechanics of reading, such as holding the book and turning the pages. Let your finger go under the words as you read from left to right. The child's main interest will be in pictures so allow time to examine and talk about them.

Encourage them to repeat what happened in the story and to talk about their favourite bit. As your child becomes more confident with the mechanics of reading you can play 'what do you think would have happened if...!' games, or 'what would you have done if you were...?'

If your child has English as an additional language, it is important that you choose suitable reading material. Check with your school for advice.



## Writing

Young children need to develop the right muscles in their hands before they can begin to write properly. You can help this development by encouraging them to do things that involve using their hands such as drawing, cutting paper or using plasticine clay.

You can give them:

- ⌘ Large sheets of paper and chubby crayons for scribbling, drawing, colouring in, tracing or copying;
- ⌘ Scissors for cutting paper (be sure to use scissors that are safe for children to use);
- ⌘ Activities that involve pouring, stirring, mixing or rolling (playdough);
- ⌘ Dolls or teddys with clothes that can be buttoned, laced, zipped and tied;
- ⌘ Encouragement to dress themselves.

Allow your child to use the hand they choose naturally. Being left-handed will not cause any problems in school!

## Maths

You can help your child become familiar with the ideas they will need to understand when they start maths in school. Allow your child to help sort cutlery, set the table, count out the correct number of spoons or forks. Allow your child to help you divide sweets among friends. Help your child to sort and match objects on the basis of:

- ✎ **Size** – place all the small objects in the box;
- ✎ **Shape** – put all the round objects on the table;
- ✎ **Colour** – put all the red items on the chair;
- ✎ **Texture** – put all the smooth items in the box;
- ✎ **Function** – collect all the items which roll together;
- ✎ **Material** – gather all the wooden items together.

Again, the incidental use of the Irish number terms is easy for some as, just like with colours, it entails the use of single words such as 'aon' (one), 'dó' (two) or 'trí' (three).

**Encourage your child to collect things** on walks, like shells, cones, pebbles, nuts and feathers. They can have fun later sorting and classifying the different objects. Try the same thing with collections of buttons, badges or lids, and other odds and ends from around the house.

**Use language** with your child that will help them to understand the concepts of 'more', 'less', 'the same', 'different', 'longer than', 'shorter than' and other useful comparisons.

## Confidence and self-esteem

If children are confident about their abilities and capabilities then they will be more willing to take on new challenges. Parents can build their children's self-esteem by becoming aware of and noticing their abilities, talents, interests and skills and then drawing attention to them. Praise children frequently and give them opportunities to demonstrate their abilities.

Praise and encouragement shape behaviour and promote learning. When children are praised they learn that they are special, can take pride in their achievements and become aware of their talents and abilities. If parents view children in a positive manner then they will view themselves in a positive light also. When children are aware that parents approve of their actions or activities then their level of self-esteem will be enhanced.

### Using language to build self-esteem

A very important factor in the development of children's self-esteem is the language used by parents. The many interactions that parents have each day with their children provide children with feedback. It pays dividends, therefore, if children are given feedback in the language of self-esteem.

Such feedback contains three elements:

- /// A description of the behaviour.
- /// Parents' reaction to the behaviour.
- /// Acknowledgement of feeling.



It is important to point out the difference between the child's worth and their behaviour. In other words, a child is not a good child because they tidy the kitchen or a bad child because they spill milk on the carpet.

Children are good because they are special to the parents who love and care about them. By describing behaviour, children get an accurate picture of how their actions affect others, rather than confusing their behaviour with their basic worth as individuals.

The following example outlines how the **language of self-esteem** can be used to correct children. 'I notice books and toys all over the kitchen floor' (description of behaviour). 'When the kitchen is tidy we will have dinner' (reason for behavioural change). 'I know you are tired and hungry at the moment' (acknowledgement of feeling). 'I want the toys put away and the books placed neatly on the shelves' (statement of expectation).

These steps involve direct clear communication and avoid language which could undermine a child's self-esteem.

The use of the language of self-esteem in correcting children is worthwhile, as children are more likely to respond favourably when they are given reasons for the correction.

If children participate in the **daily routine at home** they will feel confident about dealing with the school situation. If you are constantly saying, "Don't touch" you are saying, "Don't learn". If your children feel you have confidence in them they will feel they can achieve.

## Resources

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- ‡ Department of Education  
[www.bit.ly/3rGg12M](http://www.bit.ly/3rGg12M)
- ‡ National Council for Curriculum and Assessment  
[www.ncca.ie/en](http://www.ncca.ie/en)
- ‡ Schooldays  
[www.schooldays.ie](http://www.schooldays.ie)
- ‡ National Parents' Council  
[www.npc.ie](http://www.npc.ie)
- ‡ Help my Kid Learn  
[www.helpmykidlearn.ie](http://www.helpmykidlearn.ie)
- ‡ Handwriting for Kids  
[www.handwritingforkids.com](http://www.handwritingforkids.com)
- ‡ Read Today  
[www.readtoday.com](http://www.readtoday.com)
- ‡ International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS)  
[www.bit.ly/3rDjVcC](http://www.bit.ly/3rDjVcC)
- ‡ Early Childhood Ireland  
[www.earlychildhoodireland.ie](http://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie)
- ‡ Literacy Association of Ireland  
[www.literacyireland.com](http://www.literacyireland.com)
- ‡ Children's Books Ireland  
[www.childrensbooksireland.ie](http://www.childrensbooksireland.ie)

# Preparation for school

Starting school can be a time of anxiety for both children and parents. It is an enormous change for a child to share a room with up to 30 other children and one adult. Parents can help to reduce such anxiety – both for themselves and their child – by gently preparing their child. This preparation should begin some months before the child starts school and should be carried out gradually.

The following may help:

- ✎ **An initial visit** to the school is a good idea. Meet the principal and the teacher of infants. Show your child the school building, the cloakroom, the classroom, where the toilets are and the playground.
- ✎ Talk to your child about **your own school days**. If you haven't got a funny memory of your first day at school, make one up!
- ✎ Emphasise the opportunities for **making friends** and for getting involved in new activities. However, don't 'hype up' school life. Approach this talk with a calm attitude and treat it as normal.
- ✎ Introduce your child to another junior infant, if possible have them around to play during the holidays. It is important for your child to see some **familiar faces** on the first day.
- ✎ **Children should be able to** put on and take off coats and hang them up, use the toilet and flush it properly, wash their hands and tidy up their crayons and colouring books. Play 'pretend school' with your child. Help to practice putting things in and out of the school bag and to open and close their lunchbox.
- ✎ Teach them to use a handkerchief or tissue, share toys and take turns.
- ✎ Label your children's **clothes and belongings** clearly and help them to identify their own belongings.



- ⌘ If possible, your child should know their **home address**. You should also provide the school with the name and telephone number of a person to be contacted if you are not at home. Explain this arrangement to your child.
- ⌘ Allow your child **to do things independently**.
- ⌘ Encourage confidence by having them dress themselves. Allow time for this in the morning.
- ⌘ Don't criticise if things are not exactly to your liking, such as buttons that are not perfect or a tie that is slightly crooked.
- ⌘ **Praise their efforts** at every opportunity.

# Making life manageable for the junior infant

Children cannot be independent if they cannot manage the equipment you provide. Give some thought to the items your child needs to get through the school day:

- ⌘ If children cannot tie **laces** and need to change **shoes** – perhaps for PE – shoes with a velcro fastener will enable them to change quickly and independently.
- ⌘ Ask yourself whether or not children can manage their **clothes** by themselves. Zips may be easier than buttons for example. **Elasticated** trousers can be easier than zips or buttons.
- ⌘ If your child needs to bring a **lunch**, choose a lunch box and flask that they can open easily. Carton drinks are easier and safer than bottles. Again make sure that the school bag can hold these.
- ⌘ Give some thought to lunches too. If your child wants to bring oranges to school, for example, only peeled oranges should be included. Set yogurts may help avoid unnecessary spills.
- ⌘ Try to get your child up a little earlier, as this will ensure a stress-free morning.

# The curriculum

The primary school curriculum is designed to meet the different educational needs of the modern child. The curriculum takes a particular view of the child and of education. It celebrates the uniqueness of the child and seeks to develop each child's potential to the full. It provides a wide range of learning experiences that help the child to acquire particular knowledge, ideas and skills that will promote their development at every stage.

The curriculum aims to:

- ⌘ Develop each child's potential to the full;
- ⌘ Encourage a love of learning; and
- ⌘ Help children develop skills they will use all their lives.

**Resources**

- ⌘ National Council for Curriculum and Assessment  
[www.bit.ly/3pydDZ0](http://www.bit.ly/3pydDZ0)
- ⌘ Curriculum Online  
[www.curriculumonline.ie/Primary](http://www.curriculumonline.ie/Primary)



## The primary school curriculum

### Language

- ⌘ Gaeilge
- ⌘ English

### Mathematics

### Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE)

- ⌘ History
- ⌘ Geography
- ⌘ Science

### Physical education

### Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

### Arts education

- ⌘ Visual arts
- ⌘ Music
- ⌘ Drama

Note: Religious or ethical education is the responsibility of the different school patron bodies.

# Children with special educational needs

All schools have an additional teaching allocation to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs. Schools' allocations are determined by their educational profile.

**Special needs assistants (SNA)** are also allocated to schools where pupils with special educational needs are enrolled.

Both the **National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)**, through their psychologists, and the **National Council for Special Education (NCSE)**, through their advisors, visiting teachers and SENOs, provide advice and support to schools. Parents of pupils with special educational needs should discuss their child's needs with the school principal.

The **National Council for Special Education (NCSE)** is also available to support parents.

## Resources

- /// Department of Education  
[www.bit.ly/3loSLME](http://www.bit.ly/3loSLME)
- /// Citizens Information  
[www.bit.ly/31u3yo1](http://www.bit.ly/31u3yo1)
- /// National Council for Special Education  
[www.ncse.ie/for-parents](http://www.ncse.ie/for-parents)

# The first day

Your school will inform you of arrangements for bringing your child to school and collecting your child, what to expect in the classroom and in the yard and what protocols and practices may be in place to keep children safe in school.

It is important that you establish a good routine early. Check that all items – uniform, bag – are ready for the morning. Do this in a calm fashion and don't have your child over-excited or anxious going to bed. Give plenty of time in the morning for dressing, washing and eating a good breakfast. It is important that your child arrives at school before class starts as children can find it intimidating to walk into a class already in progress.

On the big day, if you are feeling upset, share these feelings with a partner/friend and not your child. Leave your child with the teacher, and tell the child you will be back at the appropriate time to collect them. If your child is upset, trust the teacher. The teacher is experienced and knows how to comfort an anxious child. Sometimes a small toy from home can be a comfort.

When the child arrives in school they will meet many children. There may be the familiar faces of friends from the neighbourhood as well as former classmates from pre-school. There will also be new faces.

It is important that you arrive on time to collect your child from school. Children will become upset if they see other children being collected and feel they are being left behind.

It takes **time for children to adapt to school life** and routine. Don't expect too much too soon. Talk to them about what happened and allow them to respond in their own way. If you ask "What did you learn today?" you will most likely be told, "Nothing!". Most of the work at infant level is activity based and children do not understand 'learning' in the same way that adults do. If, however, you ask "What did you do?", "Did you sing?", "Did you draw?", you will have more success.

If you feel that your child is worried about something that is school-related, talk to the teacher.

Your child will be tired coming home from school and, occasionally, may sleep for an hour or so when they arrive home. It is important to set a routine of quiet time together and early to bed.

### Dealing with the emotional side

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- ⌘ Ensure you talk to your child and let them know what will happen on their 'big day'.
- ⌘ Encourage your child to talk to you about their fears and try your best to reassure them.
- ⌘ The first day of school will be emotional for both you and your child – allow your child to cry.
- ⌘ Do not overstay – five minutes is plenty of time in the classroom!
- ⌘ Explain to your child that it is time for you to leave, and that you will be back soon.
- ⌘ Ensure you are early for pick up, as your child may become stressed if they do not see you when school is finished.
- ⌘ Getting support from other parents may be helpful in the early days.

# The school day

The length of the school day in primary school is five hours and 40 minutes. There is normally a 'little break' around 11am, and a 'big break' around 12.30pm. The length of the school day may be reduced by an hour for children in junior and senior infants. Ensure you are well familiarised with the opening and closing times of the school, and keep check of the dates of school closures, etc. Parents must accept responsibility for their children when it is necessary to allow them home during school hours.

All parents will be aware that even the most closely supervised children will have accidents occasionally. This is true of both home and school. If your child has an accident at school, the teachers will respond in a caring and professional manner.

Teachers often feel that parents have been misled on the issue of compensation for accidental injuries. There is no automatic entitlement to compensation for accidents in the school anymore than there is for accidents in the home or elsewhere.

## The school year

The primary school year has **three terms**. The first term is from the end of August/beginning of September to Christmas, the second is from early January to late March/April (Easter) and the third is from Easter to the end of June each year. In order to avoid problems for families, breaks at Christmas, Easter and mid-term in the first and second terms have been standardised.





# School year 2023/24

**October 2023 – mid-term break:** Schools close from Monday, 30 October to Friday, 3 November 2023 inclusive.

**Christmas 2023:** All schools will close on Friday, 22 December 2023, which will be the final day of the school term. Schools will re-open on Monday, 8 January 2024.

**February 2024 – mid-term break:** All primary schools will close on Thursday, 15 February and Friday, 16 February 2024. (Primary schools may use three discretionary days to extend this break to a five-day-break from Monday, 12 February to Friday, 16 February 2024 inclusive.)

**Easter 2024:** All schools will close on Friday, 22 March 2024, which will be the final day of the school term. All schools will re-open on Monday, 8 April 2024.

In addition, a small number of discretionary days are available to schools to close as suits local circumstances. Each school usually produces a list of days when the school will close for holidays or for other reasons. Parents are given a copy of this list. If your school has a website, do check it regularly for updates regarding closures, half days, etc. If the school has to close unexpectedly or finish the school day early your child will be given a note, in advance, from the school. Make sure you look in your child's school bag **every day** for such notes.

## Resources

- Department of Education  
[bit.ly/SchoolHolidays2023-26](https://bit.ly/SchoolHolidays2023-26)
- School Days  
[bit.ly/schooldayscalendar2324](https://bit.ly/schooldayscalendar2324)
- INTO year planner  
[into.ie/wallplanner](https://into.ie/wallplanner)

# School attendance

Under the [Education Welfare Act](#) (2000), you must make sure that your child attends school regularly. If your child cannot attend school for any reason at all, a signed note must be given to the school, explaining why your child missed school.

The school is required to notify the statutory [Educational Welfare Services](#) if your child misses more than 20 days of school. An education welfare officer may then meet with you to discuss how you can make sure your child is in class regularly.

Although very rare, parents can be taken to court and fined/imprisoned if they fail to cooperate with an education welfare officer with regard to their child's attendance.

It is strongly advised that you do not take a child out of school for holidays. Taking a holiday, even a short one, during term time means that your child will miss very important school time. On return, it may be difficult for your child to catch up with the work they may have missed.

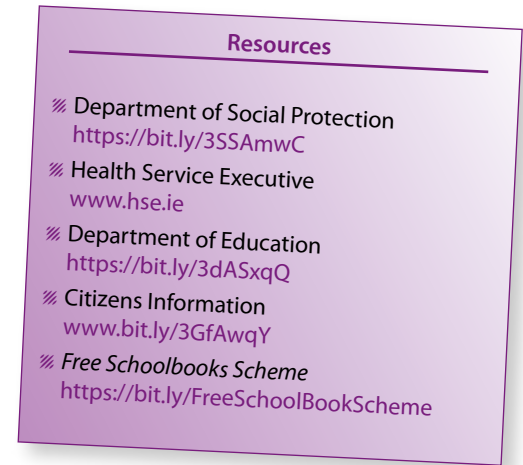


# Help with uniforms and books

Most schools require pupils to wear a school uniform as part of their admissions policy. Wherever possible, generic rather than branded items will be specified by the school. If you feel you will struggle with the costs of school uniforms, you may be entitled to receive help from the [Department of Social Protection](#). The [Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance](#) can help towards the cost of uniforms and shoes for children.

From September 2023, the introduction of the [Free Schoolbooks Scheme](#) means that pupils in primary and special schools will have their schoolbooks provided by the school. Parents should not be asked to pay a contribution toward the cost of schoolbooks, workbooks, or copybooks. All schoolbooks will remain the property of the school and must be returned to the school at the end of the year. There may be some related classroom resources that are not covered by the scheme. Additional details (if any) on what items parents will need to supply for the return to school in September 2023 will be communicated to parents by the school.

There is more information on the [Free Schoolbooks Scheme](#) [here](#).



# Healthy eating

Children form their eating habits for life from an early age, so it is important that you start them on the right road. A **good diet**, plenty of sleep and exercise are essential for a growing child. Allow plenty of time in the morning for your child to eat a healthy breakfast. Choose lunches carefully. Sandwiches and **fruit** are healthier than sweets and biscuits. Some schools have a 'no sweets' policy. If this is the case you should comply with this and explain it simply to your child. Health education is part of the school curriculum. In school, children will be encouraged to make good choices in relation to food. Your choice for them should not conflict with this.

**Eating habits**, started in childhood, will influence your child's chances of a healthy life. A good variety of nourishing foods is important from the start to ensure a healthy growing child.

Children's lunches sometimes tend to be low in fibre and high in fat and sugar. To change your child's eating habits for the better, it is best to do so gradually. Start by substituting sweets or biscuits with pieces of fresh fruit one day a week in order to make your child's lunch healthier and better for teeth. Then move on to two, three and four days a week before eventually doing so for the full schoolweek.

The **food pyramid** will help you choose a healthy and varied diet for your child.



## The Food Pyramid

For adults, teenagers and children aged five and over

Healthy food for good health.

Foods and drinks high in fat, sugar and salt



NOT every day

Most people consume snacks high in fat, sugar and salt and sugar sweetened drinks up to 6 times a day (Healthy Ireland Survey 2016). There are no recommended servings for Top Shelf foods and drinks because they are not needed for good health.

Fats, spreads and oils



Use as little as possible

Use as little as possible. Choose mono or polyunsaturated reduced-fat or light spreads. Choose rapeseed, olive, canola, sunflower or corn oils. Limit mayonnaise, colsalad and salad dressings as they also contain oil. Always cook with as little fat or oil as possible - grilling, oven-baking, steaming, boiling or stir-frying.

Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans and nuts



2 servings a day

Choose lean meat, poultry (without skin) and fish. Eat oily fish up to twice a week. Choose eggs, beans and nuts. Limit processed salty meats such as sausages, bacon and ham.

Milk, yogurt and cheese



3 to 5 servings a day  
5 to 6 for children age 5-11 and teenagers age 11-16

Choose reduced-fat or low-fat varieties. Choose low-fat milk and yogurt more often than cheese. Enjoy these in small amounts. Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding need 3 servings a day.

Wholemeal cereals and breads, potatoes, pasta and rice



3-5 servings a day  
Up to 17\* for teenage boys and men age 19-25

Wholemeal and wholegrain cereals are best. Enjoy at each meal. The number of servings depends on age, size, if you are a man or a woman and on activity levels. Watch your serving size and use the Daily Servings Guide below.\*

Vegetables, salad and fruit



5-7 servings a day

Base your meals on these and enjoy a variety of colours. More is better: Limit fruit juice to unsweetened, once a day.

Healthy food for good health. Enjoy a variety every day.

## Breakfast







For school children, breakfast is perhaps the most important meal of the day. Not only does breakfast break the child's long overnight fast and help concentration, it also lays down the foundation for healthy eating for the rest of the day. Try a wholegrain or bran-type cereal with chopped fresh fruit on top with milk, an orange or unsweetened fruit juice and some wholemeal bread, toasted or plain.

## Lunch

Lunch should provide one-third of your child's food requirements for the day. The simplest and most effective way to plan a healthy lunch is to include in your child's lunchbox one food from each of the four main shelves in the food pyramid: bread, cereals, potatoes; fruit and vegetables; milk, cheese, yogurt; and meat, fish and alternatives.

### Seven steps to creating healthy, varied and interesting lunchboxes

- ✎ Include a wide variety of foods: starchy foods, protein, dairy and fruit and vegetables.
- ✎ Try to offer different foods when possible.
- ✎ Vary the types of bread: e.g. pitta bread, bagels, wholemeal rolls – keep a stock in the freezer.
- ✎ Cook extra rice/pasta in the evening – these can make interesting salads.
- ✎ Theme your lunchbox on a different country: e.g. Italian – try a pasta salad; Mexican – filled flour tortilla wraps.
- ✎ Home-made soup (in a Thermos flask) is great for cold days, while salads are light and refreshing for warmer weather. Both are packed with essential vitamins and minerals.
- ✎ Fluids are important for children – up to six cups of fluid should be encouraged daily. Milk and water are the best options. Straws and brightly coloured drinks bottles can make rehydrating more interesting!

MONDAY				
1 medium bread roll with chicken and lettuce	+		+	Handful of carrot sticks
	+		+	Pot of low fat yoghurt
				
TUESDAY				
Small pitta bread with tuna and sweetcorn	+		+	1/2 wholemeal scone
			+	
				Carton of milk
WEDNESDAY				
2 tablespoons of pasta with 1 tablespoon of dried fruit	+		+	2 crackers with low fat cheddar cheese
			+	
				Carton of unsweetened fruit juice
THURSDAY				
2 slices of bread with cooked ham and lettuce	+	Small container of fruit in its own juice	+	
			+	Yoghurt
				
FRIDAY				
Tortilla wrap with chicken, sliced peppers and lettuce	+		+	Small tub of stewed fruit
			+	6 cherry tomatoes
				

### Resources

- ✎ This five-day food planner gives simple ideas for your child's lunchbox. For more information, see [www.safefood.eu](http://www.safefood.eu)
- ✎ Healthy Ireland [www.healthyireland.ie](http://www.healthyireland.ie)

## Tips to get children to eat more fruit and vegetables

- Children often prefer fruit to vegetables. As long as they eat a variety of fruit each day, they will get all of the vitamins and minerals they need.
- Bring your children shopping and, when you can, let them choose their own fruit and vegetables. That way they feel in control of what they eat and will get a sense of being 'grown up'.
- Children love easy to eat fruit like mandarins, small apples and bananas.
- Children often prefer raw vegetables. Offer carrot or cucumber sticks, tomatoes or any favourite raw vegetable as snacks! These can also be wrapped and put into lunch boxes. To encourage children to eat vegetables, hide them! Grate vegetables into stews, soups and casseroles. Offer children sweet vegetables like sweetcorn and carrots in preference to strong tasting vegetables like cabbage or parsnip.
- Add chopped fruit to breakfast cereals.
- For a simple dessert at any time of the day, chop an apple, banana or orange together for a tasty fruit salad that children will love. Preparing it themselves adds to their enjoyment.





## Useful websites

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Information regarding healthy eating for children, recipes and food safety:

- ⌘ Health Promotion  
[www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie)
- ⌘ Irish Food Board – Bord Bia  
[www.bordbia.ie](http://www.bordbia.ie)
- ⌘ Ireland’s Seafood Development Agency  
–Bord Iascaigh Mhara  
[www.bim.ie](http://www.bim.ie)
- ⌘ Irish Heart Foundation  
[www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)
- ⌘ National Dairy Council  
[www.ndc.ie](http://www.ndc.ie)
- ⌘ Safefood, Food Safety Promotion Board  
[www.safefood.eu](http://www.safefood.eu)
- ⌘ Healthy Eating Programme  
[www.fooddudes.ie](http://www.fooddudes.ie)
- ⌘ Coeliac Society of Ireland  
[www.coeliac.ie](http://www.coeliac.ie)
- ⌘ Diabetes Association  
[www.diabetes.ie](http://www.diabetes.ie)
- ⌘ Health Service Executive  
[www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)
- ⌘ National Parents Council  
[www.npc.ie](http://www.npc.ie)
- ⌘ Healthy Food for All  
[www.healthyfoodforall.com](http://www.healthyfoodforall.com)

# Health and hygiene

Your child is now sharing a room daily with a large number of four/five-year-olds. Close contact with other children is unavoidable, so particular attention should be paid to health and hygiene.

You should check **your child's hair** regularly for head lice. Watch out for **worms**. Inform the teacher or principal immediately if you notice anything like this.

**Children who are sick** should not be sent to school. You must consider the other children in the class. There is a school screening programme and a school immunisation programme for children attending public primary schools.

**School health screenings** are conducted by public-health nurses and medical officers and are carried out on the school premises. The school principal is told the date of the screenings in advance so parents can be notified and are entitled to be present. Children's hearing and sight are examined, and where requested by the parent or deemed necessary, a physical examination may be carried out.

Problems identified at these screenings are treated free of charge if the child attends as a public patient at an out-patient hospital department. Any subsequent treatment (whether out-patient or in-patient) arising from this initial referral is free of charge as a public patient.

Vaccinations under the **Childhood Immunisation Programme** are provided free of charge to all children. Parental consent is required for the administration of vaccinations to children and young people up to the age of 16.

## Resources

Health Service Executive  
[www.bit.ly/3EsP5ab](http://www.bit.ly/3EsP5ab)

**Dental services** to children attending primary school are also provided. They are screened in 2nd, 4th and 6th class and are referred for treatment, if necessary, to the local dental clinic.

### **Administration of medication**

If your child has a particular health problem, such as an allergy, asthma, epilepsy or diabetes, you should advise the school. The **school should be made aware** of the name and address of your family doctor. If your child needs medication on a regular basis, proper and clearly understood arrangements for administration of medicines must be made.

While teachers in schools act 'in loco parentis', there is no obligation on them to either administer medicines regularly or to supervise children taking them. It should not create a problem, however, if teachers are willing, have the permission of the board of management, have the written approval of parents and have been trained.

Teachers generally do their best to make provision for children who are ill, but ultimately will not do so if this in any way jeopardised the safety and welfare of any child in their care.

You are encouraged **to provide maximum support and assistance** in helping the school accommodate your child. This could include measures such as self-administration (where necessary and only after approval from a GP) or under parental supervision. Where teachers have been given **medication to administer in cases of emergency**, such as adrenaline in case of anaphylaxis, this medication should be the smallest dose possible to ensure recovery until a medical expert can take over. At no time should an emergency dose be such that it could harm your child if inappropriately administered. Confirmation of this should be obtained in writing from the medical practitioner responsible for your child before a school agrees to hold such life saving medication in its care. Where possible EpiPen type injections should be used and not injection needles.

Where children are suffering from life-threatening conditions, parents should outline clearly in writing what can and can't be done in a particular emergency situation, with particular reference to what may be a risk to the child.

## Head lice

Head lice are a common problem in primary schools. As your child shares a classroom and playground daily with a large number of other children, it is very easy for these to spread. Unfortunately, they are extremely mobile and can pass from one individual to another by head to head contact.

How do you tell if your child has head lice? The first clue is frequent scratching of the scalp. To check if head lice are present, carefully examine the hair around the back of your child's neck and behind the ears. The best way to find lice and their eggs is to run a **fine-toothed comb** through damp parted hair, looking carefully for evidence of lice. Since head lice shy away from light, you may only see their empty eggs shells (nits), which are small whitish ovals of equal size attached to the hair shaft.

You should check your child's hair regularly for head lice. If your child has head lice you should inform the teacher or principal and treat the hair immediately. Everybody, including you, other members of the family and schoolfriends, should be checked for lice. The reality is that anybody could catch head lice. Head lice are not choosy about what type of hair they go for. In fact, they tend to prefer clean rather than dirty hair! Head lice are easy to treat. **Lotion or shampoo** treatments can be bought from pharmacies without a prescription.

# Bullying

Bullying is a problem some children may encounter, which is of great concern to parents and teachers. Resolving the problem requires cooperation between the school and parents. Bullying can be physical, verbal or emotional and may be carried out by groups or by an individual.

Much of the advice in previous sections has emphasised the importance of building **independence and confidence** in the child. The importance of talking to and listening to children has also been stressed. These are important factors in helping the child to deal with early approaches from a bully.

Children need to have the confidence to say 'no' in a good assertive tone of voice if they are bullied for lunch or possessions. Children who are confident of their abilities and of their appearance are also more likely to be able to shrug off a taunt or a jibe. They also need to know that they have the right to tell an adult about a problem. Bullies will select children whom they feel can be kept quiet.

Building self-esteem and a quiet sense of confidence is equally important for the child who is a bully, as it is for the potential victims.

Why do some children become bullies? This can happen for many reasons, including:

- ⚡ Being bullied themselves by parents or brothers or sisters at home.
- ⚡ Feeling inadequate and lacking confidence.
- ⚡ Feeling under pressure to succeed.



- ⌘ Finding it difficult to socialise with their peers and so pick on more vulnerable children.
- ⌘ They may be very spoilt and go totally unchallenged at home.
- ⌘ Some children become involved in bullying by acting as bystanders or supporters of a bully. If this is the case, it must be pointed out that they are equally guilty of bullying.

If your child is a bully it is important to acknowledge that fact and help them to overcome this. One of the most difficult problems faced by schools in tackling bullying is getting the child (and parents) to acknowledge the fact that they are involved in such behaviour.

### What to do

- ⌘ Try to find out if this is a **temporary response to something else** in the child's life such as a new baby, a bereavement or stress at home.
- ⌘ Talk to your child and try to get your child to understand how the victim feels. Help your child to socialise by inviting other children to play or to go on outings. Don't respond by being a bully yourself. Hitting and verbal attack will make the things worse. You will need to deal with this problem **over a period of time**.
- ⌘ **Talk to the child's teacher**. You will find teachers willing to help. It is important that you and the teacher take the same approach to the problem.
- ⌘ Bullies often suffer from a lack of confidence. Don't compare your child's achievement with others. **Praise helpful, kind behaviour** at every opportunity.
- ⌘ Children should be taught to **accept differences** in others. If your child always seems overly critical of others, help by making positive remarks about other children.

## If your child tells you that they are being bullied

- ⌘ **Stay calm** and don't overreact no matter what you are feeling. Your reaction may convey a sense of anger or disappointment to the child and could be counter-productive. Children who are bullied often feel a sense of failure and guilt. Your response should explain that they are not at fault and that this is a problem which can be overcome.
- ⌘ Teaching the child that they have the right to say 'no' and to carry themselves in a confident way will deal with many situations. Establish the right to tell and talk about the problem.
- ⌘ Talk to the teacher. Bullying is a hidden activity and with classes of up to 30 it can be difficult for teachers to spot. Teachers need the support of parents in tackling this problem.
- ⌘ If the bullying is physical, don't tell your child to hit back. Schools cannot encourage children to engage in violence and conflicting advice will only confuse the child. Also, telling a vulnerable child to hit back is asking the impossible of them and will only add to their sense of failure when they find they cannot do so.
- ⌘ Children can be vulnerable and may **need help to socialise**. You can facilitate this by inviting children to play and by enlisting the help of other parents.
- ⌘ It is important to tell children that some situations are impossible and that safety must come first. Advise your child that, if threatened, to get away and tell. It is important in a situation like this to **praise a child for using common sense**.

### Resources

- ⌘ Department of Education  
[www.bit.ly/3EY1G5m](http://www.bit.ly/3EY1G5m)
- ⌘ National Parents Council  
[www.npc.ie](http://www.npc.ie)
- ⌘ School Days  
[www.schooldays.ie/articles/bullying](http://www schooldays.ie/articles/bullying)
- ⌘ Cybercrime  
[www.bit.ly/3DpHR5n](http://www.bit.ly/3DpHR5n)
- ⌘ Webwise  
[www.webwise.ie](http://www.webwise.ie)

- ⚡ Some children attract bullies because of poor personal hygiene or habits. If this is the case it can be overcome with help from you.
- ⚡ **Cyberbullying** can become a problem as children get older. Useful information and answers to frequently asked questions are available on [www.webwise.ie](http://www.webwise.ie).

### **Possible signs that a child is a victim of bullying**

The child may:

- ⚡ Begin to do poorly at school.
- ⚡ Have unexplained bruises or scratches and may be evasive when questioned about them.
- ⚡ Begin to bully other children in the family.
- ⚡ Be unwilling to go to school or walk to and from school.
- ⚡ Come home regularly with books or clothes torn or missing.



# Interculturalism

Teachers recognise that schools play a very important role in forming positive attitudes in children to people of different cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds or skin colour. In particular, teachers are aware of the need to develop and implement anti-racist policies and practices and to promote interculturalism in schools.

For adults and children coming to a new culture there is a degree of culture shock. Children may be striving to acquire understanding and fluency in English. Children from other countries will be encouraged by teachers to maintain a strong connection to their own culture and their own language while at the same time learning about Irish culture and language.

Teachers try to include and involve parents of ethnic minorities in their children's education. Child-rearing practices and expectations about children differ throughout the world. Open discussion between teachers and parents helps to prevent misunderstandings and are of benefit to all concerned. Parents might also consider involving their children in out-of-school activities such as football, basketball, community games or swimming.

## Resources

- ✎ Living in Ireland  
[www.livinginireland.ie](http://www.livinginireland.ie)
- ✎ Show Racism the Red Card  
[www.theredcard.ie](http://www.theredcard.ie)
- ✎ National Youth Council of Ireland  
[www.intercultural.ie](http://www.intercultural.ie)
- ✎ Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration  
[www.integration.ie](http://www.integration.ie)
- ✎ Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission  
[www.ihrec.ie](http://www.ihrec.ie)
- ✎ Department of Education  
[www.bit.ly/31ANnVQ](http://www.bit.ly/31ANnVQ)
- ✎ English as an Additional Language  
[www.pdst.ie/primary/literacy/EAL](http://www.pdst.ie/primary/literacy/EAL)

Parents are actively encouraged to participate in school life and contribute to class activities. Through storytelling, song, dance, cookery demonstrations or by discussing the geography and history of their country they can contribute to children learning, in a most practical way, about the riches and diversity of other cultures. Parents may also be encouraged to engage in activities, such as paired reading, which will promote curricular development as well as improving inter-cultural relations. Involvement in the parents' association, sports training or school tours are other means by which parents can participate in school activities. For non-English speaking parents the school might be able to help them to find **English language classes**.

Every child has the right to feel safe from mocking, threats, verbal and physical abuse. If racist incidents occur in schools they will be dealt with in the same way as any other form of unacceptable behaviour. The children who have behaved unacceptably will be counselled and the children at the receiving end of such behaviour will be given support.



# Homework

Policy in relation to homework will vary from school to school. If your child's school has a policy of giving homework, the following routine should be established early:

- ✎ Set aside a quiet regular time.
- ✎ The child should be sitting comfortably.
- ✎ Homework time should include time for oral as well as written work. Oral work, particularly in the early stages of schooling, can consolidate that which is learned through both Irish and English.
- ✎ Encourage your child to keep books and copies clean and tidy.
- ✎ If your child is working independently, be available to help and show an interest in what is being done. Praise your child's efforts at every opportunity.
- ✎ If, when working with your child, you feel yourself becoming impatient you should stop. Don't threaten as this will only have a negative effect.
- ✎ If your child is persistently having problems with homework contact the teacher and discuss the difficulties.
- ✎ If, for any reason, homework cannot be done let the teacher know.

Much debate has taken place in recent years on the effects of television/game consoles, etc. on young children. The reality is that most children watch TV or play computer games in moderation; this is not a bad thing. Children can learn a great deal and language can be enhanced through television. Don't allow them to watch unsuitable material. Children in senior classes should be aware of what is going on in the world so encourage them to watch and talk about news items. This will add to their general knowledge and command of language.



# Home-school communication

For schools to do what is best for your child it is very important to have good home-school communication. Parents are the primary educators of their children and their cooperation and support are essential to the school.

Each school has its own way of communicating with parents and will use a form of communication that best suits its needs and those of parents.

For general information, schools sometimes issue notices or newsletters to parents through the children. It is important that you check your child's schoolbag regularly for notes. If left unchecked, younger children may produce these weeks after they are relevant!

Schools hold parent-teacher meetings at some stage during the school year. It is important that you attend these to keep in touch with your child's progress. It is also important that your child sees that you are interested in their progress in school. Most primary schools will have a website – check the website regularly for up-to-date information.

Each school must prepare a code of behaviour. The principal of the school will provide parents with a copy of this code and will enlist parents' cooperation in ensuring this code is followed.

If your child is experiencing a particular problem it is essential that you communicate this to the teacher. Family stress caused by an illness, a new baby, a bereavement or a separation may result in the child becoming disruptive or withdrawn in school. It is unfair to expect the teacher to deal with a child who is upset if the teacher does not know there is a problem. Letting teachers know will allow them to help your child to cope and to make allowance for that distress.

# The board of management

The **board of management/manager(s)** is the body of persons or the person appointed by the **patron** to manage the school. The **patron** is the body that establishes the school and sets the ethos of the school. Some patrons are denominational (such as the churches) while others are multi-denominational.

The board of management includes representatives of parents, teachers, trustees or patrons, the principal and the community.

You can read more about boards of management at [www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-education/](http://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-education/).

# If you are new to Ireland

In Ireland, all children are entitled to free primary and post-primary education. Under the *Education (Welfare) Act, 2000* education in Ireland is compulsory from age six to 16, or until students have completed three years of second level (post-primary) education. In general, children who are at least four years of age on 1 September of a school year to approximately 12 years of age attend a primary school, and children from approximately 12 years to 18 years attend a post-primary school.

## How to enrol your child in primary school

If you wish to enrol your child in a local school, please contact the principal of the school by phone and arrange to meet with them. Do not go to the school for the first time without making an appointment. If you are worried your English is not good enough to communicate with the principal, you may bring a friend with you to help. At the first meeting, you can ask the school principal to enrol your child. Applications for school enrolment should be made in writing. If there is an application form, you should apply by completing the form.

Where a school refuses to enrol a child, a copy of the decision, including the reasons for refusal should be received in writing. *Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998* provides that a parent may appeal against a decision to refuse to enrol a child in a school.

Tusla (Child and Family Agency) Educational Welfare Services can assist you with placement where efforts to secure a place have not been successful. In dealing with any such request, Tusla will require a copy of all correspondence with the relevant schools. Further details can be obtained from Tusla directly by phoning their National Office 01 7718500; by email [info@tusla.ie](mailto:info@tusla.ie) or through their website [www.tusla.ie](http://www.tusla.ie).

If your child is enrolled in the school the principal will want to know information such as:

- ⌘ The name, age and nationality of your child;
- ⌘ Your name, address and a contact telephone number where you can be contacted, if for example, your child becomes ill at school;
- ⌘ If they have any medical problems that the school should be aware of such as asthma/epilepsy in case they get sick while in school;
- ⌘ What education your child has had to date;
- ⌘ What particularly interests your child such as music, art, sports;
- ⌘ If you want your child to partake in the school's religious education classes and/or in religious ceremonies; and/or
- ⌘ If they have any special needs.



## Are there different types of schools?

Yes, primary schools can be based on a particular religious ethos, for example, **Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland** or **Islam**. **Educate Together** schools adopt a multi-religious ethos. Most schools teach the curriculum through English. Some schools, known as 'Gaelscoileanna', teach the curriculum through Ireland's national language, Irish.

Single-sex schools teach boys and girls separately, while other schools teach boys and girls together.

It should also be noted that some primary schools are junior schools, catering for students from junior infants to 2nd class, while other schools are all-through schools, catering for pupils from junior infants to 6th class.

## Attendance at school

Once your child is enrolled in a school, they must attend school every school day. It is your responsibility and it is required by Irish law that **you inform** the school of your child's absence from school because of illness or other exceptional circumstances. You should send a letter to the class teacher to explain the reason for your child's absence or the reason why they have attended late or need to leave early.

A letter may say: (name of child) was absent from school yesterday (date) due to (reason). Signed: (your name).

## The school day

A school day lasts **5 hours and 40 minutes**. Classes usually start between 8.45am and 9.30am. Schools are open from Monday to Friday. Younger children may finish their school day one hour earlier than the children in the more senior classes. In the school day there is normally a mid-morning break and a lunch break. It is important to ensure that your child has food and drink for these two breaks. You should consult with the school principal about the food and drink requirements for school breaks. It should be noted that some schools have designated 'healthy eating days' while others may forbid certain foods – e.g. crisps, fizzy drinks. If in doubt, ask the principal or class teacher.

## English language support

Experience to date has shown that young children learn English very quickly. It is normal to place a child, even if they have very little English, in a class with children of a similar age. The [Department of Education](#) provides [additional educational support](#) to enable schools to provide extra English classes for children with an identified English language deficit.

## Discipline

[Corporal punishment is not used](#) in Irish schools. It is illegal. Each school has a code of discipline. Sanctions used by a school are specified within this code.

## School ethos

Irish primary schools promote tolerance, mutual respect and an understanding of [cultural, ethical, racial, social](#) and [religious diversity](#). They also promote the reality of difference within an intercultural society. The celebration of intercultural diversity is an important component of school life, particularly through experiences in music, art, dance, and history. The school is a multi-cultural environment. Every child's ethnic origin and religion is respected. It is expected that all children will also respect other children in the school.

## During school holidays

It is possible that your child may lose some of the English that they have learned during the school holidays. It is important, therefore, to find an opportunity for your child to use, read or listen to some English every day. For example, they could:

- ✎ Watch a television programme and then tell you about it;
- ✎ Read a book aloud to you;
- ✎ Ask for items in the local shop; or
- ✎ Keep a daily diary with pictures and writing during the holiday period.

While it is important for your child to learn English, it is also very important that they do not lose the mother tongue of your family. Take every opportunity to use your mother tongue with your child and tell them about your native country.

Mother Tongues in collaboration with the School of Education at Trinity College, have produced short videos on how families can support young children with their literacy, numeracy and creativity, available in four languages (Arabic, Brazilian Portuguese, Polish and Romanian) as well as in English. You can find the videos at [www.bit.ly/322AVxX](http://www.bit.ly/322AVxX).