

Kilcolgan Educate Together N.S.

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A booklet for parents of Infants

Starting

School

Foreword

Fáilte romhat agus roimh do pháiste.

Starting school will be the first big change in the life of your child. Up to this he/she has felt safe and secure with you in the home and family but now is facing the wider world of classroom and school. This may seem a big step for someone so small but most children manage it without any great fuss or stress - and in fact take to it like ducks to water.

However, it is also a time when parents and teachers should take special care to ensure that the transition from home to school is as smooth as possible. If the child's first experience of school is one of happy involvement, a very good foundation will have been laid for fruitful school years ahead.

It is important too, particularly during the first year, that parents understand what the aims of the school are, as many may be expecting too much in the way of academic achievement.

We know from experience that parents are very anxious to help in any way possible. We have, therefore, included some ideas for the home, which should stimulate the child's interest and nurture a 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 the 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. 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** – is 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.
- Getting each child to **accept the general order**, which is necessary for the class and school to work well.

Before your Child Starts

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

It would help greatly if your child is able to-

- ☺ **Button and unbutton a coat** and hang it up.
- ☺ **Use the toilet without help** and manage pants buttons.
- ☺ Have a knowledge of **basic hygiene** e.g. how to flush the toilet and wash hands, without having to be told.
- ☺ Use a tissue when necessary.
- ☺ **Share** toys and playthings with others and 'take turns'.
- ☺ **Tidy up** and put away playthings.
- ☺ Remain contentedly for a few hours in the home of a relation, friend or neighbour. If children had this experience, then separation from parents when they start school will not cause any great anxiety.
- ☺ Wear 'Velcro' shoes, Junior Infants cannot manage laces.

Preparing for the Big Day

A 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.**

- **Tell them about school** beforehand, casually, and talk about it as a happy place where there will be a big welcome and they will meet new friends.
- **Don't use school or the teacher as a threat.** "If you behave like that for teacher she'll murder you", though said light-heartedly can make some children very apprehensive.
- Your child will like to have a **new bag and lunch box** when school begins. These help them identify more readily with the school and other children.
- Your child will not begin working with school books straight away. It will help your child feel important if he/she has something in the school bag, so perhaps you could buy a copy or colouring book which could be used at home.

The Big Day

Coming in ...

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

Hopefully, they will be absorbed in the new surroundings. So having given assurance you will be back to collect him/her, wave goodbye and **make your getaway without delay**. Linger will cause undue distress to your child.

Packed Lunches

Your child will be going home at 12 for the first two weeks, so a small snack is sufficient.

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.

The school offers a service called The Lunch Bag to parents. Parents can order lunch via an app and the lunch is delivered to school. See www.thelunchbag.ie for more details.

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. Please look at the various additives in your children's food.

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

Homemade pizza

Fruit & Vegetables

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

Drinks

Milk

Water

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.

Please ensure your child can open all containers.

For safety reasons chewing gum, fizzy drinks and glass bottles are not permitted. We ask that children bring home any wrappers, yoghurt cartons etc. after their lunches in order to minimise waste disposal.

NO PEANUTS OR PEANUT PRODUCTS PLEASE

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 through a phone call (091 776595). Emergencies can arise so a phone call to the school will ease anxiety.

Handling the Upset Child

In spite of the best effort 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/her anxiety.
- When you have reassured him/her, leave as fast as possible. The teachers can distract and humour him/her more easily when you are not around.
- Check back discreetly in a short while. You will invariably find that calm has been restored. We will contact you if your child can't settle.
- **You must be firm from the start.** Even if a child is upset you must insist that they stay.
- On day one take as many photos and videos as you like. It is a great day for children, parents and school.

As Time Goes on...

- School begins at 9.00am. To ease the child into the school routine we have a policy where Junior Infants come in for a shorter day than usual for the first two weeks. After that they go home at 1.40pm. Please make sure that your child is collected at 1.40pm as the teacher needs that hour between 1.40 and 2.40 to clean up after the day and prepare for the following day. **Get him/her into the habit of being in good time for school from the beginning.** Mid-morning break: 11.00am to 11.10am (a small snack is sufficient here). Big lunch 12.30 – 1 o'clock (lunch required)
- Children need plenty of rest after the effort and excitement of a day at school. You should ensure that they go to bed early and have a good night's sleep.
- When he/she has settled in and hopefully, looks upon school as a "home from home" do continue to show interest in daily adventures. Give an ear if they want to tell you things - but don't pester your child with questions.
- Mind that you take some of his/her stories with a pinch of salt.
- If his/her progress is slow do not compare him/her adversely with other children while he/she is listening. **Loss of self-esteem can be very damaging to children.**
- Be careful too about criticising teachers in the child's presence. Remember that the teacher is the parent figure while at school and for the child's own well-being it is important that he/she has a good positive image of teacher.
- This last caution applies to your child's image of the school as well. **School is always "the greatest" - whatever its faults.**
- He/she is not going to be a model of perfection all the time - thankfully. You should try to have patience with his/her shortcomings and praise for his/her achievements.
- Children often "forget" or relay messages incorrectly, so **please, email the teacher if you are unsure.** Also keep an eye on the school website at www.kilcolganetns.com

Some Important Areas of Early Learning

Developing the Command of Spoken Language

It is important that the child's ability to talk is as advanced as possible. It is through speech that children communicate their thoughts and feelings, their needs and desires, curiosity and wonder. If they cannot express these in words they will tend to remain silent and will often withdraw from the learning activity of the class. This can be the first sign of failure in the school system and must be remedied, if at all possible. This is why a lot of attention is given to language development in the first years of school.

You Can Help

- Talk to your child naturally and casually about things of interest that you or he/she may be doing at home, in the shop, in the car etc. Remember that all the time children are absorbing the language they hear about them. It takes them a while to make it their own and to use it for their own needs.
- Try to make time to listen when they want to tell you something that is important to him/her. But don't always make him/her the centre of attention.
- Answer genuine questions with patience and in an adequate way. Always nurture her/his sense of curiosity and wonder.
- Introduce her/him gently to the ideas of Why? How? When? Where/ If? etc. These demand more advanced language structures.
- He/she will have his/her own particular favourite stories that he/she never tires of hearing. Repeat them over and over again and gradually get him/her to tell them to you.

First Steps in Reading

Ability to read is the foundation for all future progress in our school system. However, learning to read is a gradual process and a lot of preparatory work must be done before a child is introduced to her/his 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. Fill your child's life with a print rich environment.

You Can Help ...

- Have attractive colourful books in the home.
- Read your children a variety of stories from time to time. He/she will get to associate these wonderful tales with books and reading.
- You must convey to him/her gradually that books are precious things. They must be minded and handled carefully and put away safely.
- Look at the pictures with him/her and talk to him/her about what they say.
- Read nursery rhymes. Children will learn them off their own bat. Don't try to push them.
- Above all, don't push them with early reading. You may turn them against it for evermore.

Remember that the teacher is the best judge of what rate of progress is best suited to each child.

Understanding Maths

First a Word of Warning:

Maths for the small child has nothing to do with “sums” or figures or tables or adding or subtracting. These will all come much later.

Maths is really part of the language children use in understanding and talking about certain things in his/her daily experience e.g.

- He/she associates certain numbers with particular things - two hands, four wheels, five fingers etc.
 - Counting - one, two, three, four etc.
 - Colours - black, white, red, green etc.
 - Prepositions (telling position) and their opposites: over/under, before/after, inside/outside etc.
 - Matching/Sorting - objects of the same size/colour/texture/shape etc.
 - Odd One Out - difference in size/colour etc
- Understanding of these concepts comes very quickly for some children. For others it takes a long time. Be patient. You cannot force Maths understanding on a child.

But You Can Help ...

- In the course of your ordinary daily routine in the home, in the shop, in the neighbourhood you should use suitable opportunities to casually introduce the maths vocabulary referred to above, e.g. How many cakes? The glass is full/empty. We turn left at the lights.
- The child gets to understand Maths best by handling and investigating and using real objects. This has been his/her natural method of learning since he/she was a baby. This at times can be a nuisance but if it allows them to do the learning themselves the final result is well worth it.

Gaeilge

All children enjoy learning another language besides their own language. They have no difficulty in picking it up because it fascinates them as another code of communication. They are free of any hang-ups about Irish unless they become aware that the home attitude towards it is not good. So please be careful that anything you say does not give a negative attitude to your child.

We would want his/her parents to give every encouragement and help to the small ones in their efforts to acquire Irish. If they learn new words in school encourage them to use them at home. Use little Irish phrases or words now and again. Children are delighted to find out that their parents are into their new code as well. Use the simple words – Slán leat, Fáilte abhaile.

At table – scian, spúnóg. Use your cúpla focal.

Getting Ready for Writing

Making letters on paper is not easy for the small child. He/she must learn to hold the pencil properly and make regular shapes. His/her hand and finger muscles are only gradually developing at this stage.

You Can Help ...

- He/she must develop the ability to get the hand and eye working together. This is very important. Get them manipulating toys like:
 - (a) Jigsaws, Lego, beads to thread etc.
 - (b) Plasticene (Marla) to make their own shapes
 - (c) A colouring book and thick crayons
 - (d) Sheets of paper that they can cut up with a safe scissors.

- When he/she begins to use a pencil make sure that he/she holds it correctly at the start. It will be difficult to change him/her later.
- He/she may be making block letters at home even before he/she comes to school. This is fine. But when he/she starts making lower case letters at school you should try to get him/her to discontinue the blocks and practise his/her new system whenever he/she feels like it. Consult the teacher about this.
- Don't discourage left-handedness. If that is his/her definite natural inclination, don't attempt to change it.

Other Areas of the Curriculum

Children in junior infants learn a lot through many other activities, which do not need any elaboration here.

Children's moral and social education is covered right through the school day e.g. kindness to others, sharing with them, saying we are sorry.

Do's

Do be kind and helpful
 Do be gentle
 Do listen
 Do work hard
 Do be honest
 Do look after property

Don'ts

Don't hurt people's feelings
 Don't hurt anyone
 Don't interrupt
 Don't waste your or other
 people's time
 Don't cover up the truth
 Don't waste or damage things

Very simply put

Be Nice

Be Safe

Be Tidy

And remember **Kind Hands, Kind Words, Kind Feet**

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 he/she played with at school and to ensure he/she isn't alone, also encourage mixing rather than being dependent on one friend.

Parting Thoughts

Class Rules?

Bit by bit the child will get used to the general discipline of the classroom. He/she will get to understand quickly that in certain important matters an instruction from the teacher must be followed.

Teacher and Parent

At the early stages some parents meet the teacher almost daily and this is a very desirable thing. However, if there is something in particular that you would like to discuss you can arrange to meet him/her at a time when you both can have a little peace and quiet.

Easy Does It

There are lots of ideas and suggestions in this little book as to how you can help your child. We are not advocating that you do ALL of these with her/him in a systematic way. But if you find from time to time that she/he enjoys a fun approach to certain aspects of learning then we would say - give it a go - but remember don't overdo it.

Our Hope

We are offering this Guide to Parents as a little practical help in supporting with the education of their children at the very early stages. We will be very happy if you dip into it from time to time and find something in it of value to you and your child.

Please also read the Parent's Handbook. It tells you all about school life in Kilcolgan Educate Together. If there is something you are not sure of or just don't understand please contact us.

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