

OUR HOPE

We are offering this Guide to Parents as a little practical help in dealing with the education of their children in 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 read the information pack/policies and keep it safe. It tells you all about school life in Cahergal. If there is something you are not sure of or don't understand please contact us.

'Mol an óige, agus tiocfaidh sí'

Thank you,

Mr. Alastair Beegan

Principal

Aoife Moran

Class Teacher.



Cahergal N.S.

SCOIL NAISIÚNTA AN CHATHAIR SEAL

Booklet for Parents of Infants starting school



FOREWORD

Fáilte romhat agus roimh do pháiste chuig Scoil Náisiúnta An Chathair Gheal.

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 a fruitful school year 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.

OTHER AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM

Children in Junior Infants learn a lot through many other activities, which we do not need any elaboration on here. Their general developments is enhanced through Art , P.E , Music, Social Personal Health Education, S.E.S.E. (Science, History, Geography) Drama, and Religious Education.

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, being aware of God through the beauty of nature etc.

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. Rough behaviour is totally discouraged in the playground. You will find a list of school rules and policies in the pack.

PARTING THOUGHTS

Who is the Boss?

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 obeyed promptly.

Teacher and Parent

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

Easy does it

There are lots of ideas and suggestions in this little book as to how you can help your child. We are not advocating that you do ALL of these with him/her in a systematic way. But if you find from time to time that 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.

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.

Encouragement and praise will help in their efforts to acquire Irish. If they learn new words in school please encourage them to use them at home. Use little Irish phrases or words now and again. “Dia duit”, Conas atá tú? 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. Use the simple words—slán leat, fáilte abhaile, at table—tabhair dom, le do thoil, scian, spúnóg etc. Use your cúpla focal you’ll be surprised how much you have. Infants learn a lot of simple ‘rannta agus amhráin’ (riddles & songs in Irish) encourage them to say them with you at home.

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 and need a lot of exercise (colouring is of great benefit)

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—jig-saws, lego, blocks, beads to thread, plasticene to make their own shapes, a colouring book and thick chubby crayons , 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 practice 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.

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. 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 hands 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 SCHOOL

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/ zips etc.
- * Also **encourage personal hygiene** and cleanliness. Your child should know how to flush the toilet and wash hands, without having to be told.
- * Use a tissue when necessary.
- * **Share** toys and playthings with others '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.
- * **Give time to colouring**— 'colouring is not a time-filler', it strengthens the finger and hand muscles which are required when learning to write.

PREPARING FOR THE BIG DAY

The child's first day at school is a day to remember for the rest of his/her life. **You can help to make it a really happy one.**

- **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. Try not to exaggerate too much.
- **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.

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 it allows them to do the learning themselves the final result is well worth it.

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 his/her sense of curiosity and wonder.
- Introduce him/her gently to the ideas of Why? How? When? Where? If? Etc. These demand more advanced language structures.
- He/she will have his/her own particular favourite stories that he/she never tires of hearing. Repeat them over and over again and gradually get him/her to tell them to you—beginning, middle, end etc.

FIRST STEPS IN READING

Ability to read is the foundation for all future progress in our school system. However, learning to read is a gradual process and a lot of preparatory work must be done before a child is introduced to his/her first reader.

We very deliberately do not rush or push children into reading. We get them ready for it over an extended period. Reading is something to be enjoyed. It should never start as a chore for the small child. 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 associated 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 think is going on, the child could predict what will happen next etc.
- Read nursery rhymes. Children will learn them off their own bat.
- Don't push them with early reading, you may turn them against it for evermore.

- Your child will have the new uniform or tracksuit and a new bag when school begins. These help them identify more readily with the school and other children.

Your child's books will be taken up on the first day of school and the teacher will hold onto them until such time as they are needed. This minimizes books getting lost. Please have you child warned of this fact in case they think they will never see the books again. All books must be marked with your child's name on the front cover. Your child will only 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. He/She 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.

LUNCHES

We have a healthy eating policy in the school. 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. When purchasing a lunchbox it is advised to have your child with you so you can both pick a lunch box he/she can open and close easily. This avoids the child becoming anxious and distressed at lunchtime.

A copy of the healthy eating policy along with a leaflet on healthy lunch and snack ideas is enclosed in your pack.

GOING HOME

- Be sure to **collect your child on time.** Children can become very upset if they feel they are forgotten.
- If at any time the collecting routing has to be changed ensure you tell the child and teacher. Emergencies can also 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 sign 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.
- You must be firm from the start. Even if a child is upset you must insist that they stay. He/she must never feel that he/she is winning the psychological battle of wills.
- On day one take as many photo's and video's as you like. It is a great day for children, parents and school.

As Time Goes on

- School begins at 9:15a.m. 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 few weeks (Until 12:30—usually first 3wks –will be confirmed in June)
- **After that they go home at 1:55p.m.** Please make sure that your child is collected at 1:55p.m as the teacher needs that hour between 1:55 and 2:55p.m 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 is from 10:55a.m. to 11:05a.m.
- Big Lunch is from 12:30p.m to 1:00.
- 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 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 aswell. School is always “the greatest” - whatever it's faults.
- He/she is not going to be a model of perfection all the time—thankfully. You should try to have patience with his/her shortcomings and praise for his/her achievements.
- Children often “forget” or relay messages incorrectly, so **please check your child's bag / folder each night for notes.** We also have 'text –a–parent' in operation in the school.
- There is a tradition in the school of helping a few charities at different stages throughout the year, usually one a term and a Christmas School Raffle.

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.