

Preparing for “Big School”

From Preschool to Primary School

Starting school is an exciting time for a child. It is another stage in life and another milestone achieved. However this can also be a time of anxiety for families, the main concern, is will my child make a smooth transition into primary school?

Since the introduction of the Free Preschool Year (ECCE) in 2010, the majority of three and four year olds are now attending a pre-school setting. Research has focused on what constitutes school readiness, and there is an agreement that attending preschool is a contributing factor in promoting not just school readiness but family readiness as the child enters this significant transition period.

The preschool setting facilitates a learning environment where children actively learn and develop skills that prepare children as they move into primary school. The concept of “school readiness” applies to the necessary skills needed for big school. These include good social skills, confidence, self help skills and independence, the ability to listen and concentrate and good communication and language skills. These skills are more developed as a child reaches the age of 5.

Aistear is the shared National Curriculum for preschool and infant classes, it recognises that young children are active and visual learners. The curriculum moves with the child and through the provision of play based opportunities it encourages problem solving, communication and self discovery. This consistency in approach and practice between the two educational settings has had a positive influence for children and families alike, by giving them a sense of familiarity as they enter the primary school setting.



Galway City & County
Childcare Committee

Coiste Cúram Leanáí
Chontae & Chathair na Gaillimhe

Practical Tips for Families

As “big school” approaches, what can you do to help your child prepare for this important stage in life?

- Talk to the preschool staff, this will help ease any concerns, as they are also preparing the children for this transition period. They can give you some guidance on what you can do at home, to prepare your child for big school.
- Avail of the information and any meetings provided by the primary school as this will help you know what to expect on the first day, what to bring and the time and routines for the first week.
- At your first meeting, let the teacher know a little bit about your child’s interests, likes and dislikes and any other relevant information.
- A natural concern for families is their child’s self help skills, for example going to the toilet on their own, being able to open their lunch box, closing and opening zips or buttons, taking off and putting on their coat. Developing these skills takes time, so this is something you can practice at home.
- Try to buy clothing and equipment that your child can manage independently, for example shoes with velcro straps and trousers with an elasticated waist.
- Talk about school and your positive memories of school. Read a book about starting school.
- Visiting the library will also encourage a love for reading.
- As a fun activity, you could role play going to school or having school lunch-time. This will help ease any anxious feelings, as they play out their ideas and thoughts about school.
- Playing board games, snap, lego, hopscotch etc, will help encourage physical and social skills, turn taking, waiting and cooperative thinking.
- Give your child little jobs around the house, this encourages responsibility and independence. Allow them the opportunity to make mistakes and praise their efforts.
- On the first day, try not to stay too long, follow the teachers lead, be positive with your child and let them know who will be collecting them.

Remember to enjoy this time, and after you drop your child off at “big school” for the first time, have a cuppa, maybe a little cry but more importantly give yourself a pat on the back. It is a significant landmark in your child’s life.

Caitriona Ryan

Information and Development Worker
Galway City and County Childcare Committee
091 752039
caitriona@galwaychildcare.com

