

Castlegregory N.S.



Information Booklet for
Parents of Junior Infants
starting school.

Foreword

A warm welcome to you and your child.

Starting school will be the first big change in the life of your child. Up to this s/he has felt safe and secure with you in the home and family but now s/he 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 his/her 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 his/her introductory stage in Junior Infants. We trust you will find it helpful and that your child will be happy and fulfilled with us.



Getting Ready for Learning

Children are natural learners. They have an inbuilt curiosity and an eagerness to know more about everything – about themselves, about others and about the world around them. And they learn fast – but only when they are ready, and their interest is aroused.

Because they come to us so young, we must guard against putting pressure on them to learn what they are not yet ready for. Demanding too much too soon can switch a child off completely. At the same time, we must cultivate readiness so that they can get moving as soon as possible.

The rates of progress of children can vary greatly. We try to give them an opportunity to move ahead at their own pace or as near to it as possible.

Our first year in school, therefore, is mainly about settling in, relating to others, making friends, feeling happy and gradually getting used to the routine of the school. On the learning side the emphasis is on getting children ready for learning by –

- Developing their oral language and expression.
- Sharpening their senses, especially seeing, hearing, and touching
- Developing physical co-ordination especially of the hand and fingers.
- Extending their concentration span and getting them to listen attentively.
- Learning through play – the most enjoyable and effective way.
- Co-operating with the teacher and other children.

- Performing tasks by themselves.
- Working with others and sharing with them.
- Getting each child to accept the general order, this is necessary for the class to work well.

Before Your Child Starts

You should ensure that he / she is as independent as possible -physically, emotionally, and socially. If he/she can look after him/herself in these areas he/she will feel secure and confident and settle in readily.

It would help greatly if he/she is able to-

- Button and unbutton his/her coat and hang it up.
- Use the toilet without help and manage buttons.
- Also encourage personal hygiene and cleanliness. Your child should know to flush the toilet and wash his/her hands, without having to be told.
- Use his/her hanky when necessary.
- Share toys and playthings with others and “take turns”.
- Tidy up and put away his/her playthings.
- Remain contentedly for a few hours in the home of a relation, friend, or neighbour.

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 happy one for him/her.

- Tell him/her about school beforehand, casually, and talk about it as a happy place where there will be a big welcome for him/her, and he/she will meet new friends.
- Don’t use school or the teacher as a threat. “If you will behave like that for teacher she’ll have to speak to us” though said light-heartedly can make some children very apprehensive.

- S/He will like to have his/her new bag when s/he begins. These help him identify more readily with the school and other children.
- Your child's books will be held at school until such time as they are needed. Your child may only feel important if s/he has something in his/her school bag, so perhaps you could buy a copy or colouring book for him/her, which s/he could use 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 and will be shown his/her chair. Hopefully he will be absorbed in his new surroundings. So having assured him/her you will be back to collect him, wish him/her goodbye and make your getaway without delay.

Dealing with the Upset Child

Despite the best efforts of both teacher and parents a small number of children will still become upset at times. If your child happens to be one of them don't panic. Encourage your child to share their worries and assure them that we will look after them. Patience and perseverance can work wonders!

A Word of Advice

- Trust the teacher. S/He is vastly experienced and resourceful and is used to coping with all kinds of settling-in issues.

- Try not to show any outward signs of your own distress. Sometimes parents are more upset than the child and can be the main cause of his/her anxiety.
- When you have reassured him/her, leave promptly. The teacher can distract and humour him/her much more easily when you are not around.
- Feel welcome to check back discreetly via a call to the school office 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 s/he stay for a while. S/He must understand that the adults know best what to advise and s/he must trust that we know best.

Packed Lunches

Lunch is an important meal for school-going children. It should provide one third of their recommended daily allowance of nutrients without being high in fat, sugar, or salt. It should also provide dietary fibre (roughage). The traditional packed lunch of milk and sandwiches is under attack from a range of convenience foods like crisps, sweets, biscuits, chocolate, and soft drinks. Parents and teachers are concerned about this trend, but some find it difficult to come up with popular healthy alternatives. We will ask you to encourage a healthy lunch right from the start. Also, please, only give your child something you feel he/she can easily manage to eat.



Going Home

- Be sure to collect him/her on time. Children can become very upset if they feel they are forgotten.

- Please make yourself visible when the children are released so your child can see you.
- If at any time the collecting routine must be changed, please tell the child and the teacher.

As time goes on ...

- The doors of our school open at 9.00 a.m. and official teaching time starts at 9.10 a.m., from that time your child's teacher will take responsibility for your child. You can drop your child at the school at any time during this 10- minute period. The school day will finish at 1.50 p.m. However, to ensure that your child settles in we will adjust these times for the first number of weeks in September.
- Children need plenty of rest after the effort and excitement of a day at school. You should ensure that s/he gets to bed early and has a good night's sleep.
- When s/he has settled in and, hopefully, looks upon school as a "home from home" do continue to show interest in his/her daily adventures. Give him/her an ear if s/he wants to tell you things-but don't pester him/her 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 s/he is listening. Loss of self-esteem can be very damaging to him/her.
- Be careful too about criticising his/her teacher in his/her presence. Remember that s/he is his/her mother figure while s/he is at school and for his/her own wellbeing it is important that s/he has a good positive image of her.
- At times there may be other adults in the classroom. We have a number of learning support teachers working in our school. We are also a base school for trainee teachers.
- Children often "forget" or relay messages incorrectly, so please, check in with Aladdin regularly.
- Old shirts and large T-shirts are handy as coveralls during Art lessons.
- We would also ask children not to give out Birthday / Party invitations in class – as children can often become very upset if

they are not invited. If invitations are given out in a more discreet way, then it saves some children from feeling left out.

Some Important Areas of Learning

Developing his/her Command of Spoken Language.

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

You Can Help....

- Talk to your child naturally and casually about things of interest that you or s/he may be doing-at home, in the shop, in the car, etc. Remember that all the time s/he is absorbing the language they hear about them. It takes him/her a while to make it his/her own and to use it for his/her own needs.
- Try to make time to listen when s/he wants to tell you something that is important to him/her, yet don't make him/her the centre of attention at all times.
- Answer his/her 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.
- S/He will have his/her own particular favourite stories that s/he never tires of hearing. Repeat them repeatedly and gradually get him/her to tell them to you.

First Steps in Reading

We very deliberately do not rush or pressure 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.

However, the 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. Daily reading to your child is always recommended and for you to listen to your child reading in return results in great progress in this essential life skill.

How You Can Help..

- Have attractive colourful books in the home.
- Read him/her a variety of stories from time to time. S/He will get to associate these wonderful tales with books and reading.
- You must gradually convey to him/her that books are valued. 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 him/her nursery rhymes. S/He will learn them off his/her own bat. Don't try to pressure him/her.
- Above all, don't pressure him/her with their early reading. You may turn him/her against it for the long-term.
- Remember that the teacher is the best judge of what rate of progress is best suited to each child.
- Sing the alphabet song with your child, so that s/he at least has heard of the letters. If they recognise what each one looks and sounds like, all the better.

In Infants the emphasis will be on the sounds that the letters make. Children will be working on the Jolly Phonics programme. In Jolly Phonics the 42 main sounds of English are taught, not just the alphabet sounds. For each sound there is an action which helps the children remember the sound the letter makes. As the letters are taught, your child will be given a sound card, which is brought home. If possible, go through the sound cards with your child every day.

The letters are not introduced in alphabetical order. The first group "s, a, t, l, p, n" has been chosen because they make simpler three letter words than any other six letters. Sounds with more than one way of being

written are first taught in one form only. For instance, the sound “ai” (rain) is on the Sound Sheet. The alternative “a-e” (cake) and “ay” (day) will be taught later.

Blending is a process of saying the sounds in a word and then running them together to make the word, e.g. c-a-t is cat. It is a technique your child will need to learn, and it improves with practice. Some children take longer to do this than others. To start with you should sound out the word and see if your child can hear it. The sounds must be said quickly to hear the word. It is easier if the first sound is said slightly louder e.g. b-u-s. To give your child practice at blending, the sound cards can be used to make words. Please listen to your child blending the sounds to read the words.

Once the children have grasped the skill of blending, they will bring home a reading book. Please listen to him/her regularly. It is important that your child understands what she/he has read. You can help by talking about the story with your child, looking at the pictures, making predictions etc.

Some words cannot be sounded out or spelt correctly by listening for the sounds in them. These are called the ‘Tricky Words’ or ‘Sight Words’ and have to be learnt. As your child becomes more fluent at reading and writing, s/he will be taught how to cope with the Tricky Words.

This all sounds a great deal of work, but it goes in stages and is spread over a considerable period of time. Little and often is best. Your child may be tired after school but don’t worry. It is better to leave it than push too hard. There is no doubt that the effort on your part, at this stage, is well worth it.



Understanding Maths

First a Gentle Word of Warning

Maths for the small child has nothing to do with “sums” or figures or tables or adding and subtracting. These will all come much later. Maths is really part of the language s/he uses in understanding and talking about certain things in his/her daily experience e.g.

- S/He associates certain numbers with particular things – two hands, four wheels, five fingers etc.
- Counting – one, two, three, four, etc. and in reverse 4,3,2,1. 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, exploring, investigating, and using real objects. This has been their natural method of exploring since they were a baby. This at times can be inconsistent but if it allows him/her to do the learning him/herself the final result is more worthwhile as it sticks with them.



Getting Ready For Writing

Forming letter/shapes on paper is not easy for the small child. S/He 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...

- S/He must develop the ability to get the hand and eye working together. This is very important. Get him/her manipulating toys like:
 - a) Jigsaws, Lego, beads to thread etc.
 - b) Play Doh (Marla/plasticine) to make his/her own shapes
 - c) A colouring book and thick crayons – stay within the lines.
 - d) Sheets of paper / old newspapers that s/he can cut up with a safe scissors.
- When s/he begins to use a pencil make sure that s/he holds it correctly at the start. It will be difficult to change him/her later. S/He may be making block letters at home even before s/he comes to school. This is fine. But when s/he starts making lower case letters at school you need to get him/her to practise their teacher's instruction at home every day. If needs be consult the teacher about this.
- Don't discourage left-handedness. If that is his definite natural inclination, don't attempt to change him/her.

It is very important that your child holds the pencil correctly. If the hold starts incorrectly, it is very difficult to get it right later on. The correct formation for each letter can be seen on the pages of your child's

handwriting book. Many of the letters have a joining tail at the end to make it easier to transfer into joined up writing.

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 positive. 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. When they learn Irish, let them enjoy it and master it to the best of their ability.

Other Areas of the Curriculum

The child in junior classes learns a lot through many other activities. His/her general development is enhanced through Art & Craft, P.E., Music, SPHE (Social, Personal Health Education) SESE (Social, Environmental & Scientific Education) in addition to Religious Education. In regard to Religious Education, its moral and social aspects are covered right through the school day e.g. kindness to others, sharing with them, saying we are sorry, being aware of God through the beauty of nature etc.

The children learn their prayers and bible stories gradually. Again, as in the other areas we referred to already, the child will benefit from practising at home what s/he has learned at school. S/He can then make his/her own contribution to the usual family prayers.

Social skills are very important. We always encourage good manners, please/thank you, addressing teachers properly, being courteous to fellow students and teachers. It is important to ask your child whom s/he played with at school and to ensure s/he isn't alone. Also encourage mixing rather than being dependent on one friend only. Rough behaviour is totally discouraged in the playground. You will find a list of school rules

and policies on our website www.castlegregoryns.com for your reference.

Aistear

Aistear is a curriculum framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland. It gives information to help plan for and provide enjoyable and challenging learning experiences so that all children can grow and develop as competent and confident learners.

The Aistear framework is based on 12 broad principles – many of which are similar to the aims and objectives of the primary school curriculum. Practically speaking this means that teachers will deliver the curriculum in an integrated / thematic way. Teachers will prioritise play in the classroom and school environment.

Play helps your child:

- Build relationships – by playing with others, sharing, and taking turns, solving problems and negotiating etc.
- Be creative – when he/she must create an outfit from old clothes, build a house out of junk material etc.
- Read and write – when he/she reads or retells a story.
- Learn about numbers – when he/she pays for things in a pretend shop etc.
- Think – when a plan must be made, for example – deciding what materials to use to build a den.
- Use language – to explain the rules of the game, playing a role in pretend play etc.
- Use small and large muscles – when he/she builds with Lego, cuts with scissors, draws or writes etc.

You can help:

- Give your child time to play every day.
- Provide things for your child to play with – old boxes, clothes and household items are often more fun than bought toys and equipment.
- Join in the play.
- Make space for play.
- When chatting, ask what your child was playing with that day. Show that you value play – whether it's at home or in school.

- Let your child's teacher know about the games, activities, books that your child enjoys.

Further information on Aistear can be found on the following website: <http://www.ncca.ie>



Parting Thoughts

Who must the child listen to?

Bit by bit the child will get used to the general discipline of the classroom. S/He will understand promptly that in important matters an instruction from the teacher in the school, as likewise from the parents at home, must be obeyed promptly and without question.

Teacher and Parent

In the early stages some parents see the teacher almost daily and this is very positive. However, if there is something in particular that you need to discuss please arrange to meet him/her at a suitable time when you both can listen to each other and focus on the matter in mind.

Easy Does It

There are lots of ideas and suggestions in this booklet 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 s/he enjoys a fun approach to certain aspects of learning then we would say –

give it a go – but remember don't overdo it. We always advise to strike a balance between the fun and the firm approaches.

Our Hope

We are offering this Guide to Parents as a practical help in dealing with the education of their children in the very early stages. We will be very happy if you retain this as a reference and dip into it from time to time and find something of value to you and your child going forward on this incredible journey.

