



A guide to the Irish education system:

Please note:

The questions and answers on these pages are a guide for parents. We have made them as clear as we can. It is general information only so it may not answer all of your questions. Some of our services and schemes can be complex and the information here may not cover everything you need to know. You can get more information from our website www.education.ie or you can contact us. You will find the contact details for each service in the [contact us area of our website](#).

We have tried to make sure that this information is correct and up-to-date. If you notice any mistakes, please let us know and we will correct them as soon as we can. You can send your comments by email to info@education.gov.ie

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Going to school

Education is compulsory for children in Ireland from the ages of six to sixteen or until students have completed three years of second-level education.

What do you mean by primary and post-primary education?

Children attend primary school between the ages of 4 and 12. Primary schools are also known as national schools. Primary education is also referred to as first level education. Primary school covers eight years - a two-year infant cycle followed by six years from first to sixth class. Children move to the next class at the end of each school year. The school year runs September to May (Post Primary) and June (Primary).

Children from about 12 to 18 years attend a post-primary school. Post-primary schools include secondary schools, vocational schools and community and comprehensive schools. Post-primary education is also referred to as second level education.

Do I have to pay to send my child to school?

No. In Ireland all children are entitled to free primary and post-primary education. Most primary schools are funded by the state and the vast majority of children attend these schools.

There are a small number of private schools. If you decide to send your child to a private school, you will have to pay fees every year.

Children who are new to Ireland (sometimes called newcomers), whether asylum seekers, refugees or children of migrant workers, have the same right to education as other Irish children. They must attend school between the ages of 6 and 16.

When must my child start school?

The law says that every child from the age of 6 must receive an education, whether at home or at school. Most children start school at either 4 or 5 years of age. Your

child must be at least 4 years of age at the start of the school year (September) to enrol in primary school.

Primary education consists of an eight year cycle: junior infants, senior infants, and first to sixth classes. Pupils normally transfer to post-primary education at the age of twelve.

At what age can my child leave school?

The minimum school leaving age is 16 or after three years of post-primary education, whichever is later.

Who is responsible for my child attending school?

Under the [Education \(Welfare\) Act, 2000](#) you are responsible for making sure your children attend school. If a child's parents cannot look after them, a guardian or carer becomes responsible.

Where can I get information on pre-school and early years education?

Early childhood education and care services in Ireland are delivered outside the formal education system, by a diverse range of private, community and voluntary interests and are described variously as crèches, nurseries, pre-schools, naíonraí (Irish language pre-schools), playgroups and daycare services. Government investment in such provision is primarily implemented by the **Department of Children and Youth Affairs**. www.dcyu.ie

Getting my child into school

What school will my child attend?

Children normally attend their local school. You can send your child to the primary or post primary school of your choice, as long as there is a place for them. While most schools can enrol all the children who apply, there is no guarantee of a place in the local school.

How do I enrol my child in school?

To enrol your child, you should first check the [list of primary and post primary schools](#) in your area. You should contact the school of your choice to see if there is a place

available. If a school is full, it may not be able to enrol your child. The school may place your child on a waiting list or suggest another school in the area.

If they do not have enough places, the school will give priority according to their admissions policy. For example, they may give priority to brothers and sisters of current pupils or to children living in the local area. This policy is decided by the board of management of the school. The school can give you a copy if you ask for it.

When choosing a primary school, you may also need to know about the admissions policies of post-primary schools. Some post-primary schools give priority to students from certain primary schools.

What is an admissions policy?

The admissions policy sets out the school's policy for enrolling children in the school. Schools that cannot enrol all the pupils who want to attend must have an admissions policy according to the [Education Act](#). The school's board of management draws up this policy. They may choose to only enrol children from a particular area or age group. The admissions policy must be in line with section 7 of the [Equal Status Act 2000](#).

An admissions policy may also be called an enrolment policy. A school will give you information about their policy if you ask them for it.

Can I appeal the decision if a school refuses to enrol my child?

If a school refuses to enrol a student, you have the right to appeal the decision. You must first appeal to the school's board of management. If this is not successful, you can appeal the decision to the Department, under [Section 29 of the Education Act](#).

Your appeal is heard by an appeals committee. In most cases, appeals are dealt with within 30 days. The Department may give directions to the board of management to resolve the matter. The board of management has to obey this instruction. The appeals procedure makes sure that schools keep to their admissions policies.

You can get more information about appealing decisions on enrolment at [Appeal against Permanent Exclusion, Suspension or Refusal to Enrol - Department of Education and Skills](#).

Are there different types of school?

Primary

The primary education sector includes state-funded primary schools, special schools and private primary schools. State-funded primary schools used to be known as national schools and include:

- religious schools, such as Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland, Muslim;
- non-denominational schools;
- multi-denominational schools; and
- Gaelscoileanna (schools that teach through the Irish language).

Single sex schools teach boys and girls separately. Co-educational schools teach boys and girls together. A number of special schools cater for particular types of disability and special needs (see: Special services and extra support).

The [list of schools](#) gives details of primary, post-primary and special schools, as well as schools with special classes.

Post Primary

The post-primary education sector comprises secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. Secondary schools are privately owned and managed. Vocational schools are state-established and administered by Education and Training Borads (ETBs), while community and comprehensive schools are managed by Boards of Management of differing compositions.

What is whole-school evaluation?

Whole-school evaluation (WSE) is how we inspect the work of a school. A team of inspectors meets with members of the school community to discuss their work, their role and their vision for the school. The inspectors talk to members of the parent association in schools where the association is linked to the [National Parents Council](#). Otherwise they meet with the parents' representatives on the board of management.

The inspectors' role is to evaluate the education system and to give advice and support to schools. In particular, the inspectors measure how well the school is doing on:

- teaching and learning;
- management and planning; and
- supports for pupils.

Where can I find school inspection reports?

We publish school inspection reports carried out after 6 February 2006 on our website. You can search for these on the department website at [Inspection Reports and Publications](#)

How long is the school day?

Primary

Schools open from Monday to Friday. Classes usually start between 9am and 9.30am but may not start later than 9.30. A school day lasts 5 hours and 40 minutes. This includes assembly time, roll call and breaks.

There is normally a morning break around 11 am and a lunch break around 12.30 pm. It is important to give your child healthy food and drink for these two breaks. Schools encourage healthy eating and many schools ask parents not to give sweets, chocolate, crisps or fizzy drinks for lunch.

The school day may be shorter for children in infant classes. You can get more information in [Time in School Circular 11/95](#).

Post Primary

Schools open from Monday to Friday. Classes usually start between 9am and 9.30am. The minimum number of hours instruction per day is 6 and minimum instruction of hours per week is 28.

For more information please refer to the [Post Primary Time in school Circular m29/95](#).

Staff structure and school management (Primary)

What is the staffing structure within a Primary school?

The Principal is responsible for the day-to-day management of the school, including guidance and direction of the teachers and other staff of the school, and is accountable to the Board for that management. The Board manages the school on behalf of the Patron and is accountable to the Patron and the Minister.

Each class has a class teacher. In some smaller schools the teacher has more than one class. The class teacher teaches all subjects to their class. There may be other teachers in the school who will help the class teacher. For example your child may have a language support teacher to help learn English or a learning support teacher to help with things they are having difficulty with.

Who is the patron?

The **Patron** is the person recognised as such by the Minister in accordance with Section 8 of the Education Act, 1998. Where two or more persons exercise the functions of a Patron they may be registered as joint Patrons.

It is the duty of the Patron, in accordance with Section 14 of the Education Act, 1998, to appoint, where practicable, a Board of Management.

In Catholic and Church of Ireland schools, the bishops are the patrons of schools within the churches' diocese. The parish priest usually carries out the functions on behalf of the bishop. In multi-denominational schools, the patron is usually the board of trustees of the limited company e.g. [Educate Together](#). Patrons for Gaelscoileanna can either be church bishops or [Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoileanna Lán Ghaeilge](#), a limited company set up for this purpose.

What is 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 Board manages the school on behalf of the Patron and for the benefit of the students and their parents and to provide or cause to be provided an appropriate

education for each student at the school for which that Board has responsibility. The Board/manager(s) is the employer of staff in the school.

The board of management includes representatives of parents, teachers, trustees or patron, the principal and the community. You can read more about [Boards of Management](#) on the department website.

Staff structure and school management (Post Primary)

What is the staffing structure within a Post Primary school?

Each school is run by a Principal Teacher and will be assisted by at least one Deputy. The most significant change for children in post primary schools is that the organisation of classes will be subject based. Generally schools offer first year students a choice from a range of subjects. However the schools capacity to offer subject options to students will be constrained by the number of teachers available to it and the need to timetable subjects to make them available to as many students as possible.

School Management

Voluntary Secondary Schools are schools under the trusteeship of religious orders, dioceses or Boards of Governors. The overarching national managerial authority for these schools is called the Joint Managerial Body. (<http://www.jmb.ie>)

Vocational Schools are established in accordance with the Vocational Education Act of 1930. These schools are owned by the local Education and Training Board.

Community and Comprehensive schools were established in the 1960's and are managed by Boards of Management of differing compositions. The managerial authority for these schools is the Association of Community and Comprehensive schools.

School closures and school holidays

What are the school terms?

- The school year has three terms:
 - The first term is from the beginning of September to December (Christmas).
 - The second term is from early January to March or April (Easter).
 - The final term is from after Easter to the end of June.
- In the middle of each term there may be a short holiday called half-term or mid-term. This can vary from a few days to a week.

You can get more information at <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/School-Holidays/>

How will I know about days off during the year?

At the start of the school year, the school will give you a list of days that it will be closed during the year. These include holidays and in-service (training for teachers) days, among others. If the school has to close unexpectedly for a day or to close early, it will send a note home with your child to let you know in advance.

How many days will the school be open during the year?

Schools must open for 183 days a year at primary level and 167 days a year at second level.

In what class will my child be put?

Children starting school for the first time will be in Junior Infants. If your child has attended school before, for example in another country, the school will take their age and previous education into account. In this case, the principal will decide on the class with you and the class teacher.

Can my child repeat a year?

Children are only allowed to repeat a year for educational reasons and in special situations. In these situations, the principal will decide with the class teacher, learning support teacher or resource teacher and parents if a pupil would benefit from repeating a year.

What will my child learn at Primary school?

The curriculum taught in primary schools tries to give your child a love of learning that will last a lifetime. School is meant to be a pleasant and fun experience. It is centred on the child. Literacy, numeracy and language – reading, writing, maths and English - are most important. Children will also learn about science and technology, social, personal and health education and citizenship. Education also helps children to develop their social skills – how to get on with other people.

You can get more information about the primary curriculum from the [National Council for Curriculum and Assessment website](#).

What will my child learn at Post Primary school?

Post-primary education consists of a three-year Junior Cycle (lower secondary), followed by a two or three year Senior Cycle (upper secondary), depending on whether the optional Transition Year (TY) is taken. Students usually begin the Junior Cycle at age 12. The Junior Certificate examination is taken after three years. The main objective of the Junior Cycle is for students to complete a broad and balanced curriculum, and to develop the knowledge and skills that will enable them to proceed to Senior Cycle education. A new Framework for Junior Cycle is going to make significant changes to the current Junior Cycle beginning in September 2014. The Senior Cycle caters for students in the 15 to 18 year age group. It includes an optional Transition Year, which follows immediately after the Junior Cycle. TY provides an opportunity for students to experience a wide range of educational inputs, including work experience, over the course of a year that is free from formal examinations. During the final two years of Senior Cycle students take one of three programmes, each leading to a State Examination: the traditional Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) or the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

Must my child learn Irish?

In certain situations, for example where a child has lived abroad or they do not speak English, they may not have to study Irish. Children with certain disabilities may also be exempt from learning Irish.

You can get more information about this from [Circular 12/96 Revision of Circular 18/79 on Exemption from the Study of Irish](#).

Who will teach my child?

Primary

Each class has one teacher, who teaches all subjects. For special classes, for example English language for non-English speaking children, your child may have other teachers. In some smaller schools one teacher may teach more than one class in the same classroom. Children learn through active and enjoyable experiences. If your child needs extra help, they may also work with a [learning support and resource teacher](#) (LS/RT).

Post Primary

Second-level teachers, also known as post-primary teachers, will normally specialise in one or two subjects and will teach these to students from first year to sixth year. Therefore, each class will have different teachers for different subjects. All second-level teachers have the responsibility for ensuring that all students, including those with special educational needs or those with English as an additional language, are provided with a learning programme and learning environment that enable them to gain access to the curriculum and to advance learning. If your child needs extra help, they may also work with a [Learning Support and resource Teacher](#) (LS/RT).

How are children assessed in school?

Primary

Assessment means checking what a child has learned by testing or observing what the child knows. This is so the teacher can see how the child is making progress, developing a skill or understanding a particular topic. In the early years, assessment is informal, based on observation by you and the child's teacher.

In primary school the teacher uses many different ways to assess your child's learning. These include setting tests, tasks, project work and portfolios. Standardised tests are used to see how children are progressing compared to other children in the country of the same age or stage of education. These can let parents see their child's progress and help the school to identify children that may need support.

From 2007, all children must take standardised tests in English reading and mathematics at the end of first class or the beginning of second class, and at the end of fourth class or the beginning of fifth class.

Teachers use another type of assessment, called screening or diagnostic assessment, especially in the early years of primary school. This is used if you or the teacher suspects that your child may have difficulty, or if the child is not progressing as well as other children. The learning support or class teacher may use a special test or series of tests that give you and the teacher more information about your child's learning needs.

You can find more information about assessments [on the Department's website](#) and the [National Council for Curriculum and Assessment website](#).

Post Primary

Formative, diagnostic and summative assessment are undertaken on a regular basis at school level, with particular emphasis being placed on more formal school-based examinations before the Christmas, Easter and Summer breaks. On the basis of these assessments, teachers and principals report to parents on student progress and give advice on subject options and on the level at which subjects are taken. The Junior Certificate is a national examination taken by almost every student at the end of the junior cycle. At the end of senior cycle, students who have followed the Leaving Certificate (Established) take the Leaving Certificate examination. Student achievement in this examination is directly linked to processes of selection for courses of study in further and higher education. In addition to the examinations taken by other students, students who follow the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme take an examination paper and submit a portfolio in the Link Modules. Students who follow the Leaving Certificate Applied programme take a final examination and also accumulate credits over the two years of study.

For more information click on the [Assessment in post-primary schools - National Council for Curriculum and Assessment](#)

Do parents meet with the teachers?

Schools usually hold a parent/teacher meeting during the year. The school will let you know the date and time of the meeting. This is an important meeting and you should do your best to attend. At the meeting you can see examples of your child's work and discuss your child's progress with the teacher(s). Going to these meetings also shows your child that you are interested in how they are doing.

If you are concerned about your child's progress at any stage during the year, you can arrange to speak to the teacher.

How do schools communicate with parents?

Schools generally communicate with parents by sending notes home with the child. These notes can be written in the child's homework diary or printed on a separate sheet. You should check your child's school bag each day for notes.

Will I get a written report on my child's progress?

Under the Education Act, 1998 the school must provide reports for each child. The school must allow parents to have access to their child's school record. The school should have a procedure to keep parents informed about matters relating to the school.

Under the Education (Welfare) Act, if a student leaves one school to go to another, the principal of the first school must give information about the child to the new school. This information may include attendance problems or other relevant matters relating to the child's progress.

Will my child have to do homework?

Schools set their own policy in relation to homework. If your child does get homework, you should give them space and encouragement to do it. If they need it, offer your help. Take time to talk with your child about what they do in school each day.

- Set aside a quiet time where your child is sitting comfortably at a table and will not be distracted by television or other noise.
- Homework time should include time for oral as well as written work. Oral work – speaking and repeating what they have learned – is particularly helpful in the early years.
- Encourage your child to keep their books and copies clean and tidy.
- If your child is working on their own, be available to help and show an interest in what they're doing. Praise your child's efforts whenever you can.
- Try to be patient with your child.
- If your child is having ongoing problems with homework discuss this with the teacher.
- If your child can't do their homework for any reason, let the teacher know. Write a short note explaining why.

For more information on this please click on the following link [“help my kid learn” \(primary\)](#)

What do I do if my child has a problem?

You should first talk to your child. A problem could be with learning or it could be a personal or social one. If you cannot sort out the problem at home, you should make an appointment to speak to the teacher. If this doesn't resolve the problem you may need to make an appointment to speak with the principal.

What can the school do if I think my child is being abused?

In 2011, the Department issued Child Protection Procedures which are based on [Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011](#) to all recognised schools. These Child Protection Procedures aim to give direction to school management and staff regarding the identification of and response to child protection concerns and the process for continued support of the child. The most important consideration is the protection and well-being of the child.

Who deals with child protection concerns in a school?

Under the Procedures, each school must have a Designated Liaison Person (DLP) in place for dealing with child protection concerns. The name of the DLP should be displayed in a prominent position near the main entrance to the school.

The school DLP has responsibility for ensuring that the standard reporting procedure is followed, so that suspected child protection concerns are referred promptly to the designated person in the Child and family Agency, www.TUSLA.ie or in the event of an emergency and the unavailability of the Agency, to An Garda Síochána.

If you wish to report a child protection concern you should speak to the DLP in your school and that person will be responsible for making the report.

Where the allegation or concern relates to the DLP, you should without delay, report the matter to the Chairperson of the Board of Management or in schools where the Education and Training Board (ETB) is the employer to the CEO of the ETB concerned. In such cases, the Chairperson or CEO as appropriate shall assume the role normally undertaken by the DLP and shall follow the procedures set out in section 4.2 of the [Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools](#).

Can I report a child protection concern directly to the HSE Children and Family Services?

Yes, you can report a child protection concern directly to [TUSLA, Child and Family Agency](#). The Children & Family Services functions of the HSE are now part of the Child and Family Agency, Tusla. Tusla was established by law on 1 January 2014. TUSLA, Child and Family Services will tell you how best to proceed. It may then contact the school or ask you to contact the school or others.

You can get more information about child protection on the [Department Website](#) or on www.TUSLA.ie.

Does my child have to wear a school uniform?

Many schools require their pupils to wear a uniform as part of their school code or admissions policy.

Can I get help to pay for the school uniform?

You may be able to get help from the [Department of Social Protection](#). The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance helps towards the cost of uniforms and shoes for school children. See www.welfare.ie

If you have a problem with your child wearing the school uniform for cultural reasons, you should discuss this with the principal.

Can I get help towards the cost of school books?

The Department gives schools funding to provide assistance with the cost of books. You can find information on the scheme in [Circular 0046/2013 Allocation to schools for books](#).

This scheme covers children from families where there is genuine hardship because of unemployment, prolonged illness of a parent, large family size, single parenthood or problems such as alcohol or drug abuse.

You may also apply to your local HSE Community Welfare Officer for an Exceptional Needs Payment to cover the cost of school books and school uniforms. You can get contact details on the [HSE website - www.HSE.ie](http://www.HSE.ie)

Most schools now operate a book rental scheme to help parents with the costs of school books. For more information click on the link [here](#).

What is the school health screening and immunisation policy?

School health screenings are carried out in the school, by public health nurses and area medical officers from the Health Service Executive (HSE). These are health check-ups that might involve checking a child's hearing, teeth or sight. The school will inform you in advance about the check-ups and what is involved.

If your child has a health problem, such as hearing or speech difficulties, they may be referred to your local HSE health centre. Treatment for problems identified at these screenings is free of charge.

There is also a school immunisation (vaccination) programme. Vaccinations are free of charge for all children. Your consent is needed to give vaccinations to children under 16 years of age.

You can get details of the school screening programme on school immunisation programme on <http://www.immunisation.ie> or on the Citizens Information website, <http://www.citizensinformation.ie/categories/health/children-s-health>.

How can I support the teachers and principal?

Here are some ways you can help.

- Make sure your child goes to school.
- Encourage your child to behave in the classroom and in the playground.
- If your school has a uniform, make sure that your child wears it.
- Make sure they do their homework.
- Let the school know if your family is leaving the area.
- Respect the professional views of the principal or class teachers.

Bullying and discipline

What is bullying?

Bullying is defined in the [Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools](#) as “unwanted negative behaviour, verbal, psychological or physical conducted by an individual or group against another person (or persons) and which is repeated over time”. More information on the definition of bullying, types of bullying and the impact and indicators of bullying is available in Sections 2 and 3 of the procedures for schools.

Who is responsible for dealing with bullying in schools?

Responsibility for tackling bullying in schools falls to the level of the individual school. New [Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools](#) were published in September 2013. The New Procedures and the associated Department [Circular 0045/2013](#) apply to all recognised primary and post-primary schools and to centres for education (as defined in the Education Act 1998) which are attended by pupils under the age of 18 years.

School authorities and school personnel are required to adhere to these procedures in dealing with allegations and incidents of bullying.

The purpose of these procedures is to give direction and guidance to school authorities and school personnel in preventing and tackling school-based bullying behaviour amongst its pupils and in dealing with any negative impact within school of bullying behaviour that occurs elsewhere.

Where can I get information about bullying in schools?

The [Anti-Bullying Procedures](#) set out the requirements on schools in relation to preventing and dealing with bullying behaviour. The [Department website](#) contains further information which may be of interest to you. There are also a number of bodies/groups that provide information and assistance in the area of bullying including the [Anti-Bullying Centre at Dublin City University](#) or the [National Parents Council](#).

How can I complain about a teacher or the school?

It is important that there are good relations between home and school. With mutual respect and goodwill, you and the school can sort out most problems by discussing them. Make every effort to resolve your complaint at school level. You can ask the Department to investigate your complaint only after you have done this.

The [Complaints Procedure](#) describes the steps you should take when making complaints against schools and teachers.

How do schools reward and discipline pupils?

Teachers praise children when they work hard and produce good work and homework. Praise helps to motivate children. Each school has a code of discipline and parents are given a copy of this. You are responsible for accepting the school code and making sure your children understand and keep to it.

The teacher or principal will inform you if your child continually breaks the rules. You will have a chance to discuss the issues with them. They will expect you to make sure that your child's behaviour improves. You should try to sort it out with your child first and involve the class teacher if necessary.

For a serious breach of the school rules, the school could decide as a last resort to suspend a child from the school. This is a rare and serious decision. The school must have tried all other options before deciding to suspend. They will send you notice of the suspension. You can appeal it to the board of management. As a last resort, you can appeal to the Department of Education and Skills.

You can read more in [Primary Circular 20/90 School Behaviour and Discipline](#) and [Post Primary Circular M33/91](#).

Do schools have to have a code of discipline?

Yes, schools set out their own code of discipline. You will get a copy of the school's policy when you enrol your child.

School transport (see also Special services and extra support)

Can my child get transport to school?

In general, children are eligible for school transport where they reside not less than 3.2 kilometres from and are attending their nearest national school as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

You can get more information from [School Transport section](#).

How do I get school transport?

Bus Éireann operates the School Transport Scheme on behalf of the Department. Applications for school transport can be made online at buseireann.ie or forms can be downloaded and submitted to the local Bus Éireann office.

You can get more information from [Bus Éireann Transport Office](#).

What if there is no school transport?

A transport grant is available towards the cost of private transport for children who are eligible transport but for whom no service is available provided they have completed the application process.

What if I live less than 3.2 kilometres from my nearest school?

If there are spare seats on a school transport service, after all eligible children have been allocated their seats, you may enquire regarding spare tickets at your local Bus Éireann office.

Where can I get information about timetables, pick-up points and routes?

You can get information from your local Bus Éireann School Transport Office. See [Bus Éireann contact details](#).

If I am not happy with a school transport decision – can I appeal?

School transport is provided for primary school children under the terms of the [Primary School Transport Scheme](#). There is a [School Transport Appeals Board](#) to make sure that the terms of the scheme are applied clearly and fairly. If you would like to appeal, you need to fill in a [School Transport Appeals Form](#).

My child has special needs – can they get special transport?

We do our best to provide school transport for all children attending special schools and special classes in primary schools ([list of schools](#)).

You should apply to the principal for special transport when you enrol your child. The principal sends the application through the Special Education Needs Organiser to the School Transport Section of the Department of Education and Skills.

If transport is not available, you may get a transport grant to help with the cost of private transport.

Special services and extra support

What happens if my child has difficulty keeping up in class or has a learning difficulty?

You or the class teacher may have concerns about your child's academic, physical, social, behavioural or emotional development. In such cases the teacher may use screening tests to draw up a plan for extra help for your child at school. If there is still concern after a number of reviews, the class teacher in consultation with the learning support and/or resource teacher may decide on other supports.

Who do I contact if my child has special needs?

You should first discuss the support available from the school with the class teacher and/or the school principal. All mainstream schools have a teacher to cater for the needs of pupils with high-incidence disabilities such as mild general learning disability and dyslexia. As well as this, schools can also get extra teaching resources for pupils with more serious learning disabilities.

If your child is assessed as having more complicated or low-incidence special education or care needs, the school may apply for an additional teacher or, in the case of pupils with disabilities who have care needs, Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support.

If you are unsure which setting – mainstream class, special class attached to a mainstream school or special school – would best suit your child, you can discuss the options with the local special educational needs organiser (SENO).

You can get information about SENOs from the National Council for Special Education's [Contact Details for Special Education Needs Organisers](#). For more information, contact:

National Council for Special Education

1-2 Mill Street

Trim

Co. Meath

Tel: (046) 948 6400

E-mail: info@ncse.ie

My child has special needs – can they get special transport?

We do our best to provide school transport for all pupils attending special schools and special classes in primary schools ([list of schools](#)).

You should apply to the principal for special transport when you enrol your child. The principal sends the application through the Special Education Needs Organiser to the School Transport Section of the Department of Education and Skills.

If special transport is not available, you may get a transport grant to help with the cost of private transport.

What is a school bus escort?

School bus escorts help children with special needs while travelling on school transport services to and from special schools and special classes. In general, one escort is shared by all pupils on the service.

How can I apply for an escort?

The school can apply for an escort on a special transport service through the Special Education Needs Organiser.

Can I apply for a harness?

Special schools and classes can get a harness for special needs children travelling on school transport services. The school can apply to the local Special Education Needs Organiser.

My child has very little English. What help does the school give my child with English?

Young children learn English very quickly. Even if a child has very little English, they will normally be placed in a class with children the same age. At both primary and post-primary levels, additional language support is provided for students who do not speak English as their first language. These supports are designed to allow individual students to participate in mainstream education on a par with their peers.

Public libraries are also an excellent resource for parents and pupils.

What is the role of the National Educational Psychological Service?

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) is a service funded by the Department of Education and Skills. NEPS psychologists specialise in working with the school community and work with both primary and post-primary schools. They are concerned with children's learning and behaviour and their social and emotional development. The service is organised on a regional basis with psychologists being assigned to a group of schools. Where a school doesn't have an assigned psychologist, it can avail of a service from an independently employed panel of psychologists.

Psychologists work with teachers, parents and children in identifying educational needs. Where an individual assessment is required, it will only be carried out with the written consent of the parents or guardians. Psychologists provide oral and written feedback to both parents/guardians and teachers.

A psychological service is also provided to all schools in the event of a critical incident.

What do I do if I think my child may need to be seen by a psychologist?

Usually the first step is to discuss your concerns with the class teacher and/or school principal. This can often lead to a satisfactory solution; not every child needs to meet the psychologist. If you and the school staff agree that it would be helpful to have support, the school will refer your child to their NEPS psychologist, who helps the school to plan how to support the child. If your school arranges an assessment through NEPS there is no charge for this service.

If your school does not have a NEPS psychologist please talk to your principal about local arrangements.

For more information on National Educational Psychological Service please see the [Department's](#) website

What is the National Council for Special Education?

The National Council for Special Education was set up to improve the delivery of education services to persons with special educational needs arising from disabilities with particular emphasis on children. The NCSE is responsible through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers for allocating resource hours and special needs assistants to support children with special needs.

To find out more about the functions of the NCSE please click [here](#).

You may contact the local special educational needs organiser (SENO), who works for the NCSE, to discuss what education supports your child needs. You can download a list of SENOs from [contact details for Special Education Needs Organisers](#).

What is the role of the Special Education Support Service?

The aim of the service, known as SESS for short, is to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, particularly for children with special educational needs. The

service supports school staff working with children with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary, special schools and special classes.

Professional development and support is available to: principals, school management, class teachers, subject teachers, special-class teachers, learning support and resource teachers and special needs assistants.

The SESS involves teachers, education centres, inspectors, the National Educational Psychological Service, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the National Council for Special Education, third level colleges, the Health Service Executive (HSE), teacher unions and other relevant services.

You can get more information on the [SESS website](#).

What is a special needs assistant?

Special needs assistants (SNA) care for pupils with disabilities or certain medical conditions in school. They may be appointed to a special school or class or to a mainstream school to help with a pupil or pupils with special needs. The special needs assistant may be full- or part-time and may be shared by pupils who need support.

The school can apply to the local Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) to get a special needs assistant.

What is learning support and resource teacher?

A learning support and resource teacher (LS/RT) caters for children with learning delays or with a high-incidence disability such as mild general learning disability and dyslexia. They add to the support given by the class teacher. Every primary school has LS/RT support.

The main aim of learning support is help pupils with learning difficulties to improve their literacy and numeracy to a set standard before they leave primary school.

What is a resource teacher?

A resource teacher helps schools to support children with low-incidence special needs arising from disability. These children may, for example, have:

- a hearing or visual impairment,

- a physical disability,
- a moderate or severe general learning disability,
- several disabilities together,
- emotional difficulties,
- autism, or
- speech and language disorder.

The resource teacher will help the child by:

- assessing and recording the child's needs and progress;
- setting specific, time-related targets for each child and agreeing these with the class teacher and principal;
- teaching the children, either in a separate room or with the rest of the child's class;
- team teaching, as long as the children concerned benefit from it;
- advising class teachers about adapting the curriculum, teaching strategies, suitable textbooks, information technology and software and other related matters;
- meeting and advising parents, accompanied by the class teacher, as needed; and
- having short meetings in the child's interest with other professionals such as psychologists, speech and language therapists, visiting teachers and special school or special class teachers.

What is the visiting teacher service for children with sight or hearing difficulties?

The visiting teacher service consists of highly-trained teachers with expertise in visual impairment and other areas of special education. You can get more information by clicking this link to the [Department's webpage on The Visiting Teacher Service for Children and Young People who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing or Blind/Visually Impaired.](#)

Parents

What is the role of the parent?

Ireland's Constitution states that parents are the child's primary educators. Support from home is vital for your child's development during primary school. To support your child, you can:

- show interest in what your child is doing in school,
- consult with the school on your child's progress,
- attend parent / teacher meetings,
- talk with the class teacher about any concerns you may have, and
- praise your child's efforts at every opportunity. Your encouragement means a lot and will motivate your child to continue trying.

What should I do if my child cannot go to school?

You must tell the school that your child cannot attend and say why. Write a short note to the school to explain why your child was out and send it in with your child when they go back to school. There is usually a good reason for a child not being in school, such as illness.

Can I take my child on holidays during term time?

Taking a holiday during term time means that children miss important school time. It will be difficult for them to catch up on work later on. As a result, they may fall behind with school work and lose confidence in their abilities. The [Education Welfare Service](#) of TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency strongly advises parents not to take their children out of school for holidays during term time.

What will the school do if my child misses a lot of school?

The school must tell the [Education Welfare Service](#), of TUSLA, Child and Family Agency if your child has missed 20 days or more in the school year or if it is concerned that your child is missing too much school.

What can I do if the school stops my child attending?

The school can suspend or expel a child or refuse to enrol them. If you are not happy with that decision, you can appeal it to the Secretary General of the Department. You can do this by filling in an [Appeals Form](#), which you can get from the school or from the [Department's website](#). The appeal will be heard by an appeals committee.

What is a Section 29 appeal?

Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 allows parents, and students who have reached the age of 18, to appeal certain decisions made by a school's board of management. Appeals may be made about a decision to:

- permanently exclude a student (expel),
- suspend a student from the school for more than 20 school days in any one school year, or
- refuse to enrol a student.

For more information on the appeals process please click [here](#)

What is home tuition?

The purpose of the Home Tuition Scheme is to provide a compensatory educational service for children who, for a number of reasons such as chronic illness, are unable to attend school. The scheme also provides a compensatory educational service for children awaiting a suitable educational placement and for pre-school children with autism.

Home Tuition is provided as an interim provision only and should not be regarded as an optional alternative to a place in school.

You can get more information from: [Application for Home Tuition](#)

Can I teach my child at home?

Under the [Education \(Welfare\) Act, 2000](#), you have a right to educate your child outside of school, for example at home. If you decide to educate your child outside of school, you must register with the [Education Welfare Service](#). The Education Welfare Service of the agency will carry out an assessment of the education you provide.

What happens if my family is moving to a new area away from the school?

It is important to tell the school that your child is leaving and will not be returning. You should ask the principal to give you a report on your child's progress. When you enrol your child in a new school, you should give the principal a copy of the report from the last school. If the school has given school books or other items, return these before you leave.

Supports for parents

Do parents meet as a group?

Most schools have a parents' council and all parents are welcome to become involved. The National Parents Council is the representative body for parents at primary level.

See also: **What is the [National Parents Council – Primary?](#)**

How can I get English language classes and adult education courses?

Adult literacy services are provided by Education and Training Boards (ETB).

You can get more information from:

- your local ETB Adult Literacy Organiser,
- the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), which has a Freephone number, **1800 20 20 65**, and information on their website www.nala.ie

What is the Home School Community Liaison Scheme?

The Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) is a Department of Education and Skills (DES) initiative that was set up to combat educational disadvantage in accordance with the DEIS initiative (Delivering Equality Of Opportunity In Schools). The scheme works by developing partnerships between parents, teachers and the community to improve pupils' learning opportunities and assist their retention and participation in the educational system.

The HSCL Scheme is managed and coordinated by a national leadership team within the Senior Management Team of the Educational Welfare Services of Child and Family Agency.

You can get more information on the TUSLA website by clicking [here](#) .

Where can I get Irish language classes?

Your local Gaelscoil may run Irish language classes. You can see if there is one in your area on the [List of Primary Schools](#). You can also get more information from the Gael Linn website <http://www.gael-linn.ie>.

What is the National Parents Council - Primary?

[National Parents Council](#) - Primary (NPC) is the representative organisation for parents of children in primary or early education.

NPC's Helpline is a confidential listening service that is available to all parents of children in pre-school and primary school, to support parents on all matters relating to their children's learning at home and in school. As well as supporting individual parents, the Helpline also offers guidance and support to Parents' Associations, and to schools who are seeking to establish Parents' Associations.

The Helpline supports all members of the school community on any matter that relates to supporting parental engagement in their children's learning. The Helpline supports by providing accurate and up-to-date information on educational issues and by offering a listening ear to callers who would like to explore an issue with an independent person.

NPC's Helpline is there to provide support to you in whatever way we can. Opening hours: Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri: 10am-4pm. Wed: 9am-7pm. Telephone: 01 887 4477 email: helpline@npc.ie For more information, visit the National Parents Council Primary website, www.npc.ie

What is the National Parents Council – Post Primary?

The [National Parents Council Post Primary](#) is an umbrella body representing elected parents from a number of the post primary education sectors.

They can be contacted at Unit 5, Glasnevin Business Centre, Ballyboggan road, Dublin 11. Tel 01 8302740 or email: npcpp@eircom.net

Where can I get free internet access?

Libraries and [Citizen Information Centres](#) provide free internet access.

Third Level Education

What is Higher Education?

Higher Education in Ireland is provided mainly by 7 Universities, 14 Institutes of Technology, including the Dublin Institute of Technology and 7 Colleges of Education. Access to higher education for students progressing from post primary education is based on the Leaving Certificate, which is the examination completed at the end of second level school. Applications for entry to undergraduate courses in universities, colleges of education, institutes of technology and some other institutes of higher education, are processed by the [Central Applications Office \(CAO\)](#). The aim of the system is to process applications centrally and to deal with them in an efficient and fair manner. The participating institutions retain the function of making decisions on admissions.

There are other routes of entry for certain categories of students, for example mature students and those wishing to attend institutions not using the CAO application facility. Intending students should contact their institution of choice to confirm the exact application process in such cases.

Some courses may have specific subject entry requirements, and intending students should check the CAO website, or contact their institution of choice, to confirm the exact requirements of the course they wish to undertake.

For a full list of colleges please select the link here www.colleges.ie

The [Higher Education Authority \(HEA\)](#) is the statutory planning and development body for higher education and research in Ireland. The HEA has wide advisory powers throughout the whole of the third-level education sector. In addition it is the funding authority for the universities, institutes of technology and other designated higher education institutions.

Free Fees Schemes

Most undergraduate students attending publicly funded third-level courses qualify for funding towards tuition fees under the Department of Education and Skills free fees schemes.

In order to qualify for tuition fee funding a student must be a first-time undergraduate, hold EU/EEA/Swiss nationality (or one of the other criteria regarding nationality listed below) and have been resident in an EU/EEA/Swiss state for at least three of the five years prior to starting their course.

Students who hold the following status in the State meet the nationality requirement of the schemes:

1. Those with official refugee status under the Refugee Act 1996 or
2. a family member of a refugee who has been granted permission to live in the State or
3. a family member of an EU national and have permission to live in the State, with a stamp “4EUFAM” on their residence card or
4. have been granted humanitarian leave to remain in the State or
5. have been granted permission to remain in the State by the Minister for Justice and Equality, following a determination by the Minister not to make a deportation order under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 or
6. have subsidiary protection granted by the Minister for Justice and Equality.

From the 2013/14 academic year students who acquire EU/EEA citizenship during the course of their studies may be eligible for free fees for the remainder of their course subject to meeting certain criteria.

Full criteria applying to the free fees schemes and the Institutions to which the scheme applies for approved courses is listed on www.studentfinance.ie.

Free fees do not apply to courses in private colleges, whether they have [Quality and Qualifications Ireland](#) (QQI) approval or not. The fact that a course is listed by the [Central Applications Office](#) (CAO) is not, in itself, enough to make it a *free fees* course.

For more information on citizenship log on to www.justice.ie

Pilot Support Scheme

Pilot Support Scheme for students who are in the Protection System or at the Leave to Remain (but not deportation order) stage and who are pursuing an approved Post Leaving Certificate course or an approved Undergraduate course.

For more information please see [Pilot-Support-Scheme](#)

Student contribution

A Student Contribution is payable by undergraduate students who qualify for free fees funding. The contribution rate for the academic year 2015/16 is €3,000.

Students who qualify for a student grant may be eligible to have all or part of the Contribution paid on their behalf by the State.

EU/Non-EU fees

Where students do not qualify for free fees funding they must pay the appropriate fee - either the EU or Non-EU rate. The relevant institution decides the rate of fee payable in line with their own criteria. Further details are available from the relevant institution.

Postgraduate fees

In general, you will have to pay fees for a postgraduate course. The rate of fee is set by the relevant higher education institution.

However, you may get financial assistance under the Student Grant Scheme. Those who meet the qualifying conditions for the special rate of grant under the Student Grant Scheme will be eligible to have their post-graduate tuition fees paid up to the maximum fee limit of €6,270. Otherwise, a postgraduate student may qualify to have a €2,000 contribution made towards the costs of their fees. The income threshold for this payment is €31,500 for the 2015/16 academic year, increasing relative to the number of family dependents. Currently maintenance support is not available for students entering postgraduate courses.

Postgraduates under the [Graduate Skills Conversion Programme](#), courses are free, full-time and intensive.

Student grants

Student grants provide financial support to eligible students. There are 2 elements to the student grant - a maintenance grant and a fee grant. A maintenance grant is a contribution towards your living costs. A fee grant can cover:

- All or part of your tuition fees
- All or part of the student contribution
- Costs of compulsory field trips

If you have qualified for a maintenance grant, you will generally qualify for a fee grant.

If you do not qualify for a maintenance grant, but your family's reckonable income is below certain limits, you may qualify for a partial fee grant. This means that you will either be exempt from 50% of the student contribution, or exempt from 50% of any tuition fees and all of the student contribution.

For more information on student grants then click here on www.susi.ie

If you are getting [Back to Education Allowance](#) (BTEA) you may qualify for exemption from the student contribution however you must meet the terms and conditions of the student grant scheme.

Further Education and Training

Further Education covers education and training which occurs after second level schooling but is not part of the third level system. There are number of providers of Further and Adult Education and Training and a wide variety of schools, organisations and institutions, are involved in the delivery of continuing education and training for young school leavers and adults.

Certification in the Further and Higher Education and Training Sector is usually in alignment with the National Framework of Qualifications – an awards framework of 10 levels which is aligned to the European Framework of Qualifications. [Quality and Qualifications Ireland \(QQI\)](#) quality assures

institutions of further and higher education and training, validates educational programmes and makes awards to learners.

Providers of Adult Education and Training

The two main providers in further and adult education and training are the [Education and Training Boards \(ETBs\)](#) and SOLAS. SOLAS is the new Further and Education and Training Authority in Ireland. It is responsible for funding, planning and co-ordinating training and further education programmes. The former FAS training centres will transfer to ETBs during 2014 and until this process is complete SOLAS will manage training provided by the training centres.

Migrant Participation in Further Education

Access to Further Education Programmes

Non-Irish nationals in the following categories are entitled to free access to Further Education courses (PLC, VTOS, Youthreach, BTEI, Adult Literacy and Community Education) on the same basis as Irish nationals:

- EU nationals;
- persons who have refugee status in Ireland;
- persons in the State as the spouse of an EU national, where the EU national has moved from one country to another within the EU to work;
- persons (including their spouse and children) who have been granted leave to remain in the State on humanitarian grounds;
- persons who have permission to remain in the State as the parents of a child born in Ireland;
- applicants for asylum who have been granted permission to work under the terms of a government decision of 26 July 1999

Asylum seekers who do not have an entitlement to work are entitled to free access to adult literacy and English language supports.

Otherwise the full economic fee for Further Education courses must be paid.

Adult Literacy Provision

The Department of Education and Skills provides for English language training for adult immigrants (English for Speakers of Other Languages, ESOL) through the adult literacy budget. Some ESOL tuition is also funded through the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) Programme. Funds are allocated to ETBs who are the main statutory providers of ESOL tuition.

Alternative Provision Available

Migrants, including workers and refugees, will continue to be able to access a range of courses, including English language and literacy, which have always been provided by Education and Training Boards (ETBs) under the Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme (ALCES) and the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), both of which are funded by the Department.

Useful information and links

Search for a school - [list of schools](#)

National Council for Special Education (NCSE) – www.ncse.ie

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) – www.ncca.ie

TUSLA, Child and Family Agency, Education Welfare Service - www.newb.ie

National Parents Council www.npc.ie

National Parents Council Post Primary - www.npcpp.ie

Your Child in Primary School – Tips for Parents

<http://www.into.ie/ROI/Publications/TipsforParents/>

[Introducing Your Second Level School \(Post Primary\)](#)

Health Promotion Unit - <http://www.healthpromotion.ie/publications/>

Department for Children and Youth Affairs - www.dcy.gov.ie

Department of Social and Family Affairs - www.welfare.ie

Department of Health and Children - <http://health.gov.ie/>

Refugee Integration Agency - www.ria.gov.ie

Citizens Information website - www.citizensinformation.ie

Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration - www.integration.ie