

The Benefits of Pre-school for Your Child

&

Making the Move to Primary School.

The aim of this brochure is to inform immigrant families living in Ireland about pre-school and the benefits that can result for children and their parents when using these services. These services can be called different names such as pre-school, playgroup, kindergarten, Montessori and naíonra and they usually cater for 3 – 4 year olds. The second part of the brochure provides information on the primary school level of education in Ireland in order to assist immigrant families making this move.

Early Childhood

Early childhood is a really important and exciting phase of a child's life, when they learn so much about themselves, others, and the world around them.

Parents who are the primary care givers of their children assist their children in this journey of discovery and learning.

For some children, pre-school can be a child's first experience of being away from their parents and being part of a group in an organised/planned learning environment.

Pre-school services offer a planned programme to pre-school children for a total of not more than 3.5 hours per session. Many pre-school services in Ireland have a programme based on play or 'free' play as it is also called.

Research has shown that play is an essential need of all children and that children who are not provided with enough opportunity to express themselves through play may not develop all the skills needed to reach their full potential.

Part One: The Benefits of Pre-school

It is now known that there can be many benefits for your child in attending a quality pre-school service.

These benefits can be very broad ranging covering your child's social, intellectual, emotional, language and physical development. Quality pre-school can offer children the opportunity to develop in each of these areas:

Social Development

Children learn to mix with other children and adults and how to behave in a respectful way with others. They also:

- Have fun and make new friends

- Adjust to being part of a group by sharing, caring for others and working out disagreements

Intellectual Development

Children learn to use their mind by developing ideas, solving problems and expressing themselves. They also:

- Make choices and learn in a natural way through play
- Develop their imagination and creativity
- Develop pre-maths and pre-reading skills
- Learn about themselves and others; similarities and differences

Emotional Development

Children learn about feelings and emotions. They also:

- Adjust to spending time away from their families
- Develop their independence and self help skills
- Experience a routine and a sense of security from this

Language Development

Children learn to communicate with others using words, phrases, and eventually sentences as their language skills develop. They also:

- Learn how to listen, pre-reading and writing skills
- Learn how to use non verbal language in communicating
- Learn how to express themselves using words
- Learn English as an additional language

Physical Development

Children learn to use their bodies in new ways as they grow and develop. They also:

- Gain greater control over their body and movement
- Develop their physical fitness and health and well being

The move to primary school will also be easier for both parents and their child having attended a pre-school service.

There are other benefits for parents when their children attend a pre-school service, such as the opportunity to:

- Meet others, form contacts and make links in the local community
- Receive support and information in relation to parenting and other topics
- Attend work, training and education.

Learning English as an Additional Language in a Pre-school Setting

There are different ways that children learn an additional language and this can happen in stages which may occur when a child attends a pre-school. These stages involve:

- Continued use of the home language by the child in the new language setting
- Use of non verbal communication for example nodding, pointing, shaking head, touching and eye contact
- A period of silence, when the child does not talk at all – children are taking in the new language and building up their understanding of the language
- Use of repeating words and phrases, and language type play
- Use of single words, phrases and questions linked to the daily routine
- Use of longer sentences with relevant meaning, mistakes may still occur with grammar

Research shows that it is important that children have the opportunity to continue developing in their first/home language as this assists the learning of a second language.

(Supporting Identity, Diversity and Language in the Early Years, 2000, Siraj-Blatchford and P.Clarke)

Finding a Pre-school

Pre-schools by law are required to notify the Health Service Executive (HSE) prior to commencing. Under child care Law the services must follow regulations under which they are inspected by a HSE Pre-school Inspection and Information Service. You can collect a list of pre-schools that are notified to the HSE from your local City/County Childcare Committee or the Preschool Inspection and Information Service. This will contain the contact details of the services within your area.

Fees may be charged at a daily, weekly or monthly rate, this should be discussed with a staff member in the pre-school.

There is financial support available towards the cost of childcare. Contact your local preschool or local City/County Childcare Committee for information about the financial support.

Safety and Quality

The regulations in place which pre-school services must follow help ensure a quality, safe environment for children.

Pre-school services are inspected by the HSE Pre-school Inspection and Information Service and must comply with the regulations in order to continue.

Síolta - the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and **Aistear**, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework are new initiatives which aim to ensure that all children are experiencing quality pre-school services.

These initiatives prioritise the importance of Equality and Identity and Belonging being addressed in childcare and are strongly linked to the **Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers**, 2006.

Support for Children in Pre-school

If your child has a disability, support services such as a special needs assistant may be available or some services may also have extra facilities which can cater for your child's additional needs for example a multi sensory room.

Pre-school Calendar

The pre-school year depending on the service can run for 38 weeks from September to June and in some cases for the full year for 50 weeks.

Making the Move to Primary School

Starting in Primary School

The legal age for starting primary school in Ireland is six years of age however many parents choose to send their children between four and five years of age. Children attend primary school for eight years.

If your family are new to Ireland, whether asylum seekers, refugees or migrant workers, your child has the same right to education as Irish born Children.

Primary school education in Ireland is free unless your child is attending a privately run school. The term 'national school' is also used to describe this type of education.

The first class a child will enter in primary school is called junior infants, this is followed by:

- Senior Infants
- First Class
- Second Class
- Third Class
- Fourth Class
- Fifth Class
- Sixth Class

Infant classes usually run for approximately 4 to 4.5 hours between the hours of 9am and 2pm.

It is important to contact your chosen school for a form to register your child well in advance of the proposed start date for your child.

Types of Primary Education

There are different types of primary school education available in Ireland however the availability of these schools will depend on location. The majority of primary school education is state funded and owned and managed by church authorities such as Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland and there is also multi-denominational schools (e.g. Educate Together Schools) and Irish language schools (Gael Scoileanna). Currently (2010) there are two Muslim schools in Ireland located in Dublin. There are also in some areas separate schools for children with disabilities called 'Special Schools'.

Schools which are managed by religious orders are usually open to children attending their schools from other faiths/religions/; however, in some locations priority may be given to children whose religion is the same as the order running the school.

Many schools offer information sessions or open days for parents so they can find out more about the school and what it has to offer for their child.

Some schools will require your child to wear a school uniform but not all schools require this.

Finding a Primary School or Special School

The Department of Education and Skills has a website which contains a list of all the primary schools nationwide. See www.education.ie/home or call 01 8896400.

Support for Children in Primary School

If needed ask the school for information about grants available for school books and school uniforms.

Your child will be required to do homework when they attend school and some schools may have Homework or After School clubs. Talk to the teachers if you have concerns about how best to support your child in completing their homework and to find out about any support services that may be available in your local area.

A learning support/resource teacher service is generally available to all primary schools. Some children may have difficulty with the curriculum and need supplemental (additional/extra) teaching hours. It is the learning support teacher who provides this extra teaching.

Special needs assistants can assist in the care of pupils with disabilities. They may be available for your child on a part-time or full-time basis.

To enquire about special needs assistants you will need to contact your local special education needs organiser.

A list of special educational needs organisers is available on the website of the National Council for Special Education at www.ncse.ie

School Calendar

The schools year starts every September and ends in June. The school will also be closed for holidays at Christmas, Easter, mid term breaks, bank holidays and teacher training days. Some school buildings are also used for local elections so they will be closed when they are taking place.

Useful Contacts

- **Children's Rights Alliance**, 4 Upper Mount Street, Dublin 2. Tel: (01) 6629400, Email: info@childrensrights.ie Website: www.childrensrights.ie
- **Department of Education and Skills**, Head Office, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1. Tel: (01) 8896400, Website: www.education.ie/home
- **EDENN**, (Equality and Diversity in Early Childhood National Network) – Contact Colette Murray 0872976823
- **Educate Together**, Representative Organisation of the Educate Together Schools and Associations throughout the Republic of Ireland. H8a Centrepoint, Oak Drive, Dublin 12. Tel: (01) 429 2500, Email: info@educatetogether.ie Website: www.educatetogether.ie
- **Equality Authority**, 2 Clonmel Street, Dublin 2. Tel: LoCall 1890 245 545/ 01 4173333, Email: info@equality.ie Website: www.equality.ie
- **Forbairt Naíonraí Teoranta**, 7 Cearnróg Mhuirfean, Baile Átha Cliath 2. Tel: (01) 6398442, Email: forbairtnaionrai@eircom.net
- **Gaelscoileanna Teo**, Halla Naomh Pádraig, Institiúid Oideachais, Marino Ascaill Uí Ghríofa, Baile Átha Cliath 9. Tel: (01) 8535195, Email: oifig@gaelscoileanna.ie Website: www.gaelscoileanna.ie
- **Health Service Executive (HSE) National Information Line** 1850 241850
- **Irish Steiner Kindergarten Association**, Cappaduff, Mountshannon, Co.Clare. Tel: (061) 927944, Email: info@steinerireland.org Website: www.steiner.org
- **National Council for Special Education**, Mill Street, Meath. Tel: (046) 948 6400, Fax: (046) 948 6404, Email: info@ncse.ie Website: www.ncse.ie
- **National Disability Authority**, 25 Clyde Road, Dublin 4. Tel: (01) 6080400, Email: nda@nda.ie
- **Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs**, Hawkins House, Dublin 2. Tel: (01) 6354000 Website: www.omc.gov.ie
- **St. Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland**, Kingston House, 64 Patrick Street, Dun Laoghaire, Co Dublin. Tel: (01) 2805705, Email: info@montessoriireland.ie Website: www.montessoriireland.ie/

For full list of contacts for all **County/City Childcare Committees** go to www.omc.gov.ie or phone 01 6354000.

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