

Information for parents of infants starting school

St. Mary’s N.S. Ballinagare



**Fáilte romhat agus roimh do pháiste.**

We, as a staff welcome all children and their parents to a new and exciting stage in your child’s life. During this year your child will make new friends, enjoy new experiences and learn many new skills. We, as teachers and parents, have the chance to work as partners, to ensure that your child will have a positive attitude towards education based primarily on social and academic confidence.

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.

Children are natural learners. They have an in-built 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. Children come to us when they are 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 hand and fingers (fine motor skills).
* Extending their **concentration** **span** and getting them to **listen** **attentively.**
* Learning through **play** – the most enjoyable and effective way. It is ‘the child’s work’ and ‘the highest form of research’ and must not be undervalued. The children will learn through play each day within the Aistear framework in our school. This approach is teacher-designed, structured play which allows for child led, open ended play opportunities.
* For further information see [www.ncca.ie/aisteartoolkit](http://www.ncca.ie/aisteartoolkit)
* See also www.[helpmykidlearn.ie](http://helpmykidlearn.ie)
* **Cooperating** with the teacher and other children.
* Performing **tasks by themselves.**
* **Working and sharing with others.**

**The Importance of Parents in Children’s Learning**

The Primary School Curriculum acknowledges the central role of parents in their children’s education. It is widely recognised that parents have a key role to play in their children’s education. Parents are their children’s first educators and it is with parents that children have the closest personal, emotional and social

ties. The care and attention children receive from parents and the example they are given have a powerful influence on their formation.

Effective schools always take account of the influence of the home on children’s learning and they build on the experience children bring to the school. In the school, the teacher plays a central role in using that experience to help identify children’s learning needs and to provide the learning experiences that will best promote their development. It is therefore important that parents, teachers and schools work together in order to make children’s education as successful as possible ([NCCA.ie](http://NCCA.ie)).

**Before starting to school....**

Please ensure your child **is as independent as possible** – physically, emotionally and socially. If she can look after herself in these areas she will feel secure and confident and settle in readily.

They should be

* able to **button and unbutton or zip and unzip their coat** and hang it up.
* able to **use the toilet without help.**
* be aware of **personal hygiene** and cleanliness.
* (Your child should know to flush the toilet and wash their hands, without having to be told.)
* able to use their **tissue** when necessary.
* able to **share** toys and play things with others and “take turns”.
* able to **tidy up** and put away their playthings.

**The First day.....**

The child’s first day at school is a day to remember for the rest of their life. You can help to make it a really happy one for them. Explain to your child that the teacher will have a space for their slippers/ outdoor shoes and a coat hanger with their name on it. They can hang their schoolbag also and leave their lunch in the schoolbag. Teacher will show them where to sit and this will be their seat each day. For the first week teacher will have activities laid out on the tables to encourage the children to settle in each morning and play and chat in an informal setting. It is best not to delay in the classroom as your child may pick up on some of your anxiety. Most children, even if initially upset, soon become distracted by their surroundings and settle down. The other children in Senior Infants and 1st class offer a lot of support to the new children throughout the year.

Please provide your child with:

* School Uniform: Grey jumper/cardigan, grey skirt/ pinafore, blue shirt, red tie. Indoor slippers (which will remain in school).
* A spare change of underwear (can be kept in a pocket of your child’s schoolbag).

**PLEASE** label all uniform jumpers/cardigans clearly with your child’s name

* Lunch box and drink container that is easily opened and closed (Lunch to coincide with our healthy eating policy) labelled clearly.

Please label all school books and copies clearly ON THE FRONT COVER with your child’s name.

There is no need to give your child stationery or a pencil case. There will be a charge for stationery (on the booklist) and it will be provided by the teacher and shared in class.

The children will only need colours, a pencil and rubber for homework. These can be stored at home.

**Time**



School opens from 9.10AM and your child should be in school between 9.15 and 9.20 to give your child time to settle in before class starts at 9.20.

Junior and Senior Infants go home (via the back door) at 2pm.

\***Junior Infants go home for the first two weeks at 12:30.**

Please park at the **back of the schoo**l both morning and evening as the staff carpark is very small and the bus turning bay must be kept clear for safety reasons.

Please phone/text the principal or write a note to your child’s teacher if there is a change in time/person for collecting your child.

**Absences**

Absences must be recorded for Department returns. A note must be provided to the principal stating the following reason for absences:

* Medical appointment
* Illness
* Urgent family reasons

**Home/School Communication**

Parents can contact the school on 094 9870564 or 086 1685367. Group texts are sent regularly to communicate with parents. Please inform us if you change your mobile number (or other numbers) during the year. Letters may be enclosed in your child’s bag/ homework pack during the year. Please check regularly to ensure you are up to date.

School Website: <http://ballinagarens.scoilnet.ie/>

School Blog: <http://ballinagarens.weebly.com/>

Teachers meet parents at an annual Parent Teacher meeting mid-year.

For health and safety reasons teachers cannot leave children unsupervised. Please phone the school to make an appointment if you wish to speak to your child’s teacher.

**Breaks**

Classes break for a small break in the morning and a lunch break. They eat a quick snack at the small break and play outside. They eat the remainder of their lunch at the lunch break and play outside.

Please provide your child with a sensible lunch. At present there is a snack scheme in operation in the school which supplies the children with fruit, healthy snacks and water each day.

As part of our Green Schools policy we encourage children to bring a lunchbox and use minimal packaging rather than using tinfoil or plastic packaging when possible.

Each class plays with the children from their own class in a designated area of the yard.

**PE**

The class teacher will inform you regarding the PE day. The children wear a tracksuit to school for PE.

**When they’ve started...**

**(Or before)**

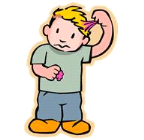
Making letters on paper is not easy for the small child. She/he must learn to hold the pencil properly and make regular shapes. Her/his hand and finger muscles are only gradually developing at this stage. **F**

**You Can Help...**

She/he must develop the ability to get the hand and eye working together. This is very important. Get him/her manipulating toys like:

* Jigsaws, Lego, beads to thread etc.
* Plasticine/Playdough to make her/his own shapes.
* A colouring book and thick crayons.
* Sheets of paper that he/she can cut up with a safe **scissors.**

When he/she begins to use a pencil in class make sure that he/she holds it correctly at the start. It will be difficult to change him/her later.Don’t discourage left-handedness. If that is his/her definite natural inclination, don’t attempt to change it.



**Developing their command of spoken language**

It is important that the child’s ability to talk is as advanced as possible. It is through speech that he/she communicates his/her thoughts and feelings, his/her needs and desires, curiosity and wonder. If he/she cannot express these in words he/she will tend to remain silent and will often withdraw from the learning activity of the class. This can be the first sign of failure in the school system and must be remedied, if at all possible. 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 he/she may be doing-at home, in the shop, in the car, etc. As you travel in the car talk about where you are going, what towns/ counties you are passing through, north/ south/ east/ west, distance in km and duration of the journey.

Remember that all the time he/she 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 he/she wants to tell you something that is important to them. But don’t always make him/her the centre of attention.
* Answer their genuine questions with patience and in an adequate way. Always nurture their sense of curiosity and wonder.
* Introduce them gently to the ideas of Why? How? When? Where? If? etc. These demand more advanced language structures.

**New Language Curriculum**

Soon this school and all schools will be using a new Language Curriculum for English and Irish. This curriculum is for all children in all primary schools. An information leaflet for parents and further information is available here: [www.curriculumonline.ie](http://www.curriculumonline.ie)



**Starting reading**

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

We very deliberately do not rush or push children into reading. We get them ready for it over an extended period. Reading is something to be enjoyed. It should never start as a chore for the small child.

**You Can Help...**

* Have attractive colourful books in the home.
* Read her a variety of stories from time to time. She will get to associate these wonderful tales with books and reading. Let your child tell you the story in their own words.
* Look at the pictures with her and talk to her about what they say. Use higher order, open questions (Why do you think \_\_?, What would happen if\_\_\_?, How do you know\_\_\_?) over closed (yes/no/ one answer) questions.
* Read nursery rhymes

**Maths**

Maths for the small child is part of the language s/he uses in understanding and talking about certain things in their 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.
* 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 school.
* The child gets to understand Maths best by handling and investigating and using real objects. This has been their natural method of learning since s/he was a baby.
* Sort the socks from the laundry basket, sort the cutlery, make patterns with toys e.g. blocks.

**Assessment**

Assessment of learning and for learning is undertaken by the teachers regularly using a variety of methods including teacher designed tasks and tests, teacher observation and standardised tests.