



Primary School Curriculum

Your child's learning

Guidelines for parents





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Welcome

The Primary School Curriculum acknowledges the central role of parents in their children's education. It follows a major review of the curriculum for primary schools and was issued by the Minister for Education and Science in September 1999.

This booklet **Your child's learning** is being distributed to all parents of primary school children to help them contribute in the most effective way to their children's learning. The booklet has four main purposes:

- to inform parents about the curriculum—what is new in it and what the new emphases are
- to encourage parents to support the work of the school in teaching the curriculum and to show some of the ways in which they can help to do this
- to stress the importance of children's learning from the earliest years
- to show parents some of the ways in which they can help children to learn at home, and in particular how to support learning in the different areas of the curriculum.

The importance of parents in children's learning

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.

The home and the school

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 important to establish strong links between parents, teachers and schools in order to make children's education as successful as possible.

How should I use the booklet?

The guidelines in this booklet suggest ways in which you can help your children to learn. Due to the fact that family circumstances vary greatly parents may feel that they are not in a position to follow all the suggestions made. However, it is important to try and use those you are comfortable with, and to enjoy watching your children learn.

The Primary School Curriculum

The last major review of the primary school curriculum was completed in 1971. Many changes have taken place in Ireland since then—in the way we live, in our attitudes, in our expectations, and in the demands of life and work. Today, children have very different educational needs, and the Primary School Curriculum is designed to meet these needs.

The curriculum takes a particular view of the child and of education. This view

- celebrates the uniqueness of the child
- seeks to develop each child's potential to the full.

These two principles embody a special vision of the child as a learner. In order to realise this vision the curriculum provides a wide range of learning experiences that help the child to acquire particular knowledge, ideas and skills that will promote his/her development at every stage.

The curriculum is laid out in seven curriculum areas, as the following table shows. Some areas consist of just one subject, others contain more than one subject. There are twelve subjects in all.

The Curriculum

Language

Gaeilge English

Mathematics

Social, environmental and scientific education

History Geography Science

Arts education

Visual arts Music Drama

Physical education

Social, personal and health education

*Religious education

*The development of the curriculum for religious education remains the responsibility of the different religious bodies.

The child as learner

The most striking feature of *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (1971) was that it put the child at the centre of the learning process. It was a child-centred curriculum.

The Primary School Curriculum (1999) retains this essential feature but it concentrates on the child as a learner. It sets out in great detail what the child should learn and how the child can learn it most effectively. It also places great emphasis on inspiring in children a love of learning and on helping them to develop the ability to learn throughout their lives.

Children learn best...

...when they are actively involved in learning, that is, taking part in interesting and stimulating activities

active learning gives children a deeper understanding of what is learned and helps them to remember it

...when learning arouses their curiosity and harnesses their sense of wonder

curiosity and the sense of wonder provide the best and most natural motives for learning.

All the subjects of the curriculum encourage active learning experiences for children that will make learning interesting, enjoyable and fulfilling.

What does the curriculum emphasise?

The individual child

No two children are alike. The curriculum emphasises and encourages the individuality of every child, including children with special educational needs.

Skills

Skills are developed in every subject. These include, for example, the skill needed in music to play a simple tune or, in reading, the skill of associating certain groups of letters with certain sounds.

However, the curriculum also encourages the development of key skills such as observing, questioning, predicting, analysing, exploring, investigating, experimenting and communicating.

Developing concepts

In the course of gaining knowledge, children are helped to develop concepts, that is general ideas or notions. This helps them to link related pieces of knowledge. For example, in mathematics children learn the concept that multiplication is the same as repeated addition (4×3 is the same as $4 + 4 + 4$).

Different ways of learning

Children learn in different ways. The curriculum recommends a great variety of approaches and methodologies which will suit varying learning styles. In addition, it suggests different forms of classroom organisation, for example whole-class teaching, learning in groups and learning in pairs.

What does the curriculum emphasise?

Working together to learn

The teacher will work with children in encouraging and guiding their learning, but children will also learn through working with each other. Children are stimulated by hearing the ideas and opinions of others, and by having the opportunity to react to them. This will help to broaden and deepen an individual child's understanding. Moreover, the experience of working together helps the child's social and personal development.

The importance of language

As well as learning languages such as English and Irish, children learn through language. In other words by learning new words and phrases children learn new concepts and ideas. For example, to a young child the word 'sister' means a particular member of the family. Later the child will come to realise that there is such a thing as a sister and later still that the word has many other meanings, such as sister—a nurse, sister—a nun, sister-in-law, sisterhood, and so on. This is a very simple example of how a child learns through language. Talk and discussion and the use of language are seen as essential to learning in every curriculum area.

Literacy and numeracy

Literacy, that is, the ability to read and write, and numeracy, the ability to understand and use numbers, are essential for effective learning and vital for success in life. The development of literacy skills is a fundamental aim of the approach to reading, and enabling the child to understand and use number is a fundamental aim of the mathematics curriculum.

The environment

Children's own environment, that is, their immediate world, is real and familiar to them. Learning is more meaningful and effective when children can relate it to what they have experienced and know well. For example, in the course of investigating the local environment in geography, children might examine a stream, noting, among other things, its width, the depth and speed of the water, and the vegetation on the banks.

Hands-on experience

Using and handling materials, such as counters and beads in mathematics, or tools and implements from the past in history, help children to root their understanding of things in practical experience.

An integrated curriculum

Children are encouraged to make connections and links between what they learn in the different subjects and curriculum areas. For example, measuring temperature in geography, where temperatures above and below freezing point are recorded, is linked to positive and negative numbers in mathematics.

Assessment

Assessment is seen as an essential part of teaching and learning, and the importance of giving parents a clear idea of their children's progress is emphasised. (See section on assessment, page 43.)

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

Information and communication technologies are an important part of living and working in the modern world. ICT, particularly computers, can make an important contribution to successful learning.

Children's early learning

What is learning

Learning can be described as any experience that contributes to the child's development. In that sense, learning begins before birth, and the rate of learning is quicker in the early years than at any other time in the child's life. New sights, new sounds, new tastes and new feelings are a part of everyday experience. The young child also develops relationships with parents, brothers and sisters, and other people who are frequent visitors to the home.

The child's earliest learning

The child's earliest learning happens through the senses, in handling things, and in learning to move and use the body in different ways. This is all part of the process through which the child learns about himself or herself and about other well-loved people. It leads to a gradual growth in the child's understanding of the world.

Most importantly, the child learns an enormous amount of language at this stage. In beginning to talk, the child uses language to name things and to describe simple actions. He/she gradually understands and learns more and more through listening and talking to parents, brothers and sisters, and others.

In play, the child uses language to describe what he/she is doing and to explain it to himself or herself and to others. Using language in this way helps the child to understand the world and how he/she fits into it.

The ability to talk and to understand what others say has a great influence on the child's general learning. Although a great amount of learning takes place through the senses and through physical experience, language is very important in helping the child to name, to sort and to classify all this information.

Much of this learning happens through day-to-day contact in the home. It happens, in the first place, because of the child's sense of wonder and curiosity about his/her surroundings. However, talking to children, playing with them and encouraging them can play a key role in stimulating learning. Parents and others can help the child's early learning by allowing plenty of time for talk and play.



Talking to young children helps them to learn.

What can I do to help my children to learn before they go to school?

Talking and listening

- talk to your children and encourage them to talk
- listen to them and respect what they have to say
- talk to them about what happens in television programmes you watch with them

Stories, reading and books

- read and tell them stories, say nursery rhymes and poems, and encourage them to talk about what they hear
- encourage them to tell stories and to repeat rhymes and poems
- make sure there are books in the home (picture books, picture books with captions, simple story books, etc.), and encourage children to handle them, look through them and talk about them

Play and activities

- encourage children in make-believe play and play with them
- play games that involve physical activity with your children
- let them play with water, sand and other materials
- involve them in activities around the kitchen, and encourage them to talk about the activities

The environment

- take them for walks and point out and name flowers, trees and other items that arouse their interest
- point out and talk about things in the urban environment such as signs, names, types of shops, statues and monuments

Music and art

- sing to them and with them, and encourage them to sing
- play singing games with them
- play music for them, get them to clap and dance to the rhythms, and talk to them about the music
- encourage them to draw pictures and to talk about them, and display their drawings and pictures in the home.

How can I help my children learn when they go to school?

Recent research has shown a strong connection between success in school and the type of support parents can give to their children. The findings of this research emphasise a number of important things that you as parents can do to help your children to do well in school.

Your child and the school

- take an interest in your children's progress in school
- talk to them about what happens in school
- talk to them about what they are learning
- help your children with their homework in an appropriate way (see the section on homework towards the end of the booklet)

Your expectations

- have high expectations of your children but always recognise their particular strengths and weaknesses
- praise and encourage them

Stimulating children and widening their horizons

- read to your children, tell them stories, and encourage them to talk about the characters in the stories and what happens to them
- bring your children on outings, to concerts, to plays (including those presented by local amateur groups), and become involved with them in different leisure activities

Contact with the school

- have an active and helpful relationship with the school
- have regular communication with your children's class teachers
- participate in and attend school activities.

How can I support the implementation of the curriculum in school?

The role of parents in implementation

Parents can make a big contribution to the education of their children in school. This is why they have been given a distinct role in supporting the implementation of the curriculum.

The school plan will identify ways in which parents can be involved in organisational planning for the curriculum. This might include arranging for a grandparent to come and talk to a class about his/her experience of the past, as part of the history curriculum. It could also involve parents in helping to arrange and supervise out-of-school activities, like exploring the local environment.

As well as having a voice in organisational planning, there are many other ways in which parents can help in implementing the curriculum successfully. You could

- visit the school to see your children's work on display
- keep the school informed about relevant experiences, or difficulties the child may have
- help the school to identify natural environments, buildings and other features of the locality that might be relevant in the curriculum, for example a stream, features of a house, a bridge
- identify places and events of local historical interest
- support Irish-language activities in school
- lend items to the school that illustrate features of your own and your parents' life and experience, for example old photographs, or utensils and tools that are not used any more
- help to involve other parents and members of the community, who are musicians and artists, in school activities
- attend school and classroom music events
- offer to help with the organisation and supervision of the school library
- offer to help with the organisation of book fairs and other language-related events.

How can I help my children at home in the different subject areas?

There are many things you can do in the home to help children to learn in every curriculum area.

The next section of the booklet outlines the new emphases in the different curriculum areas and subjects and suggests some ways in which you can assist your children's learning.

Gaeilge

Irish for communication

The approach to Irish in the curriculum is based on the use of language for communication. In every Irish lesson children will be encouraged to use the Irish they have learned in real and enjoyable situations.

The most important thing is that the children will be able to have a simple conversation in Irish and that they will be able to understand spoken Irish and read and write short texts in Irish.

The children will use short phrases and short answers to questions in the context of role-playing, games and other activities. They will have great fun using a little Irish successfully rather than trying to use more difficult vocabulary that may prevent them from communicating effectively.

The new Irish curriculum is very exciting and should result in children's being able to use simple Irish in a range of settings. However, the language needs positive support from the parents if the children are to benefit from what they learn in school.

Here are some ways that parents could help to support the Irish language at home.

- Even if you have no Irish, your child could have fun teaching you some. If a parent asks 'What's the Irish for ...?' the child can enjoy being the teacher.



Reading and
talking together

- If you have knowledge of Irish you can use it in simple ways once or twice a day. For example, going up the stairs with a small child you could say

suas, suas, suas ... on every step
and
síos, síos, síos ... coming down.

When the children are being dressed a rhyme like
Lámh, lámh eile a haon a dó, Cos, cos eile
could be used.

Using Irish words when asking for something at the table can be helpful.
For example

Bainne, arán, tae, más é do thoil é

can be followed naturally with
Go raibh maith agat.

- Children should be encouraged to sing the Irish songs they learn at school. The child will respond if you start the first few words. Children love action songs and rhymes, and they usually learn many of these in the infant and junior classes.
- You could encourage your children to watch the cartoons on TG4 on Saturdays and Sundays. It does not matter if the child doesn't understand the language. It is worth remembering, too, that children can often understand language without being able to use it. Children love cartoons and will get the gist of what is going on from the pictures and the sound effects. Older children might enjoy the quizzes for children, the fun games for adults, and sports programmes.

Using Irish in an enjoyable way

- You can play a game with Irish phrases that can be seen in the environment. In the city this could take the form of

What do you think *Oifig an Phoist* means?
What do you think *Bruscar* means?
What does *An Lár* mean?
What does *Stáisiún* mean?
What is *Bus Átha Cliath*?
What is *Bus Éireann*?
Where would you see *Go minic anseo, go tapaidh ansiúd*?

What are the Irish names of some of the streets you know?
How many signs in Irish have you seen today?

- Towns and place names can be used in a similar way.

Sráid (a street), *Cearnóg* (a square), *Lough* (loch, a lake), *Contae* (county), *Knock* (cnoc, a hill), *Tully* (tulach, a hill), *Kill* (cill, a small church), *Down* (dún, a fort or castle)

Helping to make Irish relevant

Although Irish is very visible in schools, the children need the support of their families and the wider community outside school if they are to see it as relevant to ordinary life.

It would help to give Irish meaning as a living language if children can see it used to give and receive messages.

- You could look at your children's books from school and admire them and ask the children to tell you about them.
- You could buy a video in Irish and look at it with your children, or buy books for small children and read them with them.
- If you feel more confident in using Irish you could make a habit of using particular phrases at meal times or at bedtime:

*Cá bhfuil Máire? Tá an tae réidh!
Tá sé a hocht a chlog, leaba anois!
Oíche mhaith, codladh sámh!*

- If it were possible, the whole family could go to the Gaeltacht in the summer. Various courses and holiday programmes are available, many of which are activity-based and involve children attending language classes in the mornings.

English

The English curriculum links oral language, reading and writing activities in order to help children to achieve more general language learning goals.

The importance of oral language

Oral language is seen as the language activity that binds all the other elements of the curriculum together. In the early stages great importance is given to the development of good listener-speaker relationships. However, talking, answering questions, responding verbally to a variety of experiences and taking part regularly in discussion are central to the curriculum at every level.

The approach to reading

The approach to reading throughout the school will be significantly different. What you as parents will notice most readily is that your children's reading experience will no longer be confined to a class reader. They will be encouraged to read a wide range of different types of books.

Children in the infant classes need to experience a rich variety of emergent reading activities in preparation for formal reading. These will be directed, in the first place, to building up the child's vocabulary and ability to use language. As well as building a strong oral language base children will experience a print-rich environment in the classroom, they will hear stories read to them and they will also be involved in reading large-format books (big books with large print) with the teacher. Other activities include saying and chanting rhymes, playing games involving words that rhyme, and breaking words into syllables. This will help children to develop an awareness of the different sounds in words. Great stress is also placed on developing children's ability to recognise the relationship between letters and sounds.

Throughout these early years the emphasis will be on engaging the child in these vital emergent reading activities. These activities will lay the foundation for formal reading, which will take place later, normally sometime in the senior infant class.

From the earliest stages children will be encouraged to read for meaning and as they grow older they will experience an ever-wider variety of reading matter. They will be encouraged to handle books, to browse through them, and to respond to what they read in many different ways. In this way they will build up the skill of understanding fully what they read, develop an appreciation of the content, and come to see that reading is an activity that is both useful and enjoyable.

Writing

In conjunction with learning to read, children will be encouraged, from the beginning, to write for different purposes and for different audiences. Writing a thank-you letter to Granny is different from writing a story. They will also discover how to improve their writing through discussing it with the teacher. In this way they will learn to correct their own writing and so become independent writers.

Many of the suggestions given previously for children's early learning are just as useful when they go to school. You can help in other ways too.

Talking and listening

- encourage them to talk about their interests and activities, and about what they are reading

Books and reading

- buy books as presents—a library or a good bookshop can provide valuable advice about books suitable for different reading levels
- have plenty of colourful and attractive books in the home and encourage your children to use them and to take good care of them
- read regularly to them
- show interest in what they are reading and praise them
- encourage them to read newspapers and talk to them about what they read
- bring with your children to the local library

Writing

- encourage your children to write to pen pals
- encourage them to keep a diary.



Mathematics is an important part of many jobs around the home.

In the Mathematics curriculum children at all levels will have experience of all five areas of the curriculum, Number, Algebra, Shape and space, Measures, and Data. Great importance is still given to traditional features of mathematics, such as memorising number facts (tables). However, the development of estimation skills is strongly emphasised, with children being encouraged to work out what the answer might be.

The curriculum also stresses real-life problem-solving and gives children plenty of experience in handling materials such as weights, money, liquids, beads and counters. Children will be involved in activities that will help them to appreciate that mathematics is not only essential for daily living but can also be great fun.

Here are some ideas you could try out that would help your children's learning in mathematics.

Problem-solving

- Encourage your children to take part in solving problems. You can find good examples in simple puzzle books. You could also get them involved in solving problems directly connected with their own lives. An example of this, suitable for children in senior classes and relating to the elements of shape, space and measure in the curriculum, would be:

How can we make a greeting card?
How will we make the card fit into the envelope?
Could we make an envelope?

Songs and rhymes

- Teach your children rhymes and number songs you know yourself, and encourage them to repeat the ones they learn in school.

Games

- Play board games with them. These involve counting, putting things in order, taking turns, the notion of before and after, and working out how many more are needed. This will also help their language development.
- Play card games with them that involve matching and recognising numbers. These are some of the most basic mathematical ideas.

The environment

- Encourage them to find and name shapes in the environment. This can keep them amused when you are stopped in traffic in the car or on the bus: How many squares can you see? How many circles are there?

In the home

- Involve your children in weighing ingredients when preparing food, or measuring when you are doing odd jobs around the house. Children love to help by measuring or writing down measurements. They will enjoy the activity and learn mathematics in a real situation.
- If you are organising a party, or any meal, you can include children in working out the amounts that will be needed. How many are at home for tea today? How many sausages will we need if we give everybody three? How many burgers will we need? How many burger buns?
- Create opportunities that allow children to handle money and to work out what can be bought with different amounts, for example

How many pennies are there in ten pence?

What can I buy with 50p, £1.00, £3.00?

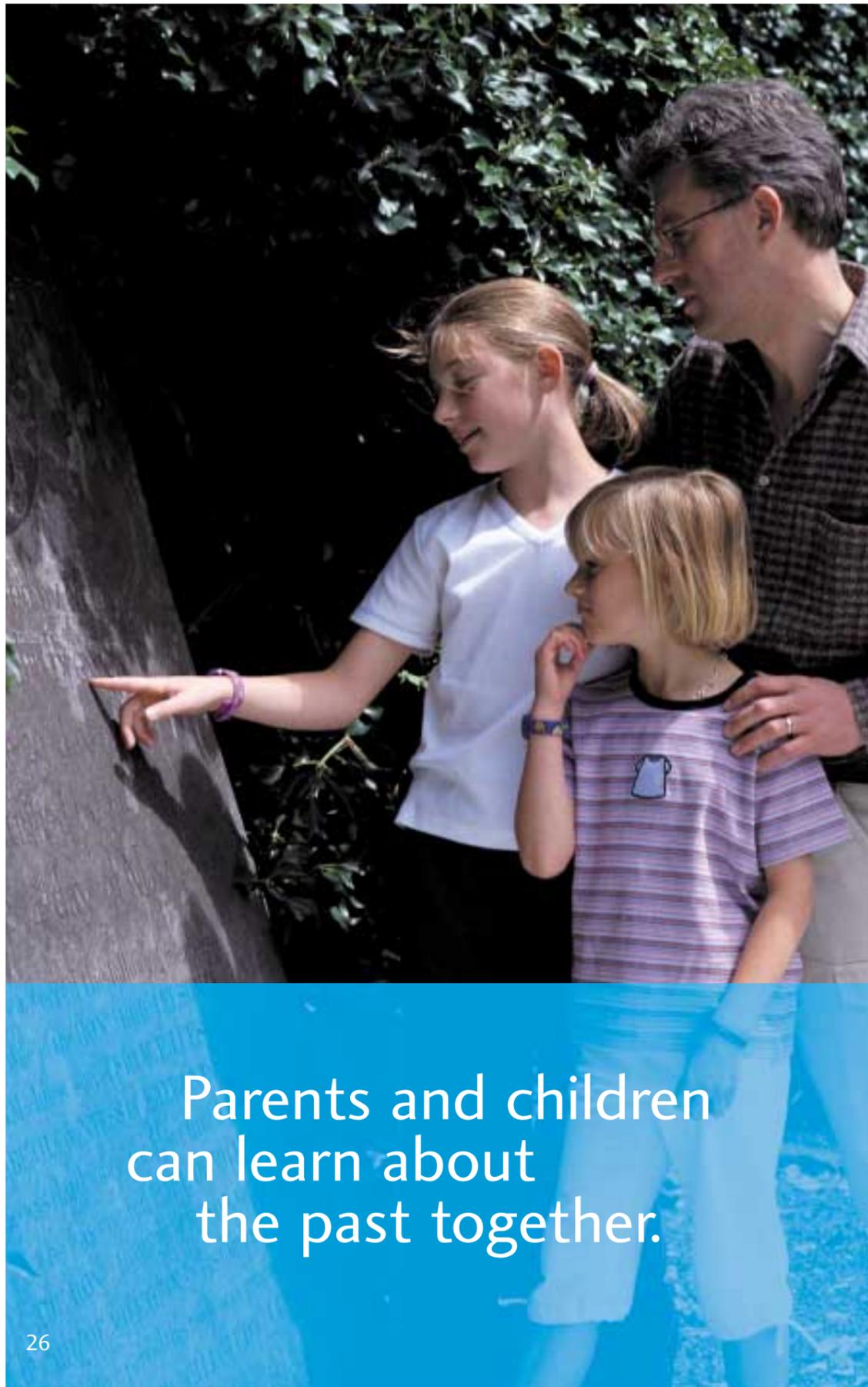
How many ways can 14p be made up?

5p+5p+2p+2p

10p+2p+2p.

Board games
involve counting,
sequencing and
taking turns.





Parents and children
can learn about
the past together.

Social, environmental and scientific education (SESE)

SESE begins in the infant classes

Social, environmental and scientific education is made up of history, geography and science. Through SESE children learn how to understand the world around them. They also learn about the past and how it has made us what we are.

One of the new features of the SESE curriculum is that children begin to learn about history, geography and science from the infant classes. They begin by exploring their home background. Teachers need to be made aware of individual home circumstances, where these are relevant, in order to treat this area with sensitivity. Later, the local environment is explored and then the wider world. There is a strong emphasis on hands-on approaches and on skills development.

There is an exciting science curriculum that will appeal to children's natural curiosity and that emphasises practical investigation. They will learn about living things, forms of energy such as light, heat, electricity and magnetism, different forces, the characteristics of different materials, and caring for the environment.

You can help your children's learning in SESE in a number of ways.

Visiting places

- take your children to visit places that are interesting in terms of history, geography and science, when they are old enough to appreciate and benefit from the experience

Books, toys and television programmes

- encourage your children to read books about history, geography and science
- encourage them to play with Meccano, Lego or chemistry sets
- identify suitable television programmes about history, geography and science that they can watch

The seasons, plants and animals

- encourage children to be aware of how changes in the seasons affect plant and animal life, and involve them in work in the garden and with plants and window boxes in the house
- encourage children to be interested in and kind to pets

Talking to older people

- encourage grandparents and older people in the community to talk to your children about the past

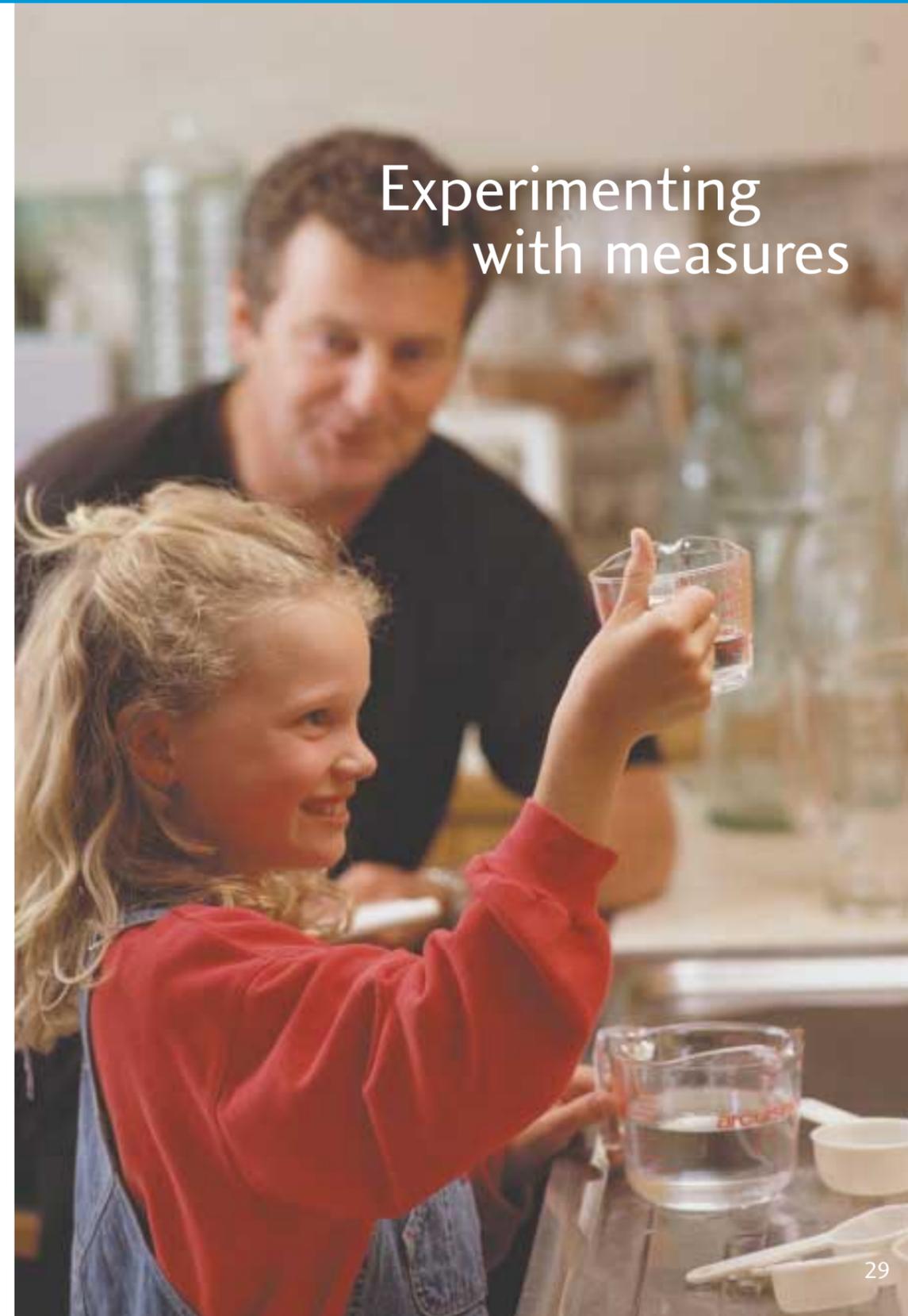
Helping in the school

- be willing to help the school if you have relevant expertise

Science and technology

- help children to be aware of how science explains the workings of common features of life in the home, for example a bicycle, a car, the water system, the fridge, a zip, the boiling of water
- involve children in designing and making things around the home, for example a shelf or a bird table
- encourage your children to use the computer (including the internet and e-mail) in ways that will help their learning.

Experimenting with measures





Making art in
the home can be a
shared experience.

Arts education comprises visual arts, music and drama.

Visual arts

Visual arts will give children opportunities to express themselves through drawing, painting, print-making, using colour, modelling in clay, constructing things using different materials, and working with fabric and other textiles. As well as expressing themselves in these different ways children will also be encouraged to respond and react to a variety of pieces of art.

Music

There are three main areas in the music curriculum: listening and responding to music, performing, and composing. Children will listen to a wide variety of music and respond to it in different ways. They will sing songs and learn to read music through song-singing activities. Composing will involve children in exploring sound by allowing them to play with simple musical ideas using different musical instruments. In this way they will be encouraged to create their own compositions.

Drama

Drama stimulates children's imagination in an exciting way. In the early stages it is approached through make-believe play. It is always based on story, and children will create the drama through their own words and actions. This provides them with a different way of learning and knowing, and gives them new insights and understanding. Drama is a special type of learning experience.

Here are some of the ways you can help your children's learning in arts education.

Artistic experiences

- give children plenty of artistic experiences, such as showing them interesting pictures and bringing them to plays and concerts, including local amateur performances, school performances, outdoor pageants, and parades
- encourage children to express themselves using a range of materials and tools, such as paint, crayons, clay, pens, pencils and fabrics
- draw their attention to interesting features of the environment both in the town and in the country, for example particular features of a building such as an archway or a fanlight above a door

Musical activities

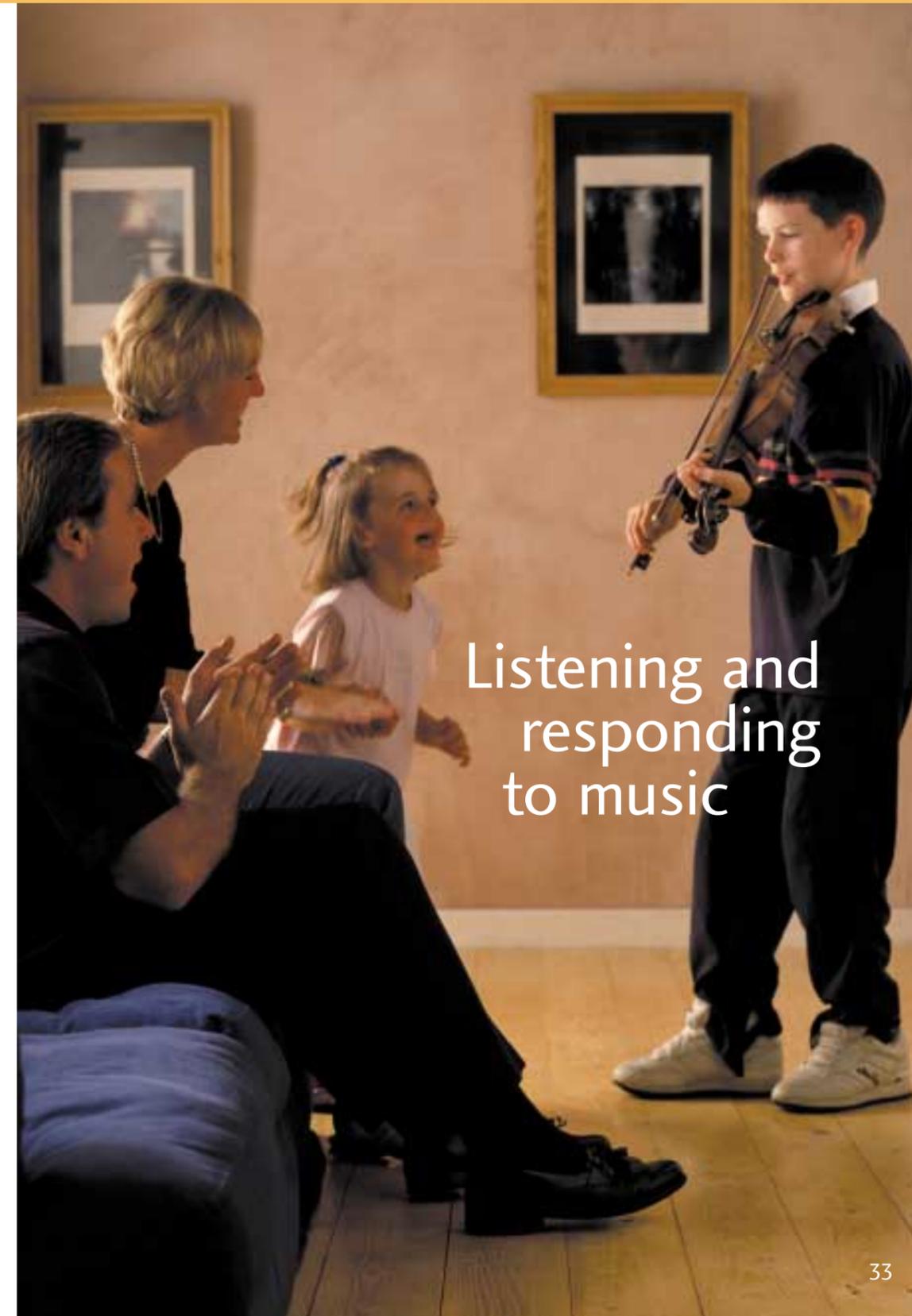
- sing to your children and clap rhythms, particularly to babies and young children
- sing songs they have learned in school with your children
- listen to music together, encourage them to listen actively, and talk to them about the music
- play with home-made instruments, such as putting dried peas in a tin and shaking it to the rhythm of a piece of music

The school and home

- give children opportunities to learn a musical instrument and allow them time and space to practise and play it
- display and discuss their school work in the arts with them
- attend school and classroom music events
- discuss your children's drama experiences in school with them

Make-believe play

- encourage make-believe play and dressing up, and keep a collection of clothes they can use for this purpose.



Listening and
responding
to music



Parents can encourage children to be active.

Physical education (PE)

A healthy, active life

Physical education contributes to children's overall development by helping them to lead full, active and healthy lives. It also gives children opportunities for learning through the medium of movement and dance. The PE curriculum stresses the importance of enjoyment and play, and all children are encouraged to take part in as many activities as possible.

A curriculum suitable for all schools

The curriculum outlines a wide range of activities that can take place in all schools, and it is flexible enough to enable schools to tailor their PE programmes to suit their own needs and circumstances. These vary from school to school, but every child will have the opportunity to take part in a balanced range of physical activity. New elements include outdoor and adventure activities and water-based activities.

You can help your children's development in PE in a number of ways.

An active lifestyle

- have a positive attitude to physical education and sport
- set children an example by having an active life-style, by taking them for walks, by taking part in sports, and by playing games with them
- take them on outdoor and adventure activities such as camping, swimming, and visits to an adventure playground
- foster your children's self-esteem by acknowledging their own particular achievements in a variety of physical activities

Helping in the school

- assist with the school sports day and with Sport for All Day

Dancing

- encourage your children to learn and practise Irish dancing and other types of dance.



Shared experiences
foster an
understanding of others.

Social, personal and health education (SPHE)

The importance of SPHE

Social, personal and health education is concerned with the personal development of the child and with his/her health and well-being. It is, therefore, one of the most important areas of the child's education. It helps children to understand how to care for themselves and it fosters in them a sense of responsibility for their own actions.

Skills and attitudes

SPHE is also concerned with helping children to develop skills, attitudes and self-esteem that will bring the greatest fulfilment and happiness to their lives. It is an important part of all school and classroom activity, but it is also given its own individual space in the timetable.

Care and respect for others

SPHE helps children to develop a sense of care and respect for themselves and for other people. It also promotes responsible social behaviour, helping children to relate successfully to others, and to work with others in resolving conflicts.

A sense of community

Through SPHE children develop a sense of belonging to a community. They are encouraged to understand their own culture and traditions and to appreciate other cultures and the different ways people live.

SPHE and RSE

Relationships and sexuality education (RSE) is now a part of SPHE. Schools will also include other programmes, such as Stay Safe and Walk Tall, in their SPHE programme.

The importance of home school links

SPHE cannot be separated from the child's life in the home or from the influence of the home. It is very important, therefore, that the home and the school work closely together in helping the child's social, personal and health development.

Parents can contribute to the social, personal and health development of the child by

- keeping themselves fully informed of the content of the SPHE programme and of the approaches to the teaching of it in school
- being consistently aware of the importance of helping in the development of values and attitudes
- encouraging and affirming children in their efforts
- encouraging children to take care of themselves through good hygiene and healthy eating habits
- stressing the importance of taking plenty of exercise—walking, cycling, skateboarding, swimming, etc.
- impressing upon children the dangers involved in the misuse of different substances such as alcohol and drugs
- helping them to learn about the changes that take place in their bodies at various stages of development
- stressing the importance of family, how people should get on as a family, and how members of the family should care for each other
- talking to children about the importance of friendship—how necessary friends are, how we should be loyal to friends, how we sometimes fall out, and the valuable lessons that can be learned from making up
- helping children to be involved in taking responsible decisions and in making good choices
- helping children to be aware that they are part of a wider community in which they should play their part.



Other issues of interest to parents

Children with special needs

When a child starts school an important relationship is created between adults at home and adults in school. The education of the child becomes a shared venture. For children with special needs, it is particularly important that a good relationship is formed between parent and teacher. This will help to create a happy and effective learning environment for the child.

It is important, therefore, that you maintain close links with the school. As parents you know your own child best. You know his/her ups and downs and are usually the first to notice that something is not quite as it should be. Your contribution to planning learning programmes is very much valued and encouraged. In order to develop the child's potential to the full both teacher and parent need to be consistent in their approach. By following up what is happening at school you can help your child to practise and reinforce new skills.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

Information and communication technologies can make an important contribution in every curriculum area. Where it is appropriate, parents should encourage children to use the internet, e-mail, word-processing and other computer programs to add to the knowledge and skills they acquire in school.

Where there is no computer in the home, the public library can be an excellent resource for children who wish to search for information for a variety of purposes. Children using the internet should be supervised at all times.

Homework

Homework and learning

It is important that there are close links between parents and the school with regard to homework. The school's homework policy should be worked out in co-operation with the parents' association. Homework has a particular part to play in helping children to learn. It should

- be part of a carefully thought-out learning programme
- have a purpose, such as allowing children to complete a task which they have begun in school, or giving them the opportunity to apply what they have learned in other situations
- be suitable to the capabilities of the children—they should be able to attempt homework within a reasonable timeframe
- be properly explained to children in advance
- be checked by the teacher—credit should be given for personal effort.

The role of the parent

As a parent, you have an important role to play in

- encouraging your children's work
- observing their work
- looking over completed work and signing it.

It is very important that you help your children with their homework in the most useful way. Try to make sure that children make an honest effort to do the homework without assistance. If they have a difficulty your help should generally take the form of prompting and guiding them towards completing the task that is set. If you have given them a reasonable amount of help and they still cannot complete the task you can then help best by writing a note to the teacher telling him/her of the child's difficulties.

Some practical suggestions

You can also help by

- setting suitable times for doing homework that take account of other needs, such as recreation and family circumstances
- setting a reasonable amount of time for homework
- making sure children have the proper physical conditions for doing homework—a quiet time, a clear table, helpful books such as dictionaries
- getting in touch with the school at an early stage if the child is having difficulties with homework.

Other issues of interest to parents

Textbooks

The function of textbooks

The function of textbooks is to help children's learning and to assist teachers in reaching the learning goals of the curriculum. The curriculum places great emphasis on oral work and on learning by doing. Parents will, therefore, see a new relationship between textbooks and learning. Both the content of textbooks and the way they are used will change. Textbooks will be used as a resource to support the many different approaches to learning that the curriculum recommends. Rather than relying on a single textbook in a particular curriculum area, the teacher may use a range of books from the class library.

The approach to reading

The approach to the teaching of reading, for example, will be based on

- a lot of oral language work
- experiencing a print-rich environment that includes plenty of signs, labels, pictures with captions, and books
- acquiring a basic sight vocabulary—common words children need for reading
- developing a knowledge of the conventions of print
- reading large-format books (big books with big print) with the teacher in a group.

In line with this approach, children will normally begin to use a formal reading scheme some time in senior infant class.

Other curriculum areas

Irish reading will not begin before second class. In mathematics, because of the emphasis on practical work, much less use will be made of textbooks generally but especially in the junior classes.

In history, geography and science the emphasis in the curriculum is on exploring the environment and on developing skills such as observing, investigating, looking at evidence, measuring and recording. This will involve children in learning through activity rather than learning from textbooks. Because of this, textbooks in SESE and the way they are used will change.

It is important that parents are aware of this new relationship between textbooks and the curriculum and also that they are familiar with school policy in relation to textbooks.

Assessment

What is assessment?

Assessment is the means by which teachers keep track of children's progress in learning. Through assessment the teacher can build up a picture of the learning needs of the child and plan future work accordingly. Assessment is also used to identify children with learning difficulties so that they can be given the support and assistance they need.

Communicating with parents

A systematic approach to assessment will enable the teacher to build up a record of children's learning and give parents a clear picture of how their children are progressing. It also helps children to become more self-aware as learners and to develop powers of self-assessment.

The range of assessment

All areas of the curriculum and all the different aspects of learning will be assessed. Assessment will also take account of the child's self-esteem, behaviour, social interaction, and a wide range of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.

Different methods of assessment

The curriculum proposes the use of a variety of assessment tools, ranging from the informal to the formal. These include

- teacher observation
- class work and homework
- work samples, portfolios and projects
- curriculum profiles
- diagnostic tests
- standardised tests.

It is intended that in planning assessment, schools and teachers will select those methods that best meet their needs at a particular time. Through assessment teachers can make children's learning more successful, identify any difficulties a child may be having at an early stage, and at the same time provide parents with a full and clear picture of their children's progress in every area of the curriculum.

For further information

This document gives a brief summary of the Primary School Curriculum. Further information may be obtained

- by keeping in regular contact with the school and with your children's teachers
- by becoming involved with your local National Parents Council - Primary
- by reading the curriculum. Copies are available in public libraries and from

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Sun Alliance House,
Molesworth Street,
Dublin 2.

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Primary School Curriculum

Your child's learning

Guidelines for parents

The Primary School Curriculum (1999) is a landmark in Irish education. It is designed to meet children's learning needs in primary school, to prepare them for later education, and to enable them to lead fulfilled lives as adults.

It suggests a greater role for parents in contributing to their children's learning, both in the home and in school.

Most importantly, it sets out a model of co-operation between parents and schools that can add a significant dimension to children's learning.



These guidelines were prepared by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment for the Department of Education and Science.

