

Transition: Moving from Preschool to Primary

Suggested activities for schools to support a positive transition to junior infants

The move to primary school is an important and exciting time in young children's lives and there are many ways in which teachers support them and their families. Children need time to transition with some adjusting quicker than others. Children bring a lot of previous learning from home and preschool. If preschools or parents have shared information about children's learning, using *M'Scéal: Moving from Preschool to Primary Reports*, make use of them. They provide beneficial information about children's skills, dispositions and previous experiences which you can build upon.



In late April/early May you could take photos of the different areas of the school and classroom and share with feeder preschools. Preschools can use the photos to make a photo book to share with children. You could make a photobook too to give to parents so that they can discuss it with children in the week or two before they start school. It's also good to inform parents and preschools which

member/s of staff will be teaching junior infants and sharing a photo of the teacher/s (with consent) with preschools will help children become familiar with him/her.

Ask older children how they felt coming to school and what they would like to tell the incoming children. This gives you a child's perspective on what school is like and what children need to know about it!

Below are some practical and enjoyable ways for teachers to help children become familiar and comfortable with their new classroom and school. Involving the children will help you find out how they are settling into school. It is important to observe as well as talk to the children about their experiences of moving to junior infants. Record your observations, and their comments and questions.

You might also like to devise other transition activities, perhaps in collaboration with local preschools. See the tip sheet *Joint transition activities for preschools and primary schools* for ideas.



Transition activities

Having a ready classroom

Make the classroom layout similar to the preschool – set up into interest areas, have lots of open-ended materials (boxes, stones, twigs, fabric). Provide a cosy area with a bean bag and blankets where children (especially overwhelmed ones) can chill out.

Move some activities outdoors.

Have books, stories, activities and routines that the children are familiar with from preschool, as well as new ones.

Display:

- a daily/weekly timetable in visual format.
- photos of the preschools children have come from. Talk about these.
- a family wall with photos of each child's family, pets etc. Talk about these.
- a photo of the teacher on the door so children know which classroom to go in to.

Read storybooks about going to school and:

- chat about how children are finding the transition.
- invite children to draw pictures about school.
- discuss the differences and similarities between preschool and school.

Help children to become familiar with their new surroundings so they know where things are, especially toilets; having pictures on doors/storage will help with this.

Toilets can be a worry so make sure children know about girl and boy toilets and remember smells. Every school has its own smell especially the toilets! Try to ensure there is some nice soap and an air freshener available. Maybe hang some of the children's art work in there.

Support children to be as independent as possible in the classroom - giving out materials, tidying up, recycling, watering plants, feeding the birds. For children who find this difficult have rotas and ask children to work with a buddy.

Children could bring a favourite toy from home with them for the first couple of weeks.

Children who know each other or come from the same preschool could sit together.

Do lots of pair and small group activities so that children can get to know each other.

Provide props for collaborative play (skipping ropes, hop scotch, balls) in the school yard/playground. Watch out for children who are on their own or who appear upset and don't forget to explain what the bell means!

Transition activities

Including the voices of children

After a couple of weeks of settling in, ask the children how they felt coming to school - things they really liked and things that they found difficult.

Ask children to draw pictures about coming to school - representations of what their first day/week in school was like. Ask them to describe the picture and scribe their ideas. Share these insights with parents.

Working in partnership with parents

Find out parents' hopes for their children as they start school. Give out post-its at the open day/ beginning of the term and ask parents to write a couple of hopes they have for their child. Revisit them during the year.

In the school information pack include messages on:

- how you will help children transition to school
- the curriculum, the value of play and how it supports children's learning and development. You could give out the NCCA play tip sheets.
- the school day so parents know the routine and can talk through this with their child.

Communicate with parents regularly so they develop a sense of belonging to the school community. Promote informal contacts with parents as they drop off and collect children. For parents who don't come to the school daily, consider a text or a note home.

Some parents can find their child's move to school stressful, especially first-time parents so be mindful of those who might need some extra support or reassurance. Think about finding a 'buddy' parent for them. Perhaps the Parents' Association could organise a coffee morning during the first week in September so parents can get to know each other.

Arrange a parent information session in late September/early October informing parents about the curriculum and how their children are settling into junior infants.

Ask parents for feedback on their experience of the transition of their child to junior infants and use this information along with the insights of children to enhance the process each year.