

INFORMATION LEAFLET

for

Parents of Asylum Seeker and Refugee children

ATTENDING

POST - PRIMARY EDUCATION

Prepared by the

RECEPTION AND INTEGRATION AGENCY

with assistance from

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**Information leaflet for Parents of Asylum Seeker and Refugee Children attending
Post-Primary Education**

Introduction

Applicants for asylum come to Ireland from over one hundred nations and many cultures. Education in every country is unique and may vary from the Irish education system. Such difference does not mean that one education system is better or worse than another - just different. This leaflet was prepared with the help of asylum seeker parents, school principals and teachers. The leaflet aims to answer some of the common questions asked by asylum seeker parents who are new to the Irish education system. It concentrates on post-primary education. A similar leaflet is available for parents with children of primary age.

A. Post-Primary Education - National Provision

1. *Must my teenage son/ daughter attend school?*

Yes. In Ireland **ALL** young people, whether they are nationals or non-nationals, are entitled to free post-primary education. In Ireland, all young people to the age of 15 years (to be raised to 16 years soon) are required, **by LAW**, to attend school. In fact over eighty percent of Irish teenagers stay in school until they are 17/18 years of age. Once a student is enrolled in a school then he/she **MUST** attend school every day. (See also Question 31)

2. *What do you mean by post-primary education?*

In general, young people from approximately 12 years to 18 years attend a local post-primary school. A small percentage of young people, between the age of 15 - 18 years, attend a Youthreach programme.

3. *Who is responsible for the formal education of children in Ireland?*

The Department of Education and Science is responsible for the administration of public education - including post-primary education at national level.

4. What school will my son/ daughter attend?

There are over 760 post-primary schools in the country. At some of the larger accommodation centres your son or daughter may be allocated to a local school. Elsewhere the manager of the accommodation centre will give you the name(s) of the local school (s). A list of local schools will also be included in your information pack about the area around the accommodation centre.

If you wish to enrol your son/daughter in a school please contact the principal of the school by phone and arrange to meet with him/her. **DO NOT GO TO THE SCHOOL FOR THE FIRST TIME UNANNOUNCED.** If you feel that your English is not good enough to communicate with the principal you could bring a friend with you who speaks some English to help in the interview.

At that first meeting the principal should tell you about their enrolment policy and the criteria used to select children for enrolment. Parents will thus be fully informed on the selection procedures which will help allay any fears of discrimination against their children. You can ask the school principal to enrol your son/daughter. If a school is not able to enrol your son/ daughter another school in the locality will be suggested.

5. What type of questions will the school principal ask at the first meeting?

If your son/ daughter is enrolled in a school the principal will want to know

- the name, age and nationality of your son/daughter
- what education your son/daughter has had to date
- what particularly interests your son/daughter - e.g. mathematics, art, languages, sports etc.
- if your son/daughter has taken any formal examinations
- if he/she has any medical problems that the school should be aware of in case he/she gets sick while in school e.g. asthma/epilepsy
- your name, address and a contact phone number where you can be contacted if, for example, your son/daughter becomes ill at school
- if you want your son/daughter to partake in the school's religious education classes and/ or in religious ceremonies.

The principal may want to know the name of your social worker or community welfare officer. Any information provided by you will be treated in strict confidence.

6. Are there different types of school?

Yes. There are three types of post-primary schools - secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. Most schools teach the curriculum through English. Some schools teach the curriculum through the Irish language - the native language of Ireland. Approximately 40 percent of Irish schools are single sex schools and teach boys and girls separately. Sixty percent teach both boys and girls together.

7. Can you explain post-primary education to me?

Post primary education consists of

- a three year junior cycle
- followed by
- a two or three year senior cycle.

The two cycles are explained in greater detail later.

There are three terms in each school year:

- early September to mid- December
- early January to mid-March/ April (Easter)
- post- Easter usually to the end of May or early June.

In the middle of each term there may be a short holiday called half-term or mid-term. This can vary in length from a few days to a week.

8. What if the school closes during the year?

Each school usually produces a list of days when the school will be closed for holidays, teacher inservice training or for other reasons. Parents are given a copy of this list. If the school has to unexpectedly close for a day or half day your son or daughter will be told or given a note.

Sample note:
School will be closed on Wednesday, 13 October because.....

9. What if my son/ daughter does not want to partake in senior cycle education?

Having considered the options available within senior cycle with a school principal, you may together decide that senior cycle is not suitable for your son/ daughter. The principal may refer your son/ daughter to a Youthreach programme if there is one located nearby and if there is space to enrol your son/ daughter on that programme. Further details on this programme are provided later in this leaflet.

10. Can you explain the school day to me?

Most post-primary schools are open from Monday to Friday, usually from 8.45am to 3.30 or 4.00pm. There may be sports or other activities arranged after school hours. Students usually start their post-primary education on completion of primary education. In the school day there is usually a mid-morning break and a lunch break. It is important to ensure that your children have food and drink for these two breaks. Check with the school principal if foods such as crisps, chocolates etc. are banned. You may find that drinks in a glass bottle or fizzy drinks are also banned. If in doubt, do check it out with the principal or year head teacher. If you live in an accommodation centre please agree with the manager about the food/drink required for the two school breaks.

11. What is the staffing structure within a school?

The principal, who may be male or female, has overall responsibility for the day to day running of the school and is responsible to the patron and the board of management. The students have subject specialist teachers for their different subjects. Thus a student may have seven or eight teachers. Staff may be male or female. Post-primary teachers are highly qualified professionals and are usually specialists in a number of subject areas. Each class normally has a year head teacher assigned to look after the needs of the students, particularly their non-academic needs. There is usually a guidance counsellor in the school who will advise your son/ daughter on subject selection and on other related issues.

12. Who is on the Board of Management?

The Board of Management consists of representatives of parents, teachers, trustees, patron, the principal and the community. The Board of Management aims to ensure that the school is run efficiently and provides all students with a quality education.

B. Special Provisions

13. What if my son/daughter has a particular problem?

If a young person has a learning problem then the school will assess the problem. A support teacher, where such is available to the school, will work with the young person. If further help is required then a psychologist from the Department of Education and Science will be asked to assist.

If the young person has a health problem e.g. hearing or speech or psychological / trauma difficulties, then experts from the local Health Board will be asked to help. There can be a delay in obtaining such specialist help.

14. But my son/daughter has very little English?

Experience to date has shown that young people learn English very quickly. It is normal to place a non-national student, even if s/he has very little English, in a class with students of a similar age. Your son/daughter may have a language support teacher to help him/her to learn English. The Department of Education and Science provides a language support programme to enable the school to provide extra English classes to non-national students who have difficulties with English. Your son/ daughter will receive a language portfolio to support his/her English language learning. You can follow his/her progress by examining the portfolio from time to time.

15. What about school books?

If you cannot afford to pay the full cost of school books you should ask the school principal if he/she can assist you with obtaining school books. The Department of Education and Science provides an annual grant to schools to assist with some of the costs of school books.

16. What about transport to school?

If a post-primary student lives more than three miles from the school he/she is eligible for free school bus travel. If you are concerned about issues related to school transport then you should talk with the principal of the school.

C. Life within the School

17. What class will my son/daughter be placed in ?

That decision will be taken by the principal of the school in consultation with you. Class allocation is usually based on age, previous education experience and competency in English. Where possible the young person is placed in a class with their age peers. If your son/daughter's competency in English is not good, it may be recommended that he/she not enter an examination class for their first year in an Irish school as this might add extra stress.

18. What will my son/daughter learn while in a post-primary school?

Junior Cycle

The junior cycle lasts three years. There are currently over 20 subjects in the Junior Certificate programme. The ten most popular subjects are English, Mathematics, Irish, Science, Geography, History, French, Business Studies, Art/Craft/Design, Home Economics. All students study Civic, Social and Political Education. In addition there are other curricular areas including Physical Education and Social, Personal and Health Education which are not examination subjects but are an integral part of the junior cycle curriculum. While you await a decision on your application for refugee status, your son/daughter does not have to study Irish or religion, if that is your wish but he/she may be expected to remain in the class under the supervision of the teacher. You should talk about these matters with the school principal.

It is important to note that schools do not offer the full suite of Junior Certificate subjects. Most schools offer a wide range of subjects.

At the end of third year students sit for the State examination called the Junior Certificate. The certificate records students achievement in a range of between eight and ten subjects. All subjects in the Junior Certificate are offered at Ordinary and Higher levels and, in the case of English, Irish and Mathematics a third level - Foundation - is available.

Senior Cycle

Students may spend up to three years in senior cycle. They may follow a two-year Leaving Certificate programme immediately after the Junior Certificate, or they may follow a Transition Year programme before starting a two-year Leaving Certificate. In some schools the Transition Year programme is optional, in others it is a compulsory component of school life.

The Transition Year programme is a one-year programme between the end of the Junior Certificate and the beginning of a Leaving Certificate programme. It is an interdisciplinary and student centred programme which offers a special opportunity for the student to develop in a non-examination environment.

There are three Leaving Certificate programmes.

- Established Leaving Certificate
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
- Leaving Certificate Applied

The ten most common subjects chosen by candidates in the Leaving Certificate are English, Mathematics, Irish, French, Biology, Geography, Business Organisation, Home Economics, History and Accounting. The subjects for the examination in the Established Leaving Certificate and in the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme are offered at Ordinary and Higher levels and, in the case of Irish and Mathematics a third level - Foundation - is available. Students sit for this examination at the end of senior cycle.

The Leaving Certificate Applied is a distinct, self-contained two-year Leaving Certificate programme aimed at preparing students for adult and working life. It does not provide direct access to university courses. The Leaving Certificate Applied examination is carried out over the two years of the programme as well as at the end.

For further information on the options within senior cycle you can consult the Department of Education and Science's document *Senior Cycle Options* which provides detailed information on these programmes. The Department can be contacted at 01 8734700 or through its website www.irlgov.ie/educ

19. Is there an alternative to the Leaving Certificate?

Yes - Youthreach. The education sector and FAS (the Training and Employment Authority) are involved in the delivery of Youthreach programmes. Youthreach is intended for young people, aged fifteen to eighteen years, for whom none of the three Leaving Certificate programmes is suited. Basic skills training, practical work training and general education are major features of the programme.

The objective of the programme is to equip young people with the skills needed for employment and further training and to provide integrated education, training and work experience over a two-year period and thereby enhance their job prospects and life chances. Students are usually directed to Youthreach programmes by school principals when it is decided that senior cycle does not cater for the particular needs of a young person.

20. What is a School's Ethos?

Irish post- primary schools promote tolerance, mutual respect and an understanding of cultural, ethical, racial, social and religious diversity. They also promote the reality of difference within an intercultural society. The celebration of intercultural diversity is, for many schools, becoming an important component of school life and is particularly emphasised through their experiences in the Civic, Social and Political Education programme. Opportunities to promote intercultural education through their study of geography, music, history etc. abound throughout the curriculum.

The school is a multicultural environment. Each young person's ethnic origin and religion is respected. It is expected that all children will also respect all other children in the school.

Any bad behaviour that is racially motivated by Irish children or by non-national children will not be tolerated by the school.

21. How are students in post-primary education taught?

There is usually a subject specialist teacher for each subject. Subjects are taught not only from an academic perspective but a practical and applied approach is also adopted so that what is learnt is relevant to the student's life. Students should enjoy their time in school and find it worthwhile and stimulating.

It is important that all students attend school everyday unless there is a very good reason for not attending. Missing school, even for a day, will make it difficult for the young person to keep up to the same level as the other students.

22. How are students assessed while in post-primary education?

Post-primary teachers continually assess their students throughout the five/six years of their post-primary education. Students are assessed on all aspects of their school experience.

Schools usually issue at least two reports on student's progress during each school year. In addition there is usually at least one parent / teacher meeting where the progress of your son/daughter can be discussed by you with the teachers. You are strongly encouraged to attend such meetings.

In addition there is the State Junior Certificate examination at the end of Junior Cycle and the State Leaving Certificate examination at the end of the Senior Cycle.

23. Are students expected to do homework?

Homework is an important part of learning. Students would be expected to do homework and it is important that parents encourage their son/daughter to do their homework each evening. They should be encouraged to have a daily routine that includes time for homework and leisure activities. Parents should assist where necessary.

24. Will the school understand my culture?

Schools are becoming more aware of different cultures as more and more cultures are represented in our school system. Libraries and Non Governmental Organisations can be a huge resource in providing information in this area. You too as a parent from a different culture can provide information in this area through the Parents Association or in consultation with the year head teacher.

25. What do I do if my son/daughter has a problem?

You should talk about the problem with your son/daughter. Such problem could be with learning or be of a personal or a social nature. If you cannot resolve the problem at home you may have to talk to the year head teacher or the guidance counsellor. If the problem is unresolved then it may be necessary to make an appointment and speak with the school principal. You may wish to bring a friend with you to assist with communication.

26. What do I do if my son/daughter is bullied?

Physical pushing or threatening physical and verbal abuse are not acceptable in Irish schools. Bullying does sometimes occur in school and even on the way to school. If your son/daughter is experiencing this behaviour from others or is involved in this type of behaviour, it is a serious matter. No young person should have to suffer at the hands of the bully.

If your son/daughter is being bullied **do not** confront the other child's parents/ guardians. **Do** talk with the class teacher and/or the principal about such instances and resolve the problem through this channel.

27. What about Discipline in the school?

Teachers want to praise young people when they work hard and produce good work, including homework. **Corporal punishment is not used in Irish schools. It is illegal.** Each school has a code of discipline. Sanctions used by a school are specified within their code. Parents are provided with the code of discipline and can discuss it with the principal or year head teacher. For example, schools are usually very strict on dress code (school uniform and the wearing of jewellery), attendance, punctuality and on conduct. Parents have a responsibility to accept the school code and to ensure that their son/daughter understands and abides by the code. If there is a discipline or other problem parents should firstly try to sort it out with their son/daughter and where necessary with the year head teacher. If the issue continues to be unresolved then you should talk with the principal.

For example if your child continually breaks the rules you will be informed by the year head teacher or school principal. You will be given an opportunity to discuss the various issues with school personnel. You will however be expected to ensure that your son/daughter's behaviour improves.

If there is a very serious breach of the school rules/ code then, a school having exhausted other options could decide, as a last resort, to suspend the young person from the school. This is a rare and serious decision. Notice, in writing, of such a suspension would be provided. Parents would usually be given a chance to appeal a suspension to the Board of Management and, as a last resort, if the suspension is for an extended period, an appeal could be made to the Department of Education and Science.

28. Does a student have to wear a school uniform?

Many schools require their students to wear a school uniform. Sometimes students need special clothing or shoes for sports. Young people should wear the correct clothing to school. Clothing and hair should be clean and tidy.

The Community Welfare Officer in your area will treat the purchase of the school uniform as an "exceptional need" under the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Scheme, if you qualify for assistance. For further information you should contact your Community Welfare Officer.

If for cultural reasons you have a problem with your son/ daughter wearing the school uniform it is important that you discuss this matter with the principal.

29. What annoys principals and school teachers most?

1. Poor attendance by students
2. Disruptive behaviour by students in the classroom or in the school and its environs.
3. Families leaving an area without informing the school
4. Not wearing the school uniform
5. Lack of respect for the professional views of the principal or teachers
6. Homework not completed.

D. Parents

30. What is the Role of the Parent

The Irish Constitution stresses that parents are the young person's primary educator. Support from the home is vital for their development during the post- primary school years.

It is important that you show interest in what he/she is learning and doing in school. Praise your son/daughter's efforts at every opportunity. Your encouragement means so much and will motivate him/her to continue trying.
It is important that you consult with the school on your son/daughter's progress. If there is anything worrying you about their education then it is important that you talk with the year head teacher or the principal so that your son/daughter receives the best education possible.

31. What is the role of the parent if your son/daughter has to miss school for a day or longer?

It is your responsibility and it is required by IRISH LAW that you inform the school of your son/daughter's absence from school because of illness or other exceptional circumstances. You should call the school, phone the school or send a letter to the class teacher to explain the reason for the young person's absence.

A typical letter might say (Name of young person) was absent from school yesterday (date) due to illness (or for whatever reason) Signed: (your name) □
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Otherwise the teachers and the principal will be concerned for the young person's welfare.
If your son/daughter is absent for an extended period without informing the school authorities then you, as the parent, may be visited by an attendance officer. It is a legal offence for a parent not to inform a school about the non-attendance of their child.

32. What if you and your family move to a new location away from the school?

It is important you tell the school that your son/daughter is moving to live in a new location and will not be returning to this school. You should ask the school principal to provide you with a written report on their progress to date, including the young person's language portfolio. When you enrol your son/daughter in a new school in a new location it is important to tell the new principal that he/she was educated at another Irish school. It is also important that you provide the new principal with the documentation from the first school. The principals can share relevant educational information about the young person, if they wish.
If the school has provided you with school books or other items, it is important that these are returned to the school before you leave.

33. Do parents meet as a group?

Most schools have a parents' council and all parents are invited and encouraged to become involved.

34. Can I help in the school?

If you wish to participate in voluntary work in the school you should talk with the year head teacher or the principal. Such work could involve helping with sporting events, concerts, talking about your own culture/ music/ country etc. There are so many ways you can help - just let someone in the school know that you want to be involved in the school - like many Irish parents. Such voluntary work is often organised with and through the parents council.

Advice for Parents

The following points are to help you support your son/daughter's education and development in an effective way:

- Use your first language (mother tongue) at home with your children
- Talk to your children as much as possible. Tell them about your day and ask them about theirs. In particular, find out what may be worrying them.
- Make sure that your son/daughter does all homework assigned by teachers.
- Homework time is approximately:

2- 3 hours for students in a post-primary school

- Find out what homework your son/daughter is doing and look at the work when it is finished.
- Make a place for your son/daughter to do homework where he/she is not distracted by television or other noise
- Encourage them to read - either in English or in your own language
- Help the young people to understand the possibilities for the future if they make a real effort to learn.

During school holidays

It is possible that your son/daughter may lose some of the English that he/she has learnt during the school holidays. It is important, therefore, that young people should use, read or listen to some English every day. Please try and find an opportunity for the young person to use English.

For example, he /she:

- may watch a television programme and then tell you about it;
- could read a book ;
- could ask for items in the local shop etc.;

could keep a daily diary during the holiday period with pictures and writing.

While it is important for your son/daughter to learn English, it is also very important that he/she does not lose the mother tongue of your family. Take every opportunity to use your mother tongue with your family and talk about your native country. You could go into your local library, gain access to the internet and keep in touch with what is happening in your native country.