

English

INFORMATION LEAFLET

for

Parents of Asylum Seeker and Refugee children

ATTENDING

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
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 primary education. A similar leaflet is available for parents with children of post-primary age.

A. Primary Education - National Provision

1. *Must my child attend school?*

Yes. In Ireland **ALL** children, whether they are nationals or non-nationals, are entitled to free primary and post-primary education. All children from 6 years to the age of 15 years are required, **BY LAW**, to attend school. Most Irish children start school at either 4 or 5 years of age. Once your child is enrolled in a school he/she **MUST** attend school every day. (See also Question 31)

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

In general, children who are at least 4 years of age on 1st September of an academic year to approximately 12 years of age attend a primary school and children from approximately 12 years to 18 years attend a post-primary school.

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 primary and post-primary education at national level.

4. What school will my child attend?

There are over 3,100 primary schools in the country. At some of the larger accommodation centres your child may be allocated to a local school. At other accommodation centres the manager of the centre will give you the name(s) of the local school(s). In the information pack you receive about the area in which your accommodation centre is located there will be a list of local schools. If you wish to enrol your son/ daughter in a local 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 the first meeting you can ask the school principal to enrol your child. If a school is full then it may not be able to enrol your child. Another school in the locality will be suggested.

5. What type of questions might the principal ask?

If your child is enrolled in a school the principal will want to know the name, age and nationality of your son/daughter your name, address and a contact telephone number where you can be contacted, if for example, your son/daughter becomes ill at school 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 what education your son/daughter has had to date what particularly interests your son/ daughter e.g. music, art, sports if you want your child 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. All primary schools are based on a particular religious ethos, for example Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland, Muslim, and in the "Educate Together" schools a multi-religious ethos is found. Most schools teach the curriculum through English. Some schools teach the curriculum through Irish - the native language of Ireland. Single sex schools teach boys and girls separately. Other schools teach boys and girls together.

7. Can you explain primary education to me?

Children may start school in the September after their fourth birthday, others wait until they are 5 years old. Different schools have different policies on the enrolment of children into the junior infants class.

There are eight classes in primary education (see table below). The children spend a year in each class. Sometimes a teacher may recommend that a pupil repeat a year.

Approximate age	Year	Class name
4 - 5 years	1	Junior infants
5 - 6 years	2	Senior infants
6 - 7 years	3	First class
7 - 8 years	4	Second class
8 - 9 years	5	Third class
9 - 10 years	6	Fourth class
10 - 11 years	7	Fifth class
11- 12 years	8	Sixth class

The primary school year has 3 terms.

The first term is from the beginning of September to mid- December (Christmas)

The second term is from early January to mid-March/ April (Easter)

The final term is from after Easter to the end of June each year

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 close for holidays, for inservice or for other reasons. Parents are given a copy of this list. If the school has unexpectedly to close or end early your child will be given a note, in advance, from the school providing you with this information. Please make sure that you look in your child's school bag **everyday** for such notes.

Sample note:

School will end at 1.00pm on Wednesday 3rd October because.....□

9. Can you explain the school day to me?

A school day lasts 5 hours and 40 minutes. Classes usually start between 8.45am and 9.30am. Schools are open from Monday to Friday.

In the school day there is normally a mid-morning break and a lunch break. It is important to ensure that your child has food and drink for these two breaks. Check with the principal of the school if foods such as crisps, chocolate etc. are banned. You may find that drinks in glass bottles or fizzy drinks are also banned. If in doubt, do ask the principal or class teacher.

If you live in an accommodation centre please agree with the manager about the food/drink required for the two school breaks. The younger children may finish their school day one hour earlier than the children in the more senior classes. For the older children there may be sports or other activities organised after school hours, usually by the teachers.

10. *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.

There is a class teacher for each class group of pupils. The class teacher teaches all subjects to his/ her pupils. There may be other additional teachers in the school who will help the class teacher. For example your child may have a language support teacher to help him/her learn English. Staff may be male or female. All teachers in Ireland are professionally trained and their opinions and advice on your child's education should be listened to and respected.

11. *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

12. *What if my child has a particular problem?*

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

In school, children are checked from time to time by a medical team. This could involve checking a child's hearing, teeth or sight. They may be provided with vaccinations. The school will inform the parents, in advance, about such medical check ups and what is involved.

If a child 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 the child. There can be delays in obtaining such specialist help.

13. *What about pre-school education?*

There is a limited number of State supported pre-school facilities available. In fact, there are only 40 early start pre-school programmes available throughout the country. There are some privately owned pre-school facilities but a fee has to be paid to attend these. Some facilities are subsidised and you should ask the Community Welfare Officer if there is assistance available.

14. *But my child has very little English?*

Experience to date has shown that young children learn English very quickly. It is normal to place a non-national child, even if s/he has very little English, in a class with children of a similar age.

The Department of Education and Science provides a language support programme to enable the school to provide extra English classes for non-national children who have difficulty with English. Your son/daughter may have a language support teacher to help him/her to learn English. A record of your son/ daughter's progress in English will be kept by the school. Your child will receive his/ her own language learning portfolio and 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 text books then ask the school principal if he/she can assist you with the purchase of school books. The Department of Education and Science provides an annual grant to schools to assist with some of the costs of textbooks.

16. *What about transport to school?*

In general, if a child is under 10 years of age and lives more than two miles from the school he/she is eligible for free school bus travel. If the child is over 10 years and the child lives over 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 child be placed in ?*

That decision will be taken by the principal of the school in consultation with you and perhaps the class teacher. Class allocation is usually based on a child's age, and previous education experience may also be taken into consideration. Therefore at your first interview with the principal you may be asked about your child's education to date.

18. *What will my child learn while in a primary school?*

The primary curriculum emphasises the importance of developing in your child a love of learning which will last a lifetime. School is meant to be a pleasant and fun experience.

There are six main areas in the primary curriculum

Curriculum Area

Subjects

Language

English and Irish. In some schools a foreign language may be offered

Mathematics

Social, environmental and scientific education

history, geography, science

Arts

visual arts, music and drama

Physical education

Social, personal and health education

Children will also be offered classes in religious education. While you await a decision on your application for refugee status, your child does not have to study Irish or Religious Education, if that is your wish but he/she may be expected to remain in the classroom under the supervision of the teacher. You should talk about these matters with the school principal.

19. What is a School's Ethos?

Irish 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 particularly through their experiences in music, art, dance, history etc.

The school is a multicultural environment. Every child's ethnic origin and religion is respected. It is expected that all children will also respect 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.

20. How will my child be taught?

One teacher teaches all aspects of the curriculum to his/her class. For specialist areas, for example English language classes, other teachers may be employed. In some small schools one teacher may teach more than one class in the same classroom. Children learn through active and enjoyable experiences. It is important that your child attends school everyday unless there is a very good reason for not attending. Missing school, even for a day, will make it difficult for your child to keep up to the same level as other pupils.

21. How are children assessed while in primary education?

Primary teachers continually assess their pupils throughout the eight years of their primary education. Pupils are assessed on all aspects of their school experience. There is no State examination at the end of primary education. Tests will be carried out from time to time, and most pupils do school examinations at the end of the school year.

Schools usually issue at least one report on your child's progress during each school year.

22. Do parents meet with the teachers?

There is usually a parent / teacher meeting organised by the school. At this meeting you can see examples of the pupils work, and discuss the progress of your child on a one to one basis with the class teacher. You will receive notice from the school about the parent/ teacher meeting. You should try and attend this important meeting.

If, in the meantime, you are worried about your child's progress, you should arrange to meet with and speak to the class teacher.

23. Will my child be expected to do homework?

Policy in relation to homework will vary from school to school. If your child's school has a policy of giving homework then it is important that he/she be given space and encouragement by you. Where necessary, you should offer to help. It is also important that you take the time to talk with your child about what they do in school each day and, where possible, read over with them the relevant sections of their school books so as to reinforce what is learnt in the classroom.

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. Information can be obtained from libraries and Non Governmental Organisations. You, too, if you wish, can provide information in this area through the Parents Association or in consultation with the class teacher.

25. What do I do if my child has a problem?

You should firstly talk about the problem with your child. Such a problem could be with learning or be of a personal or a social nature. If you cannot resolve the problem at home you should make an appointment to speak to the class teacher. You may wish to bring a friend if you require assistance with understanding English. If the problem is still unresolved then it may be necessary for you to make an appointment and speak with the principal.

26. What do I do if my child is bullied?

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

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

27. What about Discipline in a School?

Teachers praise children when they work hard and produce good work and homework. Praise helps to motivate children.

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. For example, schools are usually very strict on dress code (school uniform and the wearing of jewellery), attendance, punctuality and conduct. Parents have a responsibility to accept the school code and to ensure that their children understand and abide by the code.

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 involve the class 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 class 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 child's behaviour improves.

If a child is alleged to seriously breach the school rules the school, having tried all other options, could decide as a last resort to suspend a child from the school. This is a rare and serious decision. Notice of such a suspension would be provided in writing to the parents. Parents could appeal a suspension to the Board of Management and as a last resort an appeal could be made to the Department of Education and Science.

28. Does my child have to wear a school uniform?

Many schools require their pupils to wear a uniform. Sometimes children need special clothing or shoes for sport. Children should wear the correct clothing for school. Clothing and hair must be clean and tidy.

You should apply to the Community Welfare Officer in your local health centre to provide you with a Back to School Clothing and Footwear Scheme, where necessary. If for cultural reasons you have a problem with your child wearing the school uniform it is important that you discuss this matter with the principal.

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 pupils
2. Disruptive behaviour by pupils in the classroom or in the playground
3. Families leaving an area without informing the school
4. Not wearing school uniforms
5. Lack of respect for the professional views of the principal or class teachers
6. Homework not completed

D. Parents

30. What is the Role of the Parent?

The Irish Constitution stresses that parents are the child's primary educators. Support from the home is vital for your child's development during the primary school years.

It is important that you show interest in what your child is doing in school. Praise your child's efforts at every opportunity. Your encouragement means so much and will motivate your child 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 class teacher so that your son/daughter receives the best education.

31. What is your role if your child 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 child's absence from school because of illness or other exceptional circumstances. You should call to the school, phone the school or send a letter to the class teacher to explain the reason for your son/ daughter's absence.

Typically a letter may say

(Name of child) was absent from school yesterday (*date*) due to illness (*or for whatever reason*)

Signed: *(your name)* □

Otherwise the class teacher and the principal will be concerned for the welfare of your child.

If your child is absent regularly or for an extended period without informing the school authorities then you, as the parent, may be visited by a School 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 child is leaving the school for good. You should ask the school principal to provide you with a written report on your child's progress to date, including the young person's language portfolio. When you enrol your child in a new school in a new location it is important to tell the new principal that your child was educated at another Irish school and

provide the principal with a copy of the documentation from the first school. The principals can then share relevant educational information about your child.

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 class teacher or principal. Such work could involve helping with sporting events, concerts, summer camps, talking about your own culture/ music/ country etc. There are so many ways you can help - just tell the principal/ class teacher 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 child'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 child does all homework assigned by teachers.

Homework time is approximately:

10 minutes - 30 minutes for children to approximately 9 years

30 minutes to 90 minutes for children in senior primary classes (9 - 12 year olds)

Find out what homework your child is doing and look at the work when it is finished.

Make a place for your child to do homework where he/she is not distracted by television or other noise

For younger children read to them and get them to read to you - either in English or in your own language

Help your children to understand the possibilities for the future if they make a real effort to learn.

During school holidays

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

For example, he /she:

may watch a television programme and then tell you about it;

could read a book aloud to you;

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 child 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 child and tell him/ her 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.