

The **What, Why** and **How**

of children's learning in primary school

Information for parents



Junior and senior
infants

First and second
classes

Third and fourth
classes

Fifth and sixth
classes

Introduction

As a parent you are the most important person in your child's life. Before your child comes to school, you as a parent have taught your child many things. This early learning is very important as it provides a basis for all future learning.

Your child doesn't stop learning from you when he/she starts school. Meetings with your child's class teacher are helpful in letting you know what your child is learning at school and what you can do to continue this learning at home.

In order to help you to continue to support your child's learning in school and at home, the NCCA has produced a DVD on The What, Why and How of Children's Learning in Primary School. The DVD explains what your child learns in school, how your child learns and why he/she learns in this way. This booklet is intended to further support you in your important role.

If you want more information on the Primary School Curriculum you can:

- access it online at www.ncca.ie
- borrow a copy of the curriculum from your local library
- buy it on CD-Rom or in hard copy from the **Government Publications Office, Molesworth Street, Dublin 1.**

What is the Primary School Curriculum?

The Primary School Curriculum outlines what children learn in each subject, the approaches and methodologies used and how your child's learning progresses through the four levels of primary school:

- Level 1: Junior and senior infants
- Level 2: First and second class
- Level 3: Third and fourth class
- Level 4: Fifth and sixth class.

Schools develop plans which outline how they use the curriculum in their school.

The Primary Curriculum aims to:

- develop each child's potential to the full
- encourage in children a love for learning
- help them develop skills that they will use all their lives.



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What does my child learn in school?

The Primary School Curriculum, from junior infants to sixth class, contains 11 subjects which are grouped together in 7 areas as shown in the diagram below. The curriculum for Religious Education is the responsibility of the different church authorities. Different programmes have been developed for use in different types of schools.

As well as learning about new ideas and finding out new information in the different subjects of the curriculum, your child develops important skills such as:

- communicating
- estimating
- designing and making
- problem solving
- working scientifically.

To help connect the skills learned in the different subjects, teachers often plan learning activities which include more than one subject, for example, a topic like Water, provides opportunities for children to learn concepts and skills in social, personal and health education (SPHE), physical education, history, maths, English, Irish, music, drama and the visual arts, as well as in geography and science.

	Languages → 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

How does my child learn?

Through the Primary School Curriculum your child learns in a variety of different ways, for example, through seeing, hearing, moving, feeling and touching. They may learn working by themselves, in pairs, or in groups. Children learn through:

Talk and discussion

This means that in every lesson your child is encouraged to *listen, question, tell stories, summarise, express and explain feelings, give instructions, argue, persuade and present ideas*. Teachers often use circle work (giving special time to talk and discussion activities, while children sit together in a circle).

Play

Through **play**, your child learns important skills such as turn-taking, playing fair, investigating and problem solving. For example, when dressing up and playing shop, your child develops creative skills, social skills and mathematical skills. By playing with jigsaws your child learns the value of finishing a task, and the skills of noticing pattern and detail, and developing hand-eye co-ordination.

Working individually and in pairs and groups

While children often work on tasks alone, they also work in pairs and groups. This is called collaborative learning and shows your child how he/she can learn from others and also help others to learn. Your child learns, for example, to divide up learning tasks so that everyone in the group has a chance to take part. Children learn a lot from hearing other children's ideas and thoughts and you can be sure that they will respond to these by giving their own opinions! Working in this way gives all children a chance to shine and experience success in learning.

Using the environment as a learning resource

Teachers use the class, school and local environment in their teaching throughout your child's primary schooling. Basing your child's learning on his/her experience and environment makes learning real, practical and fun. The environment can be used in different ways:

- in science, history and geography your child observes and investigates plant and animal life in the local environment, learns to care for the environment, explores features of the geographical landscape and visits and learns about historical sites
- in arts education, local artists, musicians or dramatists may be invited to visit the school or your child may in turn visit art exhibitions or musical and dramatic performances.

Problem solving

Your child learns to solve problems alone or by working with others. The problems that your child works with in school are linked to real-life, for example, your child might be asked to design and make items for different purposes in science lessons, such as musical instruments or a bird table.

Using Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

Knowledge of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT), such as, the use of computers, digital cameras, email, internet and mobile phones, is an important part of living and working in today's world. ICT is used to broaden and support your child's learning in all curriculum areas.

As all children learn in different ways, the teacher will provide a variety of learning opportunities for your child throughout the day in different subjects. He/she will also vary the pace of learning according to your child's needs.

How does assessment support my child's learning?

The teacher uses assessment to support your child's learning. Assessment involves gathering information about your child's learning which helps the teacher to make decisions about the next steps in teaching and learning. **Your child's teacher may gather information in many different ways** including:

- talking and listening to your child
- observing and monitoring your child's social and personal development and his/her approach to tasks
- assigning small tasks and tests.

From first class onwards, your child's teacher may also give:

- weekly tests
- project work
- assignments
- standardised tests.

Standardised tests in English and mathematics help the teacher to see how your child is doing compared with other children of the same age. Teachers may also use diagnostic tests to help pick up on any difficulties your child may be having at an early stage and take steps to provide him/her with the support he/she needs. Teachers also **help children to comment on their own work from a young age**. As a parent, **you also have valuable information** on how your child is progressing in primary school. This information can be very useful to the class teacher in assessing your child's progress and planning for his/her learning.

How can I support my child with homework?

Homework **helps your child:**

- to reinforce knowledge and skills learned
- to learn to work by himself/herself
- to organise and manage his/her time.

Homework helps you:

- to keep in touch with your child's learning in school
- to monitor your child's progress
- to notice any problems your child may be having
- to learn from your child.

Homework won't always be written work. For example, your child may be asked to watch a television programme of particular interest or to interview you or his/her grandparents for a history project.

The most important way that you can support your child's learning at home is by **showing an interest in what your child is doing**.

Ask questions which encourage your child to give more than a yes or no answer, such as, *can you tell me about your picture?* or *teach me something you learned in Irish today*. **Praising your child's efforts** is also very important.

Discuss homework with your child and **agree when, how and where** homework should be done. Think about things such as having a quiet undisturbed place and whether your child works better alone or with brothers/sisters/friends. Decide a time when your child will best be able to concentrate on the work. **Help your child to plan for the use of homework time** in advance and encourage him/her to organise the books, clothes and equipment he needs for the following school day. If your child needs help with homework, **support him/her to find ways to solve the problem for him/herself** rather than doing the work for your child. **The class teacher should be able to answer any questions you may have about helping with homework.**

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Why is it important to support my child's learning at home?

Learning at home is important for a number of reasons:

- opportunities for learning at home help children connect what they have learned in school to real-life situations, for example, using the skills they learned in physical education in playing games in their local community
- research studies in Ireland and abroad show that when parents read to and with their children at home, children make better progress in reading.

Your child will love to tell you all about what he/she has learned in school and your encouragement and support will help him/her grow in confidence as he/she progresses and develops in all areas.

Your child's class teacher will always be willing to answer your queries and will welcome your support and involvement.

