

Introducing Your Second Level School

*Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland (ASTI)
National Parents Council (Post Primary)*





Foreword

Our children spend a few short years progressing through the second level education system. Yet this is an extraordinary time in their lives during which they gradually leave childhood behind and become young adults. All young people are different and have different personalities, learning habits, interests and talents. Education is about valuing and nurturing a young person's uniqueness and seeking to assist him/ her in reaching his/ her potential as a student and in his/her future life.

Parents and schools have a joint interest in ensuring that we have a progressive, vibrant, adequately-resourced education service which meets the educational needs of all our children. Parents can and should play a significant role in the education of their own children and in the development of school communities and the wider education system. It is well recognised that participation by parents in their children's second level education leads to educational and other benefits for those children. Informed participation by parents can also lead to the development and enhancement of our schools and society in general.

If education is valued in the home, not in any inflexible, grinding way, but in a life-enhancing, encouraging way which seeks to strike a balance between present enjoyment and future attainment, then children will perceive their schooling in a positive, creative way. A sense of curiosity, openness to new experiences, and a desire to know are



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vital pre-requisites to the more formal learning that goes on in schools. Together, parents and schools can provide an environment conducive to successful learning and personal achievement.

This booklet is a joint venture between the Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland and the National Parents Council (Post Primary). We hope it will encourage parents to continue to participate in and contribute to our education system to the benefit of the current and next generation of second level pupils.

Parents and teachers working in collaboration represent a powerful force in education.

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Introducing your second level school

Going to second level school should be a happy and fulfilling experience for your child. Your second level school exists to meet the educational needs of your children. Their time at second level should allow them to realise their full potential both academically and personally.

Under the Education Act, 1998 the Board of Management must run schools on "behalf of the patron and for the benefit of the students and their parents and to provide or cause to be provided an appropriate education for each student".

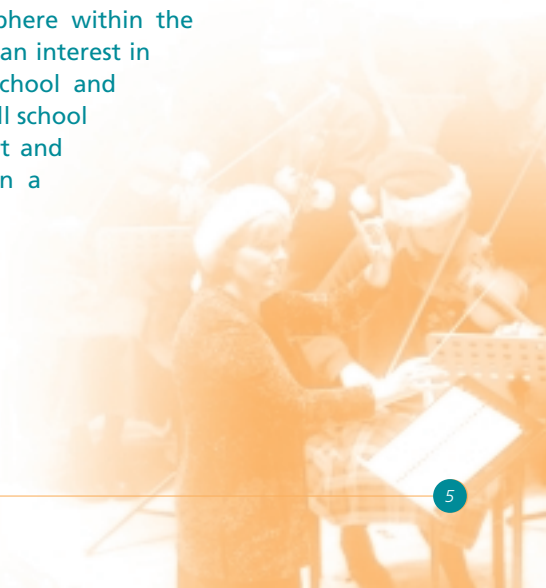
The purpose of this booklet is to assist you so that your children can make the most of their second level school and can adapt to the change in transferring from primary to second level school.

Getting involved

The most important thing you can do is to take a real interest in your children's education. All the evidence shows that pupils of parents who show this interest have a more positive and constructive attitude to school and have a better chance of benefiting from their education.

You can do this by creating an atmosphere within the home that values education. If you take an interest in the work your children are doing at school and encourage them to become involved in all school activities such as clubs, games, music, art and debates you help make their education a part of your family life.

In doing this you can create an awareness that schoolwork is important work and should be carried out with care and enthusiasm. However, avoid becoming over-powering as this can create stress and put unnecessary



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pressure on your child. Now and then ask them how they are getting on and even if the response is brief and uninformative, as is often the case with teenagers, continue to maintain an interest. If they do talk to you about school related matters always try to make time to listen. Take an interest in their homework and any projects or assignments they are doing. Remember that education is about more than school and that encouraging a sense of curiosity about the world and fostering a range of interests contributes greatly to an education for life.

Parents' organisations

The role of parents as the primary educators of their children and as partners in education is now recognised. The National Parents Council (Post Primary) is consulted by the Minister for Education and Science on a whole range of policy matters and is represented on important bodies such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment which advises the Minister on what should be taught in schools. The National Parents Council (Post Primary) also engages in the training of parents to help them play an active role in the education of their children.

Active involvement in a parents' organisation allows you to have an influence in what happens at both local and national level. It is important for parents to realise that their children's schooling and education is an area they should maintain an ongoing interest in. It is vital that there is parental input into the education system. All parents are encouraged to join the parents' council or association that operates in their school.

The parents' council or association should not have fund raising as its sole function. Being involved in drawing up the school plan, the school behaviour code, and other school policies will determine the direction of the education within your school. Affiliation to your national parent body will keep you informed of changes within the education system and will allow your opinion to be heard at national level.



The National Parents Council (Post Primary) is an umbrella body representing elected parents from a number of the post primary education sectors through the following constituent bodies:

- The Federation of Christian Brothers and Other Secondary Schools Parents' Association (FEDCBS).
- National Parents' Association for Vocational Schools and Community Colleges (NPAVSCC).
- Parents' Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (PACCS).
- Co-operation of Minority Religions and Protestant Parents' Association (COMPASS).

The National Parents Council (Post Primary) may be contacted at Unit 5, Glasnevin Business Centre, Ballyboggan Road, Dublin 11. Telephone 01-8302740. Email: npcpp@eircom.net.

The Congress of Catholic Secondary School Parents' Association (CSPA) is the national organisation of parents' councils/ associations in Catholic secondary schools.

Teachers' organisations - ASTI, TUI, INTO

The organisations representing teachers in primary and second level schools play an influential role in Irish education. This role includes negotiating with the Department of Education and Science on salary, conditions of service and on professional and education issues. Regular meetings take place between the teachers' organisations and parents' representatives. The Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland (ASTI) represents teachers in Voluntary Secondary Schools, Community Schools, Comprehensive Schools and in certain categories of Community Colleges. The Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) represents teachers in Vocational

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Schools, Community Colleges, Community Schools and Comprehensive Schools. The Irish National Teachers Organization (INTO) represents teachers in primary schools.

Adolescence

Your sons and daughters will be in a second level school between the ages of 12 and 19 when they are growing rapidly both physically and psychologically. This can be a challenging time because young people, during these years, are in the process of "creating who they are", of testing out their feelings and their relations with others. Building self-esteem is very important during adolescence and every young person, whatever their abilities and aptitudes, should be made aware of their unique value as human beings. Their individual skills and aptitudes should be recognised and rewarded. It should be recognised that it is normal for young people to seek to loosen their ties with their families and strengthen their connectedness to peer groups at this time. An open and firm but not overly rigid environment is the best that any parent or school can provide. It is difficult, especially in a school situation, to maintain a balance between allowing adolescent children the space to develop their personalities while at the same time making it clear that there are limits to the exercise of this freedom.

Students with special needs

The Education for Persons with Disabilities Act, 2004 provides a statutory entitlement to education for all children and young persons. The Act makes provision for the education of people with special educational needs, to acquire that education wherever possible, in an inclusive environment with those who do not have such needs. The Act states that people with special educational needs shall have the same right to avail of, and benefit from, appropriate education as do their peers:

"a child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment...unless the degree or nature of those needs is such that ...that (inclusion) would be inconsistent with the best interests of the child or the



effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated".

Under the Act a "child" is a person under 18 years of age.

The National Council for Special Education has overall responsibility to assist schools to plan and deliver support services for students with special educational needs. Special Educational Needs Organisers work directly with schools. Each second level school must prepare an education plan for students who have been assessed as having special educational needs. Education plans are prepared under the co-ordination of the Special Educational Needs Organisers and involve the cooperation of the parents, the Principal or relevant teachers, a psychologist from the National Educational Psychological Service and other relevant personnel, as appropriate.

Parents with a child who has been assessed as having a special educational need should notify the school of this need at the earliest opportunity upon enrolment. The school will then contact the local Special Educational Needs Organiser who will assist in obtaining the additional teaching or other resources necessary to assist the child.

Parents of children who have not been assessed as having a special educational need but who are concerned about aspects of their child's development or behaviour, should notify the school of this concern and the school can then commence seeking an assessment of the child by the National Educational Psychological Service.

International students

All children of school-going age are entitled to attend second level schools. Second level schools therefore reflect the cultural diversity in our country and school policies and plans take account of the differing needs of

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students, irrespective of nationality or ethnic group. At present, schools can obtain the services of a Language Support Teacher for students whose first language is not English. Such students are entitled to 90 minutes instruction per week. Students whose first language is not English can also use dictionaries in the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations. This facility does not include examinations in English, Irish, the candidate's first language or a language closely related to the candidate's first language. The school makes an application on behalf of the student for this support. Newly arrived international second level students are generally exempt from learning Irish.

The Education Act states that schools should not "require any student to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent of the student or, in the case of the student who has reached 18 years, the student".

At present, guidelines are being developed to assist all second level schools to promote inter-culturalism across the curriculum. When published, these guidelines will assist schools to deliver the curriculum and to put in place policies which reflect the cultural diversity in the school and the wider Irish society.

The different types of schools

One of the features of Irish education is that there are a number of types of schools which allow a measure of choice to parents and which reflect the history and dominant beliefs of Irish society.

The second level sector is comprised of Voluntary Secondary Schools, Vocational Schools / Community Colleges and Community and Comprehensive Schools.

Second Level Schools		
Voluntary Secondary Schools 403	Vocational Schools/ Community Colleges 247	Community and Comprehensive Schools 92



(1) Voluntary Secondary Schools

Voluntary Secondary Schools are schools either under the trusteeship of religious orders, dioceses or Boards of Governors. These schools include, for example, schools under the trusteeship of the Christian Brothers, under the various orders of nuns, the various dioceses, Protestant schools and, less frequently, consortia of different interests. Almost all of these schools now have Boards of Management that consist currently of four nominees of the trustees, two members elected by the parents and two members elected by the teaching staff. The Education Act 1998 requires schools to have Boards that include parent and teacher representatives. In the past such schools provided a more academic education but now increasingly they provide a range of academic, practical and vocational subjects.

The overarching national managerial authority for these schools is called the Joint Managerial Body.

(2) Vocational Schools

Vocational Schools are established in accordance with the Vocational Education Act of 1930 as amended by the Vocational Education (Amendment) Act, 2001. These schools are owned by the local Vocational Education Committee which is the employer of the teachers and which provides various administrative supports for the schools. The Vocational Education Committees are established by the Local Authorities, usually County Councils. These committees provide places for parent and teacher representatives. Boards of Management are subcommittees of the VEC and include VEC representatives and parent, teacher and community representatives. In the past these schools were oriented towards a

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technical education but now they generally provide a wide range of both academic and practical subjects.

The national representative body for the Vocational Education Committees is the Irish Vocational Education Association.

(3) Community Colleges

These schools are also established under the Vocational Education Act of 1930 as amended by the Vocational Education (Amendment) Act, 2001 and are usually managed by a Board of Management which is a sub-committee of the Vocational Educational Committee. The composition of these Boards is a matter for local negotiation, however a typical Board of a Community College would consist of three nominees of the local Vocational Educational Committee, three nominees of the local Bishop or religious order, two representatives of the teachers, two representatives of parents and a nominee of minority religions.

(4) Community and Comprehensive Schools

Community and Comprehensive Schools were established in the 1960s in order to provide a broad curriculum for all the young people of a community. The Boards of Management of Community Schools consist of three nominees of the Vocational Educational Committee, three nominees of the religious authorities, two representatives of parents and two representatives of the teachers. The Boards of Management of Comprehensive Schools differ from one Comprehensive School to another. Currently there are no teachers or parents represented on the Boards in Comprehensive Schools but it is expected that this will be changed shortly. Many of these schools have been established as the result of the amalgamation of Voluntary Secondary and Vocational Schools.

The managerial authority for these schools is the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools.



Transferring from primary school to second level school

The vast majority of children transfer successfully from primary school to second level. However, a certain amount of anxiety is inevitable in any change and this is normal and to be expected.

Your child can be affected in a variety of ways and one of the most common is tiredness. Your child is in a new environment with different teachers, a broader range of subjects, and a longer school day. In most cases they will have adapted by the October break but for some it can be their second term before they appear to be coping. Other difficulties can occur when a student misunderstands a teacher's instruction. Encourage them to approach the teacher and clarify their concerns. Keep an eye on time spent on homework. The general guidelines for homework outlined in this booklet are reasonable and should be encouraged as good practice for your child. Some schools have a buddy system or alternative mentoring programmes. These can be very effective in helping your child bridge the gap between primary and secondary school.

To ease the passage from primary to second level school parents and their children should avail of every opportunity to get to know the second level school. If there are introductory meetings which provide an opportunity to visit the school and become acquainted with the various rooms, corridors, playing fields and so on, you should make sure that you participate in these. These will ease any anxiety of getting lost on the first day. If your son or daughter has friends from their own primary school who will be going to the school for the first time they could perhaps link up for the first day. Even if they are in different classes, they might arrange to meet at break and at lunchtime. If you have friends and acquaintances who have children at the same school perhaps they could talk to your son or daughter in an informal way regarding the school.



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In general, the change from primary to second level should not be traumatic. For most, it is an exciting adventure, an opportunity to make new friends and to have new experiences. Schools and teachers put much effort into welcoming and supporting first year students. However, if your child appears over-anxious you should contact the school and arrange to talk to either the Principal, Deputy Principal, the Year Head or the Form/ Class Tutor of your child. They will try to do everything to set your mind at ease.

The school plan

The school plan sets out the long-term vision of the school, its goals and action plans, and its policies and procedures. It includes information on the school's curriculum, resources and facilities, and opportunities for students and others to participate in the school community. Reading your school's school plan will give you a good overall view of the school, its aims and ethos.

Visiting the school

Schools encourage parents to visit the school at a time that is mutually convenient. You can visit for many different reasons, to familiarise yourself with the school and its activities, to inform yourself of the progress of your children and when there is a problem, to solve it in a spirit of mutual co-operation. These type of visits take time and will be unsuccessful if not planned. Appointments for such visits should be made, usually through the school secretary.

Visiting a teacher during class time only disrupts your child's education and will not answer your concerns.

Home/ school communication

School authorities try to keep the whole school community - parents, pupils and teachers - informed of school activities and developments. Some schools are now entitled to appoint a Home/ School Community Liaison teacher whose main function is to foster positive relationships between individual parents and the school so that the children can benefit to the fullest possible extent from their school.



Schools also hold parent/ teacher meetings to enable parents to discuss with teachers the progress/ behaviour of pupils. Parents should do their best to attend these meetings. However, if for some reason you cannot attend, schools will facilitate you by seeking to arrange a meeting with a year head, form teacher or classroom teacher/s at a time mutually agreeable to you and the teacher/s concerned.

Your school along with the parents' association may organise information evenings for particular years or classes. Attending these can help improve your understanding of your child's education and further your relationship with school personnel. It also shows your child that their education is important to you and that the school is a place you are comfortable and familiar with.

School administration

Each school is run by a Principal Teacher who may also be known in some schools as the Headmaster or Headmistress or even as the President of the College. The Principal will be assisted by at least one Deputy. They will be assisted in carrying out administrative work by teachers with posts of responsibility called Assistant Principal posts and Special Duties Teacher posts. Among these post holders some may be designated as Year Heads and others as Class/ Form Tutors. It is important to identify the Year Head and/ or Class/ Form Tutor who is responsible for your child's class. These teachers will have special responsibility for many aspects of your child's welfare in school and will often be the principal contact person for you in relation to school matters pertaining to your child. The larger the school the more likely it is to have such posts.

Assignment of pupils to classes

Most second level schools will have a large number of pupils entering first

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year. All schools try to acknowledge and develop the different potentialities and the different kinds of abilities which young people have. Some pupils may be very good at academic subjects; others may be good at practical subjects or at music; others may have very important qualities such as an ability to work in harmony with others, or may be very good at sports and games. Schools try to develop all of these abilities and to recognise the unique importance of each pupil.

Schools have a number of ways of organising pupils into classes in accordance with school policy. Pupils may be assigned to one particular class for all subjects in accordance with their results in tests and this is called **streaming**. Some schools assign pupils on a **mixed ability** basis to classes. This means that pupils with varying levels of attainments in particular subjects are assigned to the same class. Some schools **band**, which means that pupils across a certain range of ability are assigned to a group of classes and others across a different range of ability are assigned to another group of classes. Many schools also engage in what is called **setting**. This means that groups of pupils are placed in particular classes for periods so as to have special tuition in certain subjects, usually reading and mathematics.

Most schools, nowadays, have a variety of ways of assigning pupils to classes and do not operate strict mixed ability or strict streaming across the whole range of pupils in a year group or across the range of subjects.

The school Principal, Deputy Principal, Guidance Counsellor or Form Teacher are available to discuss with you issues such as subject choice.

Organisation of classes

The most significant change which your child will be faced with when entering the second level school will be the subject based organisation of classes. Children are asked to choose subjects from within a range and they attend, with other children from their first year group, the classes in the subjects of their choice. Generally schools offer first year students their choice from a range of subjects when they start at second level. Some schools offer first year students experience of a wide range of subjects in the first term and ask them to make



choices after that within the options available. In some schools at the end of the first year, one or two subjects may be dropped. The school's capacity to offer subject options to students will be constrained by the number of teachers available to it and the need to timetable subjects to make them available to as many students as possible. All students, irrespective of the type of school, are required to study English, Irish* and mathematics.

The size of the class in which children may find themselves will be affected by the number of students opting to take a particular subject. The number of teachers in a school is decided by pupil teacher ratio. Currently schools get one classroom teacher for every 18 pupils. The school then has to distribute these teachers across a wide range of subjects and an ever increasing curriculum. This can lead to large classes in a subject like English, which is compulsory for all students.

School rules and student behaviour

Teachers and parents are on the same side with regard to student behaviour. Both want a quality learning environment for students. This requires the co-operation and involvement of parents. For the vast majority of pupils there will be no serious behavioural problems. Parents and a supportive home environment play a crucial role in shaping attitudes that produce good behaviour in schools and in society generally. Schools therefore need the support of parents and can more easily implement a policy on behaviour and discipline if they actively involve parents.

Almost all schools will have a written code of discipline or student behaviour and a set of rules which pupils are expected to comply with. The code and the set of rules are not there in order to punish the pupils, but are there, just as society has laws and rules, so that the school community can work together in

* Newly arrived international students who do not have English as a first language may be exempt from Irish.

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harmony. Relationships between pupils and relationships between pupils and teachers should be courteous and respectful and codes of behaviour are better understood as codes of mutual respect.

It is important therefore that parents become aware of the aims and values of the school. They should be encouraged to become involved in the process of developing the school's code of behaviour and discipline. Parents can thus feel a sense of involvement with the school. They should encourage their children to abide by the school's code and should actively support the teaching staff in the application of the code.

It is important to make a distinction between minor and more serious misbehaviour. Instances of minor misbehaviour are often dealt with at school level in an informal manner. However, if there is a more serious incident of misbehaviour or repeated instances of misbehaviour parents will be informed and their co-operation in addressing the problem will be requested. This may involve a meeting with the Principal or teachers in the school. At such meetings it should be remembered that everybody is acting in the best interests of the pupil and the school.

Suspension and expulsion

Extreme sanctions such as expulsion are resorted to by schools only in the most serious cases of indiscipline and usually after every effort at rehabilitation has failed and every other sanction has been exhausted. If a pupil is causing severe disruption, a school may have to exclude such a pupil in order to allow the education of the other pupils in the school to proceed. The rights of the majority of pupils must also be taken into account. When serious sanctions, such as suspension and expulsion, are involved what are termed the "rules of natural justice" apply. These require that the pupil and his or her parents should be advised of the nature of the complaint and be given every opportunity to respond. Parents should also be informed of their right of appeal to the next level of authority. In certain very serious matters such as permanent exclusion



and cumulative suspensions of more than 21 school days an appeal may be made to the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Science (Tel: 01-8734700).

Bullying

Bullying is a serious problem and should not be treated lightly. It can cause deep psychological trauma to young people and therefore must be addressed.

Bullying behaviour can be physical, verbal or emotional and may be carried out by groups or by individuals within the school community. Bullying can have a racist, sexist, or homophobic tone or can seek to victimise a person with a disability or a distinguishing feature. It is important to realise that any young person can be bullied. It may sometimes be difficult to maintain the distinction between the normal robust interplay of young people and bullying but common sense should tell us the difference. If a child is suffering stress because of the behaviour then a problem exists. Bullying is not a normal phase of development and it does not teach pupils to "toughen up". If your child reports that he or she is being bullied then this is not a question of telling tales: they are behaving responsibly. It is important that you listen to them, believe them and compliment their courage to reveal their experience.

Schools should have an anti-bullying policy in place. Often a school's anti-bullying policy is built into its code of behaviour. If you have any reason to believe that your child is being bullied you should approach the school authorities on the matter. Teachers will deal with it in a calm, unemotional manner and investigations will be conducted outside the classroom situation to avoid any form of humiliation of the pupil concerned.

Building self-esteem is a very important part of countering bullying and each young person should be

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helped to see their own unique value in the world. Parents who are concerned that their own child may be bullying should also take steps as their child may also need support or help. Respect and tolerance for differences in others is best taught by ourselves being respectful and tolerant of difference. It is vital that parents communicate the message to their children that bullying is an unacceptable behaviour.

School uniforms

Many schools prescribe a uniform for pupils. The decision is taken by the Board of Management/ Manager of the school following consultation with the school community. Among the reasons for a school deciding that their pupils should wear uniforms are that uniforms encourage a sense of identification with the school, that they prevent fashion competition between pupils and that they are cost effective.

In addition, schools may have a dress code. This may have to do with such matters as hairstyles and the wearing of jewellery and rings. It is extremely difficult to summarise the issues involved but if schools have guidelines, parents have a responsibility to ensure that their children are dressed in accordance with these guidelines. Quite often there are public controversies about a child's right to have a particular hairstyle or to wear certain types of jewellery. Such conflicts can be extremely difficult to resolve if allowed to develop. Common sense is perhaps the only guide. It should also be remembered that we have to try and preserve a balance between individual rights and our need to live within communities. A school, therefore, sometimes has to adopt general rules for the good of all concerned. While dress and appearance can be important to a young person's sense of identity, this form of self-expression is perhaps best practiced on out of school occasions and during the school holidays.

Homework

Different schools will have different policies with regard to homework. However, all recognise that homework has a role in consolidating work done in schools, in allowing pupils to work on their own initiative and in fostering self



reliance. Homework correction by a teacher which includes constructive criticism and encouragement can often boost a child's self esteem and encourage them to continue producing good work. A quiet, comfortable, heated environment should be made available to allow your child do their homework. Homework can be the bane of pupils' lives and indeed they can sometimes worry about going to school because they haven't done their homework, therefore it is important that a regular time is set aside for homework. Pupils will be happier going to school if they have completed their homework in a satisfactory fashion. In so far as is possible, a routine should be established. However, children should be allowed to reward themselves for completing a session of work by watching their favourite television programme or perhaps visiting a friend. There are no hard and fast rules for the amount of time pupils should spend on homework but the following broad general guidelines could be helpful:

First year	An hour and a half
Second year	An hour and a half - two hours
Third year	Two hours - three hours
Senior cycle	Three hours

Study is best done in blocks of time with a period of relaxation between because the mind finds it difficult to absorb and to remain functioning in a productive way for more than approximately three quarters of an hour.

The experts recommend that study should be part of a routine established by students at the earliest possible stage in their schooling. It should be undertaken in a quiet, calm atmosphere that will be similar to the circumstances under which the students will subsequently have to take examinations. It is also best undertaken in a carefully organised and tidy environment where the required material is readily to hand.

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Student councils

The Education Act provides for the setting up of student councils which are run by students. Student councils aim to promote the interests of the school and the involvement of students in the affairs of the school. They encourage students to participate in school activities while also offering a valuable learning opportunity in the organisation and running of a democratic body. Student councils work in co-operation with school Boards of Management, parents and teachers. The Department of Education and Science has produced a guidebook on student councils entitled *Student Councils: A Voice for Students*. In addition, the National Children's Office runs a website on student councils aimed at students (www.studentcouncil.ie).

Union of Secondary Students

The Union of Secondary Students (USS) is a national representative body for second level students. It is composed of student councils from schools all over the country. Any student attending a school whose student council has officially affiliated to the USS is a full member of the USS. All other secondary students are considered to be observer members and have many of the same rights as full members. The USS acts a lobby group representing the interests of all Irish second level students. USS Committee Members are second level students and work on a voluntary basis for the organisation.

Students and work

While work experience can offer students valuable experience of employment and the workplace, it is vital that a part time or temporary job does not interfere with your child's education. If part-time work is interfering in any way with your child's education, it should cease. Students should always retain a balance between work experience, their studies and recreational activities. Research confirms that excessive part time work has a negative effect on students' grades and increases the risk of school drop out. The Protection of Young Persons (Employment) Act, 1996 was designed to ensure that employment would not usurp the important role of education. Some basics contained in this Act are:



- Children under 14 years of age cannot be employed in a regular full time capacity.
- Children age 14 may not work during school term but can be employed during school holidays for a maximum of 35 hrs per week between the hours of 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. with two consecutive days off in each 7-day period.
- 15 year olds may work a maximum of 8 hrs per week during school term and a maximum of 35 hrs per week during school holidays between the hours of 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. with two consecutive days off in each 7-day period.
- Both 14 and 15 yr olds must have a break of three weeks from work during the summer holiday period.

A comprehensive information leaflet, which also contains information about 16 and 17 year olds, may be obtained from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. There is also a Code of Practice Concerning the Employment of Young Persons in Licensed Premises which a number of organisations have signed up to. IBEC, the employers' organisation, recommends that pupils in examination classes should not be employed during the school term.

Breaches of the Protection of Young Persons (Employment) Act may be reported in confidence to the Labour Inspectorate, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Davitt House, 65a Adelaide Road, Dublin 2.

Weight of school bags

The weight of school bags has been a matter of increasing concern to parents, to teachers and to the medical profession. Junior cycle

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pupils (first year, second year and third year pupils) carry school bags which are heaviest in proportion to their body weight. The design of the school bag, its contents, and the way it is worn are said to be key factors in protecting students.

There are three common school bag designs, namely the ruck-sack type, shoulder strap type and the sports bag. The ruck-sack design is the best when it is worn correctly on the back and not over one shoulder. One Irish study found that while 93% of pupils surveyed had school bags designed to be worn on their back, only 62% wore their school bags on their back. It is also important that the straps are a good fit for the child.

Schools are also being encouraged to make efforts to alleviate the problem of heavy school bags. Actions such as the provision of lockers, the co-ordination of timetabling and of homework can help. Pupils should also be reminded that it is not necessary to bring all books for all subjects every day and they should be encouraged to plan their requirements for each day. General posture and fitness level are also important in protecting against back pain and back injury amongst young people.

Absenteeism, truancy

Under the Education Welfare Act (2000), it is the responsibility of parents of school-going children to ensure their children attend school every day unless there is a good reason for absence. Parents are also required to let the school know if and why a student is absent by, for example, sending a brief note to the school.

Truancy is a very serious problem that can prevent the educational development of young people. Children who play truant may be out of the control of their parents; they may have emotional problems; they may have difficulty in keeping up with school work or experience bullying, school phobia or discipline problems. If you suspect that your child has been playing truant you should inform the school immediately. The school authorities will endeavour to deal with the matter in an appropriate, caring manner in the best interests of the child concerned. If a child misses more than 20 days in a school year, the school is obliged to contact the National Educational Welfare Board which will then try



to establish a reason for absences. If there is a worry that your child is missing out on education because of absenteeism an Educational Welfare Officer may visit you to discuss the matter. The Educational Welfare Officer will seek to work with you and the school to ensure your child can receive an adequate education. For more information contact the Educational Welfare Board at Lo-call 1890 363666.

Health, dietary requirements

If your child has any particular health problems which the school should know about such as asthma, epilepsy, diabetes, etc. you should inform the school about this. If your child is taking medicine or has a specific dietary requirement which the school should be aware of, make sure that the school is given this information. Schools however are under no obligation to administer medicines or supervise children taking them. Teachers of course have a general professional duty of care to safeguard the health and safety of pupils and will, within the limits of their own professional competence, assist pupils as much as possible.

Where a pupil suffers from a physical disability and may, in emergency, require the application of immediate medicine, the school can reasonably be required to co-operate with emergency administration. Parents must request the school to administer medication in emergency situations and must furnish the school with written instructions of the procedure to be followed. In administering medication to pupils, teachers are expected to exercise the standard of care of a reasonable and prudent parent.

Complaints against teachers

The Education Act, 1998 gives the Minister the power to put grievance and complaints procedures in place in consultation with all the partners in education. The formal procedures



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currently in place have been agreed between the teachers' unions and the Boards of Management. The procedures are detailed below to inform parents as to the present system.

Schools must operate in a disciplined, caring manner. Second level schools are places where there are large numbers of vibrant adolescents so it is inevitable therefore that there will be conflicts. Schools, on occasions, can be fraught places and parents should be careful to distinguish rumour and anecdote from fact.

If a parent has reason to complain, schools must deal with the complaint in a fair manner. The guiding principle in all conflict resolution is that the problem should be resolved at the lowest level if at all possible. Thus, every effort should be made to resolve complaints informally. There are also formal procedures for such complaints and these must be followed. The procedures involve a number of stages and are designed to provide a fair and equitable mechanism to resolve the complaint for all parties involved. The matter should be discussed with the teacher. If this does not produce a resolution the matter can then be raised with the Principal. If the complaint is still unresolved the matter can be raised formally with the Manager / Board of Management. The Board of Management may make further attempts to resolve the matter through meetings between the Principal, the teacher concerned and the complainant. If the matter is still unresolved at that stage the Board of Management may initiate a formal investigation which would involve a right of hearing by the relevant parties and a final decision by the Board of Management.

How schools are funded

The salaries of teachers in all recognised schools are funded by the state.

Voluntary Secondary Schools receive a grant per pupil of €286 per annum towards their running costs. Schools rated as disadvantaged receive an additional €38.09 per pupil per annum. Community and Comprehensive schools and Vocational Schools are funded on the basis of an annual budget.

Fee paying schools, of which there are approximately 58 out of a total of 741 schools, do not receive any grants towards their running costs.



Surveys show that there is a funding shortfall in meeting the day-to-day running costs of many schools and that schools must thus become involved in fund-raising.

The curriculum

The curriculum of a school consists of all the activities of the school which contribute to the education of the pupils. Nowadays all schools try to provide a broad and balanced education for pupils. This means that schools are aware that as well as academic achievement, personal and social development are extremely important. As the influence of traditional authority wanes people are thrown back on their own personal resources and schools endeavour to provide young people with the resources to live a fulfilled and rewarding life.

Second level education consists of a three year junior cycle followed by a two or three year senior cycle. The Junior Certificate examination is taken after three years. In senior cycle there is an optional one year Transition Year followed by a choice of three two-year Leaving Certificate programmes.

Junior cycle

The junior cycle covers a vital period in young people's lives when they encounter significant changes in their educational experience. The Junior Certificate Programme provides a single unified programme for students aged broadly between 12 and 15 years. This programme seeks to extend and deepen the quality of students' educational experience in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills and competencies and to prepare them for further study at senior cycle. The Junior Certificate Programme also contributes to the moral and spiritual development of students, and encourages them to develop qualities of responsible citizenship in a national, European

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and global context. A special intervention entitled the Junior Certificate Schools Programme is offered in many schools to cater for pupils whose needs are not adequately covered by the mainstream Junior Certificate. For more information on the Junior Certificate Schools Programme visit www.jcsp.ie.

Senior cycle

One of the main objectives of educational policy is to encourage and facilitate as many students as possible to continue in full-time education after the end of the junior cycle. A major objective for the education partners is to increase the percentage of the 16 to 18 year-old age group completing senior cycle to at least 90 percent. The programmes available at senior cycle comprise:

- Transition Year (one year).
- Leaving Certificate (two years).
- Leaving Certificate Applied (two years).
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (two years).

The aims of senior cycle are to develop each student's potential to the full and to equip him or her for further education or training, or for the world of work. Senior cycle programmes are designed to provide for the holistic development of students by fostering in them a sense of self-esteem, self-reliance and innovation so that they are adequately prepared for active involvement in the social, cultural and economic future of society.

Students may spend up to three years in the senior cycle. Some students complete a one-year Transition Year before starting a two-year Leaving Certificate programme. Others begin a two-year Leaving Certificate programme immediately after completing the junior cycle.

Transition Year Programme

The Transition Year Programme is interdisciplinary and student centred. By freeing students to take responsibility for their own learning, the Programme helps them to learn skills and to evaluate life in ways and in situations which arise outside the boundaries of the certificate programmes.



Over 70% of second level schools currently provide Transition Year as part of their curriculum. In some schools all students take the Programme. In others it is taken by a selection of students. Students who take Transition Year on average achieve better examination results than pupils who do not take it.

Each school designs its own Transition Year Programme according to a recommended curriculum framework laid down by the Department of Education and Science. The school is enriched by a range of active learning methods. Parents, the community and local enterprise can bring to the Transition Year a sense of the world and so contribute to an education which faces the demands and pleasures of life, work, sport and leisure.

The Transition Year offers a special opportunity to consider, in a non-examination environment, the importance of the Irish language and culture, the prospects of our European and world environment, the wealth of creative and performing arts activity and heritage, and the equality of women and men in society. It also provides opportunities to experience the world of work.

Transition Year incorporates core subjects such as Irish, English, maths and physical education. Ask about the Transition Year Programme available in your child's school and how your child may benefit from particular courses and activities included in the Programme.

Leaving Certificate

The Leaving Certificate examination is held at the end of the senior cycle in post primary schools. It is the final examination of post-primary education. Students normally sit for the examination at the age of 17 or 18, after five or six years of post primary education.

Pupils following the established Leaving Certificate programme must take at least five subjects, including

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Irish. Written examinations are held for all subjects along with oral and aural examinations for Irish and modern languages. Practical tests and project work form part of the assessment of some subjects.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) carries out a rolling review of the syllabi for Leaving Certificate subjects and new syllabi and subjects are introduced on a regular basis.

Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme

The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) is the normal Leaving Certificate programme with a strong vocational dimension. The term vocational is used very broadly and a wide range of subjects satisfy the requirements. LCVP students must take at least five Leaving Certificate subjects as well as link modules.

Programme requirements for LCVP students are:

- at least five Leaving Certificate subjects, one of which must be Irish.
- two of the five Leaving Certificate subjects taken must be selected from one of a set of designated vocational subject groupings.
- two link modules on preparation for the world of work and enterprise education.
- a recognised course in a modern European language other than Irish or English.

LCVP students have the same opportunity to proceed to third level education as students of the established Leaving Certificate. Link modules can be used for points for college entry through the CAO.

For more information visit www.lcvp.ie.

Leaving Certificate Applied

The Leaving Certificate Applied is a self contained two year programme. It is a person-centred programme involving a cross-curricular approach rather than a



subject based structure. It has as its primary objective the preparation of participants for adult and working life through relevant learning experiences which develop the following areas of human endeavour: spiritual, intellectual, social, emotional, aesthetic and physical. The framework of the Leaving Certificate Applied consists of a number of modules grouped under the three general headings:

- (1) General Education
- (2) Vocational Education
- (3) Vocational Preparation

The Leaving Certificate Applied is intended to meet the needs of those students who either choose not to opt for other Leaving Certificate programmes or who are not adequately catered for by other Leaving Certificate programmes.

Students who successfully complete the programme will receive a Leaving Certificate. While the Leaving Certificate Applied will not qualify students for direct entry to third-level courses, students who successfully complete the programme will be able to proceed to many Post-Leaving Certificate courses. FÁS also accepts the Leaving Certificate Applied as a qualification for entry to standards-based apprenticeship.

For more information visit www.lca.ie.

School transport

To be eligible for the School Transport Scheme, a pupil must

- (a) be enrolled for an approved course in a recognised post-primary school;
- (b) be at least 12 years of age;
- (c) have completed sixth standard in primary school, and

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- (d) live at least three miles/ 4.8 kilometres, by the shortest walking route, from the appropriate post primary centre catering for the catchment area in which the pupil lives.

Eligible pupils carried on a service provided under the scheme pay a term contribution of €33 if in the junior cycle and €51 if in the senior cycle (subject to a maximum family contribution of €107 per term), unless a parent / guardian holds a family medical card.

A service is regarded as having been provided for a post primary pupil if that pupil lives within two miles/ 3.2 kilometres of a pickup stop on the route of the service.

Where eligible pupils attend school at a centre other than the post-primary centre that caters for the catchment area where they live, they may be allowed the concession of transport from the catchment boundary of the centre attended, provided there is room for them on a bus serving that centre. Such passengers are referred to as catchment-boundary pupils and pay the same contribution as eligible pupils (i.e. €33 or €51 per term). Ineligible pupils may receive permission to travel as concessionary passengers on a scheme service within their own catchment area if there are spare seats. There is a charge of €51 per term for such concessionary passengers.

School clothing and footwear grants

The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Scheme assists low income families with extra costs when children start school each autumn. The scheme operates from the beginning of June to the end of September each year and is administered on behalf of the Department of Social and Family Affairs by the Health Boards.

A parent may qualify for payment of a Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance if:

- he/ she is in receipt of a Social Welfare or Health Board payment;
- is participating in an approved employment scheme or attending a recognised education or training course;



- a child dependent allowance is payable in respect of the child and the parent's household income is at or below certain specified levels.

The income limits for 2005 are as follows:

Couple with	Income limit	Lone parent with	Income limit
1 child	€368.10	1 child	€250.90
2 children	€387.40	2 children	€272.50
3 children	€406.70	3 children	€294.10
4 children	€426.00*	4 children	€315.70**

* Limit is increased by €19.30 for each additional child

** Limit is increased by €21.60 for each additional child

Under the scheme an allowance of €80 is payable in respect of qualified children aged from two to 11 years. An allowance of €150 is payable in respect of qualified children aged from 12 to 22 years. Application forms are available from local Health Board Community Welfare Officers.

Grants for school text books

A scheme exists to provide grants towards the cost of providing school text books. A pupil from a family where there is genuine hardship because of unemployment, prolonged illness of a parent, large family size with inadequate means, single parenthood family or other family circumstance (such as alcoholism) that would indicate a similar degree of financial hardship is eligible. Such families may be divided into the following three categories:

- (a) Families which are dependent mainly on social welfare payments.

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- (b) Families on low incomes from employment (such families are likely to be in receipt of family income supplement, which is a weekly cash payment by the Department of Social and Family Affairs to help families at work on low pay, or to be beneficiaries under the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Scheme).
- (c) Families which are experiencing financial hardship because of particular circumstances in the home. As the vast majority of eligible pupils will fall within the first two categories only a small proportion of those considered eligible will come within this category.

Entitlement to a medical card is not necessarily an indicator of eligibility.

Participants in the VTOS, Youthreach and PLC programmes who are supported by other arrangements are ineligible under this grant scheme. Pupils who are in the care of foster families under arrangements made by the relevant Health Board are also ineligible. Support for such pupils is a matter for the Health Board. A pupil who transfers from one second level school to another after commencement of the school year is ineligible in the second school unless the Principal is satisfied that assistance has not already been given under this scheme or that any books already supplied in the current school year have been returned.

The amount and form of assistance given to eligible pupils is a matter for individual schools.

Book loan/ rental schemes

The provision of school text books can be a very costly burden on parents. For first year students, text books alone can cost over €250. Some schools have book loan / rental schemes to try to deal with this problem. Parents however should remember that money spent on education material such as text books is money well spent and that expenditure in this area should have a high priority for parents.



An increasing number of schools operate book loan / rental schemes.

These schemes operate on the following basis:

- books are owned by the school
- students hold the books for one year or for an examination cycle
- students are required to keep the book in good condition
- at the year's end books are returned back to the school for recycling
- a mixture of second hand and new books is used
- payment may be required in advance or in two or more phased tranches.

The co-operation of parents and school staff is essential to the success of a book loan/ rental scheme. The Cooney/ Carey report on school books, commissioned by the Department of Education and Science, contains guidelines on the running of book loan/ rental schemes. The report is available on the Department of Education and Science website.

Examination fees

The current rates of examination fees are €90 for the Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and Leaving Certificate Applied and €86 for the Junior Certificate. Repeat Leaving Certificate students pay €236 in examination fees.

All holders of medical cards have entitlement to free examination fees.

Useful contacts:

Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS)	01-4601150	www.accs.ie	office@accs.ie
Central Applications Office (CAO)	091-509800	www.cao.ie	help@cao.ie
Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland (ASTI)	01-6040160	www.asti.ie	info@asti.ie
Church of Ireland Board of Education	01-4978422	www.ireland.anglican.org	office@rcbdub.org
Conference of Religious of Ireland (CORI)	01-6677322	www.cori.ie	education@cori.ie

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Catholic Schools Parent Associations (CSPA)	086-8261797	www.cspa.ie	info@cspa.ie
Department of Education and Science, Dublin	01-8734700	www.education.ie	info@education.gov.ie
Department of Education and Science, Athlone	0906-474621	www.education.ie	info@education.gov.ie
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	01-6614444	www.entemp.ie	info@entemp.ie
Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA)	01-4966033	www.ivea.ie	info@ivea.ie
Joint Managerial Body, Secretariat of Secondary Schools (JMB)	01-2838255	www.jmb.ie	info@secretariat.ie
National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA)	01-8531910	www.ncva.ie	information@ncva.ie
National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB)	01-8738700	www.newb.ie	info@newb.ie
National Parents Council (Post Primary) (NPCPP)	01-8302740	www.npcpp.ie	npcpp@eircom.net
Special Needs Council	046-9486400		
State Examinations Commission	0906-442700	www.examinations.ie	info@examinations.ie
The Secondary Education Committee (Protestant Schools)	01-4975034		secgrant@iol.ie
Teachers' Union of Ireland	01-4922588	www.tui.ie	tui@tui.ie
Union of Secondary Students		www.ussonline.net	info@ussonline.net

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Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland (ASTI)
ASTI House
Winetavern Street
Dublin 8

Tel: 01-6040160
Web: www.asti.ie

National Parents Council (Post Primary)
Unit 5, Glasnevin Business Centre
Ballyboggan Road
Dublin 11

Tel: 01- 830 2740
Web: www.npcpp.ie

