

# 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](http://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.



## Information for parents

# 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.*



# Junior and senior infants 1

A summary of your child's learning in junior and senior infants in the 6 curriculum areas is provided below, along with some suggestions on how you can support your child's learning at home.

## LANGUAGE

Through language, your child learns to communicate in English and in Irish. Your child learns to listen, to speak, to read and to write in both languages. These language skills provide a basis for learning other languages and are important for learning in all other areas of the curriculum.

The Language Curriculum emphasises **developing listening and speaking skills in preparation for beginning reading and writing**. Through listening and speaking activities, children learn new words, to think and to talk about their thoughts and feelings. They also learn to listen to each other.

**Children become more aware of letters and words when they see writing all around them**, for example, on the classroom walls and in the class library. Children listen to and create stories from big books (large books with big pictures and text) with the teacher and other children. This gives them the chance to talk about the story and to ask and answer questions. From these early activities, **your child learns important messages about reading and writing**; he/she learns that words run from left to right on a page and have meaning, and that pictures help to tell a story. Children also learn that different letters have different sounds by playing rhyming games with words and by using their listening skills to hear different sounds in words. **Making marks**, scribbling, drawing and painting with paint, crayons, pencils, pens and chalk, **also helps your child to begin reading and writing**.

Your child will start reading graded books chosen with the teacher, and will learn to form letters correctly and be encouraged to write short pieces, when he/she is ready to do so.



**Waiting until your child is ready, helps your child to experience greater success in reading and writing right from the beginning.** On the other hand, if your child begins before he/she is ready to do so, he/she may not experience that same success.

**You can help your child to learn at home by:**

- singing songs, nursery and counting rhymes in both languages with your child and encouraging your child to teach you songs and rhymes that he/she has been learning in school. Children love action rhymes so help your child to make up actions to go with the words or ask your child to show you actions he/she has learned
- bringing your child to the library and sharing books with your child, for example, ask your child to predict what the story will be about from looking at the picture on the front cover
- listening to and talking with your child and encouraging him/her to tell you more about different things that interest him/her, for example, what his/her favourite toys are and why.

## Information for parents

## Junior and senior infants 2

### MATHEMATICS

Your child learns to understand and solve problems with the Mathematics Curriculum. Your child is busy with early mathematical activities such as sorting, matching, comparing and ordering different objects. For example, you might see your child arranging toys in lines on the floor or organising toys in groups according to different types, colours or sizes. These activities give your child a strong foundation for learning in:

- Number (including counting, comparing and ordering)
- Algebra (including copying and adding to patterns of colour, shape, size and number using beads or blocks, or by drawing and colouring, for example, 2 blue, 1 red)
- Measurement (including working with length, weight, capacity, time and money)
- Shape and space (including working with 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional shapes)
- Data (including sorting objects and understanding and making charts and graphs).

#### You can help your child to learn at home by:

- asking your child to help you with sorting and matching activities at home, for example, tidying toys into the right boxes, sorting the washing into bundles such as putting all the towels together or all the white clothes, matching socks when you're putting clothes away or helping to put the shopping away in the right presses. Talk to your child while you are doing these activities together and ask your child how he/she knows something matches or should go in a particular place
- teaching your child counting rhymes and songs and making up actions together to go with the words. Your child can also learn old counting favourites from grandparents and other family members. Children love counting rhymes such as *One, two, buckle my shoe, This old man* or *A haon, a dó, a trí, lúcha beaga buí*.

### SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND SCIENTIFIC EDUCATION (SESE)

In SESE (history, geography and science) the emphasis is on **connecting learning with the child's immediate environment**. In history, children's curiosity about the past is awakened by **exploring their personal and family history**, for example, by listening to stories about when their grandparents were young. In geography and science, the local and wider environment provides many opportunities for children's **investigations which help them to understand and care for the world** around them. In SESE, **your child uses investigative skills** such as *observing, questioning, investigating and experimenting, estimating and measuring, classifying recording and communicating* and so **works like a Scientist, Historian and Geographer** from a young age.



#### You can help your child to learn at home by:

- talking to your child about important events in his/her own life, such as, the day that he/she was born, when he/she came home from the hospital, his/her first steps, first tooth and so on
- helping your child to notice and discuss how changes in the seasons affect the weather, plant and animal life, for example, the clothes we wear in the Winter/Summer, buds appearing in Spring and leaves on the trees in Summer
- discussing what happens through heating and cooling and discovering things that melt and/or freeze, for example, ice-cream, butter, chocolate, water and ice.

### Information for parents



## Junior and senior infants 3

### ARTS EDUCATION

The three subjects visual arts, music and drama give children opportunities to **develop artistic and creative skills** by participating in different kinds of activities, for example, drawing, painting, constructing, dramatic play, singing, clapping or exploring the sounds made by different musical instruments. The **focus is not so much on the work your child produces (the product) but on what your child learns by engaging in creative activity (the process)**. This curriculum area encourages your child to listen to, look at and respond to the music, artwork and dramatic expression of others in the class, as well as the work of older children and adults.



#### You can help your child to learn at home by:

- singing and clapping the rhythms of favourite songs with your child and encouraging him/her to share new songs with you that have been learned in school
- keeping a collection of clothes and hats that can be used for dress up play
- making a collection of empty cartons, boxes, paper, crayons, paints, playdough, pens, pencils, glue, old fabrics and so on, to allow your child to express him/herself artistically.

### PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Children love all kinds of physical activity. Physical education in the infant classes helps your child to learn about and develop more control over his/her movements, to learn how to co-operate with others and to develop important social skills such as sharing, relying on others and teamwork. Your child also learns directions in a fun way which helps with reading and writing, and in finding his/her way around the school! Your child participates in different physical activities such as:

- Athletics (including running, jumping and throwing)
- Dance (including exploring, creating and performing dance)
- Gymnastics (including balancing, moving in different directions and moving using apparatus such as hoops and mats)
- Games (including ball handling, kicking, carrying and striking and playing simple playground games)
- Outdoor and adventure activities (including walking, following directions and following simple trails).<sup>1</sup>

These activities help your child **to understand and appreciate physical activity**. Physical education starts your child on an active way of life.

#### You can help your child to learn at home by:

- encouraging your child to play with toys that will help him/her to develop physically, for example, construction toys or playdough
- encouraging your child to be active, for example, walking, running, and jumping and playing games. Encourage your child to attend or take part in local sport activities which will help him/her to feel a sense of belonging to the community.

<sup>1</sup>In aquatics children learn about safety in the water and how to move in the water through play and using their arms and legs. To suit individual school circumstances, the curriculum advocates that children should have opportunities to develop water based movement skills at some point in their primary schooling.

### Information for parents

## Junior and senior infants 4

### SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE)

Social, Personal and Health Education, or SPHE, deals with **your child's personal development, health and wellbeing**. It helps children to **understand how to care for themselves, how to respect and relate to others, and how to deal with different feelings**. It helps your child to **learn and develop a sense of responsibility for his/her actions**. SPHE includes **Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)** – an important part of all children's development. **Each school has an RSE policy** which outlines what will be taught in RSE and when certain content will be introduced.

The SPHE Curriculum helps your child to:

- care for him/herself
- to learn basic hygiene skills, such as, washing hands before eating
- to develop growing independence, such as, putting on own coat and shoes
- to deal with the newness of school life by, for example, taking turns and sharing.



SPHE helps your child to explore and respect diversity and to appreciate differences in people by learning how to relate to and respect others. Your child also learns to develop a sense of place in the school and local community, to care for the local and wider environment and to become familiar with different types of information media.

You can help your child to learn at home by:

- talking to your child about feelings and helping your child to name and recognise feelings and realise that it is okay to have different feelings about different things
- encouraging your child to recognise and care for him/herself and his/her own things at home and at school, for example, washing hands before eating, hanging up own coat, putting away own lunchbox, tidying toys away
- developing healthy eating habits through providing a healthy lunch for school and at other mealtimes. Breakfast is a particularly important meal as it starts your child on a healthy day.

Ask your child's teacher about other ways you can help your child to learn at home in the infant classes. Ask other parents what works well for them.

# First and second classes 1

A summary of your child's learning in first and second classes in the 6 curriculum areas is provided below, along with some suggestions on how you can support your child's learning at home.

## LANGUAGE

Through language, your child learns to communicate – in English and Irish. Your child learns to listen, to speak, to read and to write in both languages. These language skills provide a basis for learning other languages and are important for learning in all other areas of the curriculum.

Your child continues to **develop listening and speaking skills** through talk and discussion which increases your child's knowledge of words and develops his/her listening skills. He or she learns, for example, *to listen, to start conversations, to take turns, to use language correctly in social situations, to describe, to ask and answer questions and to express feelings* in real and play situations.

Your child is becoming a more confident reader and writer in the first language of the school. **He/she learns to use many different strategies to help with reading.** One of these strategies is called 'developing phonological awareness.' Using this strategy, your child learns how to break down and sound out new words in order to read them. Your child also **writes for many different reasons** now, perhaps a shopping list, a diary entry, a letter or email to a friend or a story.

**In second class, in schools where the teaching is mostly through English, most children begin to read in Irish,** starting with picture books before moving on to single word and single sentence books. They use many of the skills and strategies they have learned in English to improve their reading and writing skills in Irish.

### You can help your child to learn at home by:

- listening to and talking with your child and encouraging him/her to tell you more about different things that interest him/her, for example, asking about a favourite pastime/hobby
- reading with your child and asking questions to check understanding. When you are out and about with your child, you could read signs and notices and in this way draw his/her attention to print all around
- asking your child to tell you some new words or sentences he/she has learned in Irish at school
- watching cartoons and children's programmes on TG4 with your child, which will get him/her used to hearing Irish being spoken naturally.



## First and second classes 2

### MATHEMATICS

Your child learns to examine, understand and solve problems with the Mathematics Curriculum. In first and second class children continue to **work with real objects** like blocks, cubes, crayons, counters, coloured shapes, sand and water and to build their knowledge and understanding of new content in:

- Number (including counting, comparing and ordering, learning about place value, adding and subtracting numbers, and working with fractions)
- Algebra (including exploring and using number patterns, for example, odd and even numbers or adding ten to a given number)
- Measurement (including working with length, weight, capacity, time and money)
- Shape and space (including working with 3-D shapes and 2-D shapes and angles)
- Data (including understanding, interpreting and making charts and graphs).

Your child builds on what he/she has learned in the infant classes as he/she works with patterns, measurement, shape and space and data. Your **child now works with bigger numbers** and so learns about place value, meaning that a number like 14 is made up of 1 ten and 4 units.

Your child needs to understand this so that he/she can, for example, add two or more bigger numbers together more easily. Your child will also learn to subtract using these bigger numbers and the way children learn to do this now may be different to the way you learned it. If in doubt, remember you can always ask the teacher!

#### You can help your child to learn at home by:

- helping your child to break numbers into tens and units by setting out a number of objects like crayons or pencils and using elastic bands to group objects together into bundles of ten. Help him/her to see that any objects that are left over are units
- encouraging your child to estimate by, for example, asking him/her to think about and guess how many steps it might take to get to a particular point while out on a walk. Stop halfway through and ask if he/she wants to change his/her guess. You can also ask your child to estimate whether a bag of flour is heavier than a bag of potatoes you have in the kitchen and check his/her estimate by weighing the objects.

### SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND SCIENTIFIC EDUCATION (SESE)

In SESE (history, geography and science) your child continues to **learn from his/her immediate environment**. Children may explore the history of buildings in the community such as their school, discuss how different people in the community help them or observe the seasonal changes in trees and plant life in the local area. **Using investigative skills encourages the budding Scientist, Historian and Geographer in your child**. Such skills include *questioning, observing, predicting, investigating and experimenting, estimating and measuring, classifying and recording and communicating*.

#### You can help your child to learn at home by:

- helping your child to observe and investigate at home, for example, grow seeds and bulbs, or test how long it takes to do certain activities, or investigate whether materials are magnetic or not
- encouraging your child to explain to you about topics he/she has been working with in science, history and geography. Children remember what they have learned by having the chance to explain their learning to another person.

### Information for parents

## First and second classes 3

### ARTS EDUCATION

In arts education (visual arts, music and drama) your child continues to have many opportunities to **be creative and to develop his/her imagination through art activities, music and drama. The focus is not so much on the work your child produces (the product) but on what your child learns by engaging in creative activity (the process).** In first and second class, your child continues to explore and experiment in art and music and has many opportunities for **taking part in imaginative and dramatic play.**

This curriculum area encourages your child to **listen to, look at and respond to** the music, artwork and dramatic expression of others in the class, as well as the work of older children and adults.



#### You can help your child to learn at home by:

- listening to different types of music during car journeys or while doing jobs at home. Ask your child whether he/she likes the songs or piece of music and allow him/her to decide what music he/she would like to listen to
- encouraging your child to use a range of tools such as crayons, paints, playdough, pens, pencils, glue, old fabrics and so on, to express him/herself artistically
- watching children's drama on television with your child or taking your child to see films, plays, concerts and art exhibitions in the community and talking about what they have seen and their response to it.

### PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education provides your child with further opportunities to **learn important social skills through physical activity.** Your child is increasingly able to use his/her body in different ways and can now take part in small-sided versions of adult team games such as basketball or Gaelic football and in co-operative games. Through participating in a range of physical activities, children learn to **improve their own performance and to choose the types of activities they will enjoy** in their personal lives. Your child participates in different physical activities such as:

- Athletics (including running, jumping and throwing)
- Dance (including exploring, creating and performing dance)
- Gymnastics (including balancing, moving in different directions and in sequence alone and with others and moving using apparatus such as mats and benches)
- Games (including ball handling, kicking, carrying and striking, and playing small-sided versions of games)

- Outdoor and adventure activities (including walking, following directions and maps and following simple trails and obstacle courses).<sup>2</sup>

#### You can help your child to learn at home by:

- encouraging your child to be active at home, for example, walking, jumping, running, playing games and taking part in local sports activities which will help your child to develop a sense of belonging to the community
- encouraging your child to make up and play games with other children and discuss the need for rules and deciding on team strategies.

<sup>2</sup>In aquatics children learn about safety in the water and how to move in the water through play and using their arms and legs. To suit individual school circumstances, the curriculum advocates that children should have opportunities to develop water based movement skills at some point in their primary schooling.

### Information for parents

## First and second classes 4

### SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE)

Social, Personal and Health Education, or SPHE, deals with your child's **personal development, health and well being**. SPHE helps your child to learn and **develop a sense of responsibility for his/her actions**. He/she also learns **how to respect and relate to others and how to deal with feelings**. SPHE includes **Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)** – an important part of all children's development. **Each school has an RSE policy** which outlines what will be taught in RSE and when certain content will be introduced.



The SPHE Curriculum helps your child to care for him/herself, for example, through learning about the importance of food for growth, health and energy and through discussing and practising appropriate strategies for keeping safe. He/she is encouraged to develop growing independence. Your child also learns to develop a sense of place in the school and local community, to care for the local and wider environment and to become familiar with and more critical of different types of information media.

#### You can help your child to learn at home by:

- talking to your child about different issues which affect him/her, such as relationships with family and friends, what is happening in school and keeping safe. Through discussion help your child to find ways of dealing with problems such as making up with a friend after a row or dealing with unsafe situations. Through such discussions, your child will learn that he/she can talk to you about anything
- giving your child opportunities to be independent and to make decisions such as when to do homework, what to do with pocket money and what to play and do when friends are visiting. Talk to your child and encourage him/her to review these decisions in order to make thoughtful choices
- encouraging healthy eating habits through providing a healthy lunch for school and at other mealtimes. Breakfast is a particularly important meal as it starts your child on a healthy day.

Ask your child's teacher about other ways you can help your child to learn at home in first and second class. Ask other parents what works well for them.

## Third and fourth classes 1

A summary of your child's learning in third and fourth classes in the 6 curriculum areas is provided below, along with some suggestions on how you can support your child's learning at home.

### LANGUAGE

In English, your child continues to develop *listening and speaking skills* through talk and discussion. He/she learns to: *listen, initiate conversations, question, tell stories, summarise ideas, express and explain feelings, give instructions, argue, persuade and present ideas*. By now, your child should be a fairly confident reader and writer. He/she **reads a broad range of reading material** such as short stories, novels, poems, plays, newspaper and magazine articles, information material and also uses the internet to expand the range of reading material. Your child **writes for many different reasons and in many different ways**, for example, letters, diary entries, poems, stories, newspaper and magazine articles and book and film reviews. Your child is increasingly able to look over first drafts of his/her writing and with the help of both the teacher and classmates, **finds ways to improve his/her writing and make the message clearer**. Using a computer can really help with this writing process.

In Irish, your child continues to **develop conversation and communication skills** and to build vocabulary through working with themes such as **mé féin, sa bhaile, an scoil, bia, an aimsir, an teilifís, siopadóireacht, caitheamh aimsire, éadaí agus ócáidí speisialta (myself, home, school, food, the weather, television, shopping, pastimes, clothes and special occasions)**. Your child is also increasingly able to read and write short pieces in Irish.

In schools where the teaching is mostly through Irish, your child reads and responds to a broader range of reading material. He/she also writes in Irish for many different reasons and in many different ways.



#### You can help your child to learn at home by:

- encouraging your child to read a range of material in both languages, visiting the local library weekly and asking your child questions about his/her reading. Although your child is older, her/she will still enjoy sharing books with you. For example, you could take turns in reading aloud pages from a novel and thus sustain reading over a period of time
- showing you value writing by creating many reasons for writing in the home, for example, writing lists and notes, writing letters and emails to friends and families, writing diary entries, planning family events in writing, writing book and cinema reviews and discussing them together and so on
- helping your child to use the computer at home or in the local library to write emails or for other kinds of personal writing and to revise, edit and improve his/her writing. Help your child also to use the internet to search for information and find interesting and varied reading material.

### Information for parents

## Third and fourth classes 2

### MATHEMATICS

Your child learns to understand and solve problems with the Mathematics Curriculum. Children continue to **work with real materials** such as counters, cubes, fraction tiles, measurement equipment, number games, playing cards and mathematical software to build their knowledge and understanding of new content in:

- Number (including learning about place value, adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing numbers, working with fractions and decimals)
- Algebra (including adding to and using number patterns and sequences, for example, 1, 3, 9, 27...)
- Measurements (including working with length, area, weight, capacity, time and money)
- Shape and space (including working with 3-D shapes and 2-D shapes and lines and angles)
- Data (including understanding, interpreting and making charts and graphs and learning about probability and chance)

There is a continued emphasis on **linking your child's learning to real-life practical tasks** involving mathematics, for example, while working with measurement your child may work to solve real life problems such as measuring a room and figuring out how much wallpaper would be needed or working out how to adapt a recipe which is provided for four people when cooking for six!

From fourth class onwards, **children learn to use a calculator** to perform large number calculations which they have already learned to do on paper. The calculator is **not a substitute for learning how to add, subtract, multiply and divide numbers** but rather allows children to check their estimations and answers and leads to greater understanding of the way numbers work. **Using a calculator helps children to focus on the problem to be solved and on finding the best way to do so.**

#### You can help your child to learn at home by:

- giving your child shopping receipts and bills with the totals removed and asking him/her to estimate the total cost by rounding the figures to the nearest Euro. Encourage him/her to use a calculator to check the answer. He/she could use the calculator as you place items in the trolley to keep a running total of what you are spending. In this way, your child will see a very practical use for the calculator!
- encouraging your child to collect, analyse and present data in natural ways by, for example, showing him/her how to record time spent on watching television and on physical activity over a given week. Help him/her to make a chart in which he/she writes the time spent on each activity on each day. At the end of the week talk to your child about what the information shows
- asking questions which encourage your child to use mental mathematic strategies learned in school, for example, on a car journey, you could ask your child *how far will we travel in three hours if you travel at a speed of 55 miles an hour? or if petrol costs €1.09 a litre how much will it cost you to put 30 litres in the tank?*



### Information for parents



## Third and fourth classes 3

### SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND SCIENTIFIC EDUCATION (SESE)

In SESE (history, geography and science) children continue to use the home, classroom and local environment as a resource for learning. Their **learning broadens to include exploration of wider environments**, in Ireland and beyond. Children use the same investigative skills of *questioning, observing, predicting, investigating and experimenting, estimating and measuring, classifying and recording and communicating* while **working as Scientists, Historians and Geographers**. Photographs, real objects and information sources, such as encyclopaedias, atlases, computer software and internet searches, all help children to explore a world beyond their own local environment. **New learning builds on and links to what has been learned before**, for example, in geography, children may learn about the physical features of another area in Ireland but will connect this to what they have already learned by comparing and contrasting it with features in their own local area. Likewise, in history, children may discover how the lives of people have changed over time in their own area **and** in other places through exploring a topic like *homes*.

#### You can help your child to learn at home by:

- watching the daily news or documentaries on television with your child. You could, for example, use a map or a globe to find countries which have featured in the programme or pick one news item which is particularly interesting and use reference books or web sites to find out more about the story and the people and places involved
- involving your child in designing and making things around the home, such as a shelf or a book table
- visiting areas of historical interest in the local area and museums, and talking to your child about the history behind the places and objects you find.



### ARTS EDUCATION

In the three subjects visual arts, music and drama your child continues to **have many opportunities to be creative and to develop his/her imagination through art activities, music and drama**. Your child's **active and enjoyable participation** in artistic activities is emphasised. As in the junior classes, **the focus is not so much on the work your child produces (the product) but on what your child learns by engaging in creative activity (the process)**. Your child improves and refines the skills he/she has already learned through exploring and experimenting in art, music and drama lessons. He/she works with a greater variety of artistic material and experiences a broader range of musical and dramatic activity. This curriculum area encourages your child to **listen to, look at and respond to** the music, artwork and dramatic expression of others in the class, as well as the work of other children and adults.

#### You can help your child to learn at home by:

- encouraging your child's interest in listening to or performing music, for example, listening to CDs, singing songs, playing the recorder or another musical instrument
- encouraging your child to express him/herself artistically by providing materials and space to do so. Give your child the responsibility of tidying up when he/she is finished
- watching children's drama on television with your child or going to see films, plays, concerts and art exhibitions in the community and talking about what you have seen and your response to it.

### Information for parents

## Third and fourth classes 4

### PHYSICAL EDUCATION

In **third and fourth class** your child again participates in a **range of physical activities, both indoor and outdoor**, such as:

- Athletics (including running, jumping and throwing)
- Dance (including exploring, creating and performing dance)
- Gymnastics (including balancing, moving in different directions and in sequence, alone and with others, and moving using apparatus such as mats and benches)
- Games (including ball handling, kicking, carrying and striking and playing small-sided versions of games)
- Outdoor and adventure activities (including walking, following directions on maps and following trails and obstacle courses).<sup>3</sup>

These activities help your child to understand and appreciate physical activity. There is an **emphasis on fun and enjoyment in P.E. lessons** and your child learns to **work together with others to improve overall group performance**. At the same time, your child is encouraged to **improve and refine his/her own individual performance** in various physical activities at his/her own pace. Through experiencing a **broad range of physical activity**, you'll find that your child may like some sports or games more than others. These may then well be played outside of school and on into adult life.

<sup>3</sup>In aquatics children learn about safety in the water and how to move in the water through play and using their arms and legs. To suit individual school circumstances, the curriculum advocates that children should have opportunities to develop water based movement skills at some point in their primary schooling.

#### You can help your child to learn at home by:

- building time into the day for physical activity at home and encouraging your child to participate in activities organised by local clubs and organisations including swimming and athletic clubs, football, hurling, soccer or basketball clubs, and Irish dancing and other types of dance classes. This will help your child to develop a sense of belonging in the community
- taking your child on outdoor activities such as swimming and visits to adventure playgrounds.



### Information for parents

## Third and fourth classes 5

### SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE)

Social, Personal and Health Education, or SPHE, deals with your child's **personal development, health and well being**. It helps children to **understand how to care for themselves, how to respect and relate to others and how to deal with their feelings**. It helps your child to **learn and develop a sense of responsibility for his/her actions**. SPHE includes **Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)** – an important part of all children's development. It includes helping children to learn about the changes that take place in their bodies at different stages of development, for example, at puberty. **Each school has an RSE policy** which outlines what will be taught in RSE and when certain content will be introduced.



Your child learns more about caring for him/herself and about what makes him/her a unique person, such as, strengths and weaknesses, and likes and dislikes. He/she explores and discusses the factors that influence personal decisions and choices and discusses why and how adults can make decisions and set boundaries. Children also develop a greater sense of their own contribution to the school and local community, learn about the lives of people in other places, and to care for the local and wider environment. They also learn to think about and to question the role and influence of media sources in their lives.

#### You can help your child to learn at home by:

- encouraging healthy eating habits through providing a healthy lunch for school and at other mealtimes. Breakfast is a particularly important meal as it starts your child on a healthy day
- talking with your child about what is in the newspaper or on the television/radio/or a film you may have watched together. Ask your child about his/her feelings, views and concerns
- talking with your child about different issues which affect him/her, for example, relationships with family and friends, what is happening in school, keeping safe and the dangers involved in the misuse of substances such as drugs or alcohol. Through discussion help him/her to find appropriate ways of dealing with any problems that may arise such as bullying or peer pressure. Through such discussions, your child will learn that he/she can talk to you about anything.

*Ask your child's teacher about other ways you can help your child to learn at home in third and fourth class. Ask other parents what works well for them.*

## Fifth and sixth classes 1

A summary of your child's learning in fifth and sixth classes in the 6 curriculum areas is provided below, along with some suggestions on how you can support your child's learning at home.

### LANGUAGE

Through language, your child learns to communicate in English and in Irish. Your child learns to listen, to speak, to read and to write in both languages. These language skills provide a basis for learning other languages and are important for learning in all other areas of the curriculum.

In English, your child's **listening and speaking skills continue to be developed** through talk and discussion. He/she learns to: *listen, start conversations, question, tell stories, summarise, express and explain feelings, give instructions, argue, persuade and present ideas*. Your child should now be a confident reader and writer and is **learning to think about and question the messages put across** in both his/her own writing and the broad range of reading material he/she reads both for personal pleasure and information. Through **reading a class novel**, your child participates in group or whole class reading sessions and shares his/her response to what is being read and predictions of what may yet happen with others. Reading a novel helps your child to sustain reading over time. Your child also **writes longer pieces**, and so learns to develop one piece of writing over time by revising and redrafting it.

In Irish, children continue to **develop their conversation and communication skills** and to increase their vocabulary in Irish, building on what they have learned in previous classes.



They work with the same themes as in previous years: **mé féin, sa bhaile, an scoil, bia, an aimsir, an teilifís, siopadóireacht, caitheamh aimsire, éadaí agus ócáidí speisialta** (myself, home, school, food, the weather, television, shopping, pastimes, clothes and special occasions). Your child **uses everyday resources** such as newspaper articles, and radio or television programmes (for example, news from TG4). These real materials develop and improve your child's listening and speaking skills in Irish, reinforce the idea of reading for information and pleasure and provide a good model and reason for writing.

In schools where the teaching is mostly through Irish, your child reads and responds to a broader range of reading material and writes in Irish for many different reasons and in many different ways.

#### You can help your child to learn at home by:

- listening to and talking with your child, for example, about what's happening at school, about their friends or about their favourite subject
- watching programmes, such as *an nuacht*, quizzes, cartoons or sports programmes on TG4, with your child. Although your child may not understand much of the language used at first, he/she will probably be able to understand the gist of the programmes using the pictures and sound and his/her own prior knowledge
- encouraging your child to borrow books, novels or story tapes from the local library.

### Information for parents

## Fifth and sixth classes 2

### MATHEMATICS

Your child learns to understand and solve problems with the Mathematics Curriculum. Children **continue to work with real materials** such as counters, cubes, fraction tiles, measurement equipment, number games, playing cards and mathematical software to build their knowledge and understanding of new content in:

- Number (including learning about place value, adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing numbers and working with fractions and decimals)
- Algebra (including working with positive and negative numbers using a number line and working with number sentences and word problems)
- Measurements (including working with length, area, weight, capacity, time and money)
- Shape and space (including working with 3-D shapes and 2-D shapes and lines and angles)
- Data (including understanding, interpreting and making charts and graphs and learning about probability and chance).

The tasks and practical problem solving activities that your child works with in fifth and sixth class are similar to those in previous classes. They have, however, become **more challenging and complex**.

#### You can help your child to learn at home by:

- creating opportunities for your child to handle money and work within budgets, for example, you could give your child the responsibility of planning a shopping trip and staying within a particular budget to buy particular items on your list. He/she could use the internet to check out and compare prices of, for example, CDs or DVDs online
- providing opportunities for your child to solve problems in real-life situations at home, for example, ask your child to help in assembling furniture or in measuring a room for wallpaper or a new carpet.

### SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND SCIENTIFIC EDUCATION (SESE)

In SESE (history, geography and science) children continue to use the classroom, school and local area as a resource for learning. **Their learning broadens out to explore other places in Ireland and beyond and to explore the lives of people in the past.** Children use the same **investigative skills** of *questioning, observing, predicting, investigating and experimenting, estimating and measuring, classifying and recording and communicating* as **they work as Scientists, Historians and Geographers**. Photographs, real objects and information sources such as encyclopaedias, atlases, computer software and Internet searches all help children to explore a world beyond their own local environment. **New learning builds on and links to what has been learned before**, for example, in geography, children may learn about the physical features of another area in Ireland but will connect this to what they have already learned by comparing and contrasting it with features in their own local area.

Likewise, in history, children may discover how the lives of people have changed over time in their own area **and** in other places through exploring a topic like *homes*.

#### You can help your child to learn at home by:

- watching documentaries and programmes of historical, geographical or scientific interest with your child. When the programme is over, use a map, globe or the internet to find countries which have featured in the programme. Use reference books or web sites to find out more about the story and the people and places involved and past events that have shaped the current situation
- visiting places that are interesting in terms of science, history and geography such as beaches, open farms, woodlands or rivers in the local area, ruins, or museums. Talk to your child about what you see, hear and do there.

## Fifth and sixth classes 3

### ARTS EDUCATION

In the three subjects **visual arts, music and drama** your child continues to have many opportunities to be creative and to develop his/her imagination through art activities, music and drama. Your child's active and enjoyable participation in artistic activities is emphasised. The **focus is not so much on the work your child produces (the product) but on what your child learns by engaging in creative activity (the process)**. Your child improves and refines his/her skills through exploring and experimenting in art, music and drama lessons. He/she works with a greater variety of artistic material and experiences a broader range of musical and dramatic activity. This curriculum area encourages your child to **listen to, look at and respond to** the music, artwork and dramatic expression of others in the class, as well as the work of other children and adults.

#### You can help your child to learn at home by:

- encouraging your child's interest in listening to or performing music, such as listening to CDs, singing songs, playing the recorder or another musical instrument
- encouraging your child to express themselves artistically by providing resources and space to do so and giving your child the responsibility of tidying up when he/she is finished
- watching children's drama on television with your child or taking your child to see films, plays, concerts and art exhibitions in the community and talking about what they have seen and their response to it.

### PHYSICAL EDUCATION

In fifth and sixth class your child again participates in a range of physical activities, both indoor and outdoor such as:

- Athletics (including running, jumping and throwing)
- Dance (including exploring, creating and performing dance)
- Gymnastics (including balancing, moving in different directions and in sequence, alone and with others and moving using apparatus such as mats and benches)
- Games (including ball handling, kicking, carrying and striking, and playing and refereeing small-sided versions of games)
- Outdoor and adventure activities (including walking, cycling and camping and following increasingly challenging trails and obstacle courses within time limits).<sup>4</sup>



These activities help your child to understand and appreciate physical activity. There is an emphasis on fun and enjoyment in P.E. lessons and your child learns to work together with others to improve overall group performance.

At the same time, your child is encouraged to improve and refine his/her own individual performance in various physical activities at his/her own pace. Through experiencing a variety of physical activity, you'll find that your child may like some activities or games more than others. These may then well be played outside of school and on into adult life.

#### You can help your child to learn at home by:

- ensuring your child has many opportunities to take part in physical activities with family and friends
- bringing your child to watch local or national sporting events and encouraging your child's interest and participation in particular physical activities or games. This could mean supporting a local or county G.A.A. team or playing for a local club. This will help your child to develop a sense of belonging to the community.

<sup>4</sup>In aquatics children learn about safety in the water and how to move in the water through play and using their arms and legs. To suit individual school circumstances, the curriculum advocates that children should have opportunities to develop water based movement skills at some point in their primary schooling.

### Information for parents

## Fifth and sixth classes 4

### SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE)

Social, Personal and Health Education, or SPHE, deals with your child's **personal development, health and well being**. It helps children to **understand how to care for themselves, how to respect and relate to others and how to deal with their feelings**. It also helps your child to learn and develop a sense of responsibility for his/her actions. SPHE includes **Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)** – an important part of all children's development. SPHE enables your child to recognise the importance of treating his/her body and that of others with dignity and respect and to learn about the changes that take place in his/her body at the various stages of development, for example, at puberty. **Each school has an RSE policy** which outlines what will be taught in RSE and when certain content will be introduced.

The SPHE Curriculum also helps your child to:

- learn to care for him/herself
- appreciate the importance of good nutrition and hygiene in staying healthy
- learn about healthy behaviours
- recognise causes of personal worry and to identify coping strategies
- develop a growing sense of the importance of making informed decisions.



Children also develop a greater sense of their own contribution in the school and local community, begin to explore the concept of democracy and learn to recognise, acknowledge and respect the various cultural, religious, ethnic or other groups that exist in a community or society. They learn to care for the local and wider environment and appreciate their own role in keeping the Earth safe for future generations. They also learn to think about the role and influence of media sources in their lives.

You can help your child to learn at home by:

- encouraging healthy eating habits through encouraging your child to help make a healthy lunch for school and at other mealtimes. Breakfast is a particularly important meal as it starts your child on a healthy day
- involving your child in planning and carrying through family events like shopping, a cinema trip or decorating a room will give your child a real sense of being a useful family member and will also allow him/her to apply skills learned through the curriculum in school to real-life situations, such as searching the internet and interpreting timetable information
- talking to your child about different issues which affect him/her, for example, relationships with family and friends, what is happening in school, keeping safe, the dangers involved in the misuse of substances such as drugs or alcohol. Through discussion help him/her to find appropriate ways of dealing with situations such as bullying and peer pressure. Through such discussions, your child will learn that he/she can talk to you about anything.

Ask your child's teacher about other ways you can help your child to learn at home in fifth and sixth class. Ask other parents what works well for them.