

CHANGING SCHOOLS

Moving from Primary to Post-Primary School

Guidelines for Parents/Guardians of Students
with Special Educational Needs

NCSE 2016



The word 'parent' in this document should be taken to include guardians of children.

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Introduction

All young people have to manage changes in their lives. One of these changes is the transition from primary to post-primary school.

This guide is intended to provide information to support a successful transition for students with special educational needs, for their parents and for the schools where they are enrolled. We hope this will help alleviate the anxiety that some students and parents can experience at this time as well as providing examples of good practice.

Important steps in planning the transition to post-primary school

There are a number of steps involved in planning for transition into post-primary school. Further information and advice about each step is provided in the sections that follow.

- Step 1:** Choose a post-primary school – as soon as possible
- Step 2:** Enrolment
- Step 3:** Plan with the school
- Step 4:** Preparing for change

Step 1: Choose a post-primary school

Early preparation and sufficient information are key to plan a successful transition. It is important to allow sufficient time for all the necessary planning to take place.

As a first step, parents may find it helpful to consider all the local post-primary options that are available. The term 'post-primary' includes secondary, community/comprehensive, ETB (Education and Training Board) and Educate Together schools. Special schools also enrol students of post-primary age.

In the vast majority of cases, parents choose a mainstream post-primary school for their sons/daughters. In these schools, students with special educational needs are supported by subject teachers and a learning support teacher service to give extra help to students with learning needs. All schools can apply for resource teaching and/or SNA support for students with special educational needs who require such support. School transport is provided for students with special educational needs who are attending the nearest recognised: mainstream school, special class/special school, that is or can be resourced, to meet their special educational needs.

If at all possible students with special educational needs should be educated with students who do not have special educational needs, as long as this is consistent with their best interests and the interest of those with whom they are educated.

Some students with more complex needs may be better placed in a more specialised setting for example, a special class in a mainstream post-primary school or a separate special school. Here, classes have very small numbers.

Having considered all options and discussed with relevant professionals, you as parents, make the final decision about what type of post-primary provision – mainstream, special class or special school – your child will attend.

Your child's primary school principal or teacher and/or other professionals involved with your child (e.g. NEPS psychologist or HSE speech and language therapists or occupational therapists) will be able to advise and assist you. You can also contact your local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) for information about placements available in your area and/or educational supports that may be available for your child. SENOs provide a direct service to the parents of children with special educational needs and to schools within designated geographical areas.

The NCSE booklet "Choosing a School" also provides valuable information for parents whose children are changing schools. This is available on the NCSE website at: www.ncse.ie/information-booklets-pamphlets-2.

Parents can find it useful to get a sense of a school by attending open days, parents' evenings, and induction events. Your son/daughter can accompany you to these evenings so that the idea of transferring to another school develops over a length of time.

As parents of a child with special educational needs you should expect that in post-primary school:

1. Your child is made to feel welcome
2. Your child's teachers are knowledgeable about special educational needs
3. Teachers are willing to learn about your child's particular needs.

Some questions you may find it helpful to think about or to ask the school:

1. Will the school have a place for my child?
2. How will the school support my child?
3. As a parent, how can I help the school to support my child?
4. How will my child be included in school/class activities with other students?
5. My child requires medication during school hours, how will this be managed?
6. How will my child access assistive technology, if required?
7. What forms of home-school communication will be available?
8. As a parent, who in the school should I contact if I am aware my child is having difficulty?
9. If needed, will special school transport be available for my child?

Step 2: Enrolment

When you have decided on your chosen school, you need to apply to the school for a place. Schools can have different rules and regulations about how students are enrolled. Many schools set a closing date by which a student must be enrolled. You can find out about this from the school principal or from the school's website.

When you have decided on your choice of school, make sure that you have applied before the school's closing date for enrolment. The school will need sufficient time to put adequate planning in place. Some of this planning can take time, for example, if the school building needs to be adapted, or the school needs to upskill teaching staff, or your child needs specialist equipment.

A small number of parents can sometimes have difficulty finding a place for their child in a local post-primary school. This can happen when schools are over-subscribed, i.e., the school has more students wanting to enrol than places available in the school. It can also sometimes happen that there may not be a place available in a special class or special school for your child.

If you are unable to find a school place for your child, there are people to help you. All parents can contact the Educational Welfare Service. Contact details for their services are available on the Tusla website at: <http://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/education-and-welfare/>.

As your child has special educational needs, you can also contact your local SENO for assistance. His/her contact details are available on the NCSE website at: <http://ncse.ie/seno-contact-list>.

Step 3: Plan with the school

Careful planning and preparation helps students with special educational needs to transition with greater ease and success. Parents, primary and post-primary schools all have an important part to play in the transition from primary school. For students with complex special educational needs, planning for post-primary should start two to three years in advance of the transition – in 4th or 5th class of primary school.

If your child has complex special educational needs he/she may need a transition plan to assist him/her to transfer to post-primary school. You and your child will be involved in developing this plan. Other people may be involved, as necessary, including relevant teachers from the primary and post-primary school, NEPS psychologist, health professionals involved with your child and/or the local SENO.

Most post-primary schools will have links with their feeder primary schools. This allows for an easier transfer of information. Usually, there is contact between the 6th class teacher/resource teacher and the receiving post-primary school which helps to overcome any disconnect between what was taught in primary and the starting point in certain subjects at second level.

Schools often hold a planning meeting before students with more complex special educational needs start school. This is good practice. The planning meeting should include you as the parent, the school principal, if possible the class teacher and as necessary other professionals who have been involved with your child before he/she started school.

Planning for the transition of students with complex special educational needs should begin at least two years before students are due to start post-primary.

Parents and schools should exchange relevant information to assist planning for students with special educational needs.

During the transitions, NEPS psychologists may be involved with the school in an advisory way, discussing possible transition programmes, strategies and/or other interventions to support your child during transition.

At this planning meeting, you can let the school know about your expectations (and those of your child) for post-primary education and any particular anxieties your child has about starting school. Open communication with the school can help to address concerns quickly before they have an impact on your child's experience of school.

It is also important to give the post-primary school any information that might help the school to meet his/her needs. This includes any relevant professional reports (e.g. reports written by psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and so on) as these can help to ensure that the school is aware of your child's strengths, abilities and needs. This information can also help the post-primary school to decide if school policies need to be developed or revised around caring for a student with special educational needs or medical needs, e.g. behaviour policies or administration of medications policy.

The school staff may find it helpful to consult with relevant professionals who work or have worked with your child. The relevant professionals may include visiting teachers for children who are blind/visually impaired and those who are deaf/hard of hearing, psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists or physiotherapists and so on. Where a child has a serious medical condition, the post-primary school may wish to consult with your doctor. The school will seek your permission to contact these professionals. If necessary, some of these professionals may visit the school to assess the adaptability of its environment. You may wish to discuss who in the new setting will have access to any confidential information about your child.

All of this information will assist the post-primary school to develop an individualised support plan for your child. Many different types of plans can be described as support plans for example, a general plan for support, a behavioural plan, an individual learning profile, an individualised educational plan, a personalised learning plan and so on.

As appropriate, a support plan may include information on your child's:

- Learning needs
- Social and communication needs
- Care needs, for example, dressing, toileting, mobility and medication needs
- Sensory needs such as over sensitivity to noise, textures, lights
- Physical needs that require environmental adaptations such as adaptations to the school building, adapted seating or other specialised equipment. If necessary, occupational therapists and/or physiotherapists may be consulted about adaptations to the environment.

The plan can make clear how and with whom parents can communicate should any queries or concerns arise. It is also good to agree a joint approach for any difficulties that may arise. The school should make clear how relevant information from professional reports will be shared with teachers.

Schools also use the information and professional reports to apply, on your behalf and with your consent, to the NCSE for additional supports for your child, where these are necessary. Such additional supports can include: resource teaching, transport, assistive technology and access to special needs assistant support.

Schools also submit relevant applications to the Department of Education and Skills for necessary adaptations to school buildings, specialist equipment and so on. The school principal needs copies of professional reports to make such applications.

Additional supports that your child receives in primary school do not automatically transfer to post-primary school. This is because children's needs change over time and they may require a greater or lesser amount of support to manage in a post-primary school.

As a parent, you can help the post-primary school to plan by:

- Arranging to have your child's professional reports forwarded to the post-primary school as the school will need these to apply for any additional supports for which your child is eligible. This will mean that the necessary supports can be in place before your child starts school.
- Sharing your own knowledge and experience of your child's strengths, abilities and difficulties and what works best in helping your child to learn. This information could be very useful to the staff in the new school to allow them to plan for your child.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has developed an Education Passport to support the transfer of student information from primary to post-primary school. The primary school will only share this information after the post-primary school has confirmed your child's enrolment. More information on the Education Passport is available at: www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Primary-Education/Assessment/Report_Card_Templates/transfer/.

Step 4: Preparing for change

Most students with special educational needs look forward to moving to post-primary schools and see the possibilities for making positive new relationships there. They still however can have concerns about the change.

Research has identified that some of their main concerns include:

- Losing the security of the primary school, their primary school teachers and the friendships they have there.
- Making new friends; getting to know their post-primary teachers and being known by them.
- Learning to fit in among new students of their own age and with older students.
- Losing a sense of social standing and fearing they will be bullied – where they were the oldest students in the primary they will now be the youngest in post-primary.
- Following new rules, fitting in and staying out of trouble.
- Keeping up with the school curriculum.
- Fearing a lack of supports in post-primary school.

Parents, students and schools all have an important part to play in preparing for the transition into post-primary school.

The primary school class teacher usually prepares all 6th class students for the transition to post-primary. Parents also have an important part to play. It is important to get the balance right between preparing your child for post-primary school and not overwhelming him/her with too much attention focussed on starting in post-primary. Remember that all children need to relax and enjoy their summer holiday before starting post-primary! Here are some ideas that might help you to prepare your child to make a successful transition to post-primary. As a parent, you will know which of these might suit your child best.

Depending on your child's needs, your support could include some or all of the following:

- Talk with him/her, listen to his/her views and concerns and answer any questions he/she may have about the planned move.
- Attend any open days or induction days organised by the post-primary school. Some parents of students with special educational needs find it helpful to attend open days two or three years in advance of their son/daughter's transfer to post-primary. You may wish to check with the post-primary school if you intend to do this.
- It is now quite common for post-primary schools to hold school assessments of all their students as they begin their post-primary education. The day usually includes meeting teachers, getting familiar with the building and it is important that students with special educational needs are involved. Many students get anxious about these assessments. You can explain that they are to help the school to learn more about the supports that students will need and that they are not used to stop students attending the school.

- Some post-primary schools organise visits for students with special educational needs during their final summer term in primary or offer activities for incoming first years before the school term begins. If these options are available, you should encourage your child to attend, as such visits can help to familiarise students with the school at a time when there are fewer students in the building. They can learn about the layout of the school, meet other students, get to know some of their new teachers and become familiar with the operation of the school including the frequency of bells, the location of lockers, the noise and movement when classes end and what happens at break times.
- If you think it would help, you could ask the school for permission to take photos of the building. You can use these photos to compile an album to use with your child as a way of raising the idea of school re-opening in September. Some schools provide Transition Booklets, video-recordings or make photographs available on the school website. These can be very helpful for some students who need visual supports to ease the transition.
- Some parents help their children to produce a communication passport which introduces the student and sets out his/her interests, likes and dislikes. It explains how the student learns, what he/she finds easy and what is difficult. It can sometimes outline any sensory difficulties that the student may experience. A communication passport can be very useful for a student with limited communication skills or students who are non-verbal.
- Involve your child in buying school books, uniform, P.E. gear.
- Talk to your son/daughter about the length of the school day, how a timetable works and how they are going to travel to school.
- Talk regularly during the summer holidays about the new school rules, P.E. arrangements, the canteen, lunch breaks, uniform and the timetable.

It is also important that parents prepare themselves for the change. Your confidence in the move will reassure your child and help him/her to settle down and feel comfortable in the new setting. In turn this will promote a sense of belonging and self-worth. This can take time and your child will require your support and patience.

Further Information

A range of resources are available to facilitate the transfer of 6th class students. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) has produced three very useful documents on the transfer from primary to post-primary which are available on their website at:

<http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/NEPS-Home-Page.html>

The documents are: a transfer profile which can be used to share information between primary and post-primary schools; an information pack for the transfer of information to post-primary school; and sample transfer programmes and workbooks which can be used to prepare students for the move.

The Special Education Support Service (SESS) has produced a transition booklet which includes useful strategies for familiarising students with the post-primary routine; for settling in and getting to know classmates; or learning how the school works. This booklet is available on the SESS website at:

<http://www.sess.ie>

Further information for parents/guardians can be found in the NCSE publications:

- Children with Special Educational Needs: Information Booklet for Parents
- Choosing a School: A Guide for Parents and Guardians of Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs.

The NCSE has also published **nine information leaflets on particular areas of special educational needs**, to explain how the education system supports students with special educational needs.

The information leaflets cover: general learning disabilities; specific learning disabilities; emotional and/or behavioural difficulties or disorders; physical disabilities; blind/visual impairment; specific speech and language disorder; deaf and hard of hearing; and autism spectrum disorder. There is also a leaflet to explain the SNA scheme.

The information booklets and leaflets are available from your local SENO or on the NCSE website at <http://ncse.ie/information-booklets-pamphlets-2>.

Useful Contacts

NCSE SENOs: Through your school or at:

www.ncse.ie

Health Centre:

www.hse.ie

Department of Education and Skills:

www.education.ie

National Parents Council (Primary):

www.npc.ie

National Parents Council (Post-Primary):

www.npcpp.ie

Special Needs Parents Association:

www.specialneedsparents.ie

Tusla:

www.tusla.ie

Visiting Teacher Service:

(for children who are blind/visually impaired or deaf/hard of hearing)

<http://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/Visiting-Teacher-Service>

