

NEXT STEPS

Moving on to Secondary School

wexford 
local development

Forbairt Áitiúil Loch Garman



SICAP

Social Inclusion &
Community Activation
Programme

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Next Steps – moving on to secondary school.

Moving from Primary to Secondary School is a big milestone for young people. For many it marks the end of a comfortable and familiar school life and the beginning of something entirely new, something bigger. Children who are nearing the end of 6th class have to come to terms with the idea of finishing up and moving on. Change can be a challenge, but it also brings new opportunities. With a small bit of planning, preparation, empathy and understanding your child can make a positive and successful switch to second level. This booklet covers some of the things to consider as your child prepares to take the next steps on their learning journey.

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Introduction

Second Level (also known as Post Primary) Education takes place in two stages. These are the Junior cycle for the first 3 years followed by the Senior cycle which can be 2 years or 3 years when Transition year is included.

The new junior cycle combines subjects such as Maths, English, Gaeilge with short courses such as PE, Digital Media, CSP.

Transition year (4th year) follows on from the junior cycle and gives students the chance to experience different learning styles, develop new skills and independence before moving on to the final two years of senior cycle.

The senior cycle finishes with the Leaving Cert which comes in three distinct programmes:

For some students the **Leaving Certificate Established** can lead to an application to third level universities and colleges or to a Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) course. Approximately 75% of students in their final year sit the leaving Cert Established.

The **Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme** combines parts of the Leaving Cert with a focus on self-directed learning, enterprise, preparation for work and community. Around 20% of students opt for the Leaving Cert Vocational Programme.

The **Leaving Certificate Applied** is for students who prefer a more practical, vocational style of learning. It aims to prepare students for adult and working life and is more assessment based than the Leaving Cert. Some students move on to a Post Leaving Certificate course once they have completed their Leaving Cert Applied. Around 5% of students opt for Leaving Cert Applied

Some schools have a religious ethos, often Roman Catholic, whilst some do not, for example Vocational Colleges. It is a good idea to check which school you feel will be most suited to your needs. For example, does it offer the right subjects? What type of Leaving Cert programmes are available? What are the facilities like? Are there extra supports available?

The Post Primary Curriculum

One of the good things about second level is the number of subjects on offer. There is a lot more to learn and some subjects may be completely new. First years generally do a wide range of subjects before making a choice about which subjects they want to continue with in second or third year. New subjects might include Business, Technical Graphics, Home Economics, Woodwork and modern languages such as French, German or Spanish. The new junior cycle has a focus on literacy, numeracy and key skills. It also includes short courses such as CSPE – Civic, Social and Political Education and SPHE – Social, Personal and Health Education. During second and third year students complete a number of classroom based assessments. At the end of the three-year cycle students receive their Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement.

What will be different?

Moving from primary school to second level brings many changes. To start with there's the switch from being the senior pupils in school to being the youngest. Suddenly being 12 or 13 doesn't seem that old when you're in the same school as 17-18 year olds. Most schools use the Meitheal Programme where older pupils (usually 5th or 6th years) help the first years to settle in. It's a great programme and many 1st years really value the advice and support that they get from their Meitheal Leader. There is also the need to get used to the new building, a new timetable with new subjects and lessons around 40 minutes long or sometimes an hour or more. There are new teachers for each subject. Students will be moving around the building from class to class. It's likely to be a much bigger place with a lot more people. The school bag will look and feel different, the school day will be longer and some of the homework might take more time. For some this may seem scary at first but after a few weeks all of this change should begin to feel familiar. It's also a chance to meet new people, make new friends and learn something new. There is also the possibility of sports activities, drama, music, after school study groups, art, travel and more. So, whilst there will plenty of change, there is also a great deal to look forward to.

Attitudes to Learning & Change

With so many changes on the way, it's worth taking time to consider how to respond. How we think about things can affect how we deal with them. Try to avoid falling into a habit of making negative predictions or presumptions. Having low expectations can be very limiting and can encourage unhelpful ideas such as 'just stick with what you know', 'You're not good at those subjects' or 'You won't like this'. An open mind can encourage the possibility of doing well. Simple ideas such as 'it's good to try something new', 'I can get better at this' and 'I like a challenge' can help develop a positive attitude to learning. Planning ahead can help deal with the many changes and challenges and it is important to approach moving on to secondary school with an open and curious mind. Learning isn't always easy and it's even harder if we tell ourselves 'I can't do that' or 'I'm not interested'. It's not as simple as saying 'think positive and everything will be ok' but it is about taking a realistic and practical approach to each day. Moving to second level is exciting but it can also be an emotional time. Simply being a teenager can also be challenging with swings in mood and energy levels. It's very normal for your child to not feel ok at times, especially if something goes wrong. Problems however are usually only temporary. A positive outlook towards learning and change can help to bring about the solution that's needed. Small steps in the right direction are more achievable than trying to fix everything or feel fabulous all at once. Patience and positive encouragement can help your child adapt to life in their new surroundings. Help them to understand that they can overcome problems that may arise.

Preparation – What Helps?

Coping skills, resourcefulness, resilience, routine, social skills, adaptability, independence & self-belief. That's a lot to take on board but young people don't always get the credit they deserve for their ability to deal with challenges and change. Many of them will have already visited their new school and most schools have useful websites or social media that can help give a sense of what to expect. Some may have an older sibling or friend who is already in the school and can give advice on what to expect. It really is 'good to talk' although make sure that your young person is ready and wants to discuss things. Just like starting primary school, starting second level isn't a once off event it's a

process.. Be willing to listen and acknowledge their thoughts and feelings during the transition to second level. Something that may seem small might actually be a big deal to a new first year so make time to talk things over in a calm atmosphere. They can benefit from examples of everyday positive social skills – active listening, empathy, sharing and connecting. Let them see that you are available to listen and help if needed. Balance and boundaries are essential. They should be moving towards greater independence – making their own lunch, organising their school bag etc but they also need clear boundaries and routines. Discuss and agree rules and routines around things like homework, social media and living together as a supportive household. Show appreciation for their efforts to do well at home and at school. Discuss and agree term-time sleep routines and consider ways to prevent phones and social media from interfering with healthy sleeping habits.

VS Ware

Most schools now use digital information systems to communicate with parents. An example of this is Aladdin which is used in over 2,500 primary schools. Many post-primary schools use 'VS Ware' to message parents & families, provide information, monitor attendance and to deal with payments. To access VS Ware you will need an account. Schools may send a text message with a link inviting you to set up an account. Alternatively, they may have details on how to set up VS Ware on their website. You will need to download the VS Ware app to your phone or device. If you are unsure how to do this talk to the school or to another parent who knows how it's done.

Homework

Homework at second level can be a source of avoidable stress. It is likely to take more than an hour on most evenings. Try to show an empathetic attitude to the workload and an interest in their homework. Try to agree on a quiet space in the house that can be set aside for study and homework without distractions. Encourage and acknowledge effort, help if needed but avoid doing the homework for them. Be supportive around the use of time, reminders can be helpful but getting into a nagging conflict is not. Support them to find a method that works for them, it may be worth getting the hardest homework

done sooner and a regular break or two to re-charge can help. Homework is a fact of secondary school life so the sooner they can get into a positive routine that works the better it will be.

Lingo & People

Post Primary schools have a number of staff with different roles and responsibilities. Some of the roles, subjects and abbreviations to be aware of include:

- **Principal:** the senior staff member with responsibility for leading the school
- **Deputy Principal:** senior staff member who assists the principal. Some schools have more than one Deputy Principal.
- **Secretary:** staff member responsible for dealing with a wide range of school business
- **Receptionist:** the first port of call for enquiries and other school business
- **Guidance Counsellor:** a teacher who offers advice and guidance on education, careers, personal development and personal counselling
- **Subject Teachers:** teachers who specialise in one or more subjects
- **Year Head:** teachers with the added responsibility for a specific year group
- **SET:** Special Education Teacher
- **SNA:** Special Needs Assistant: a member of staff that acts in a caring and supportive role for a child with special educational needs
- **SENO:** Special Educational Needs Organiser
- **HSCL-** Home and School Community Liaison, a teacher with responsibility for building links with home, school and the community
- **Chaplain:** usually in faith based schools the school Chaplain deals with spiritual matters that may be a part of the culture of the school
- **Meitheal Leader:** an older student who helps to welcome new first years into the school

- **Caretaker / Facilities Manager:** staff member responsible for the security and maintenance of the building
- **BOM:** Board of Management, the BOM is responsible for school policies, procedure and governance
- **Students Council:** a group of students that engages with the school and promotes the interests of the students
- **Parents Council:** a voluntary group of parents that links with the school
- **Admissions Policy:** the process and procedures that a school uses to allocate places
- **Communication Platform:** schools use a variety of digital platforms to communicate effectively with parents and guardians
- **TY:** Transition Year, 4th year, the year after the Junior cycle and before the final 2 years of the Leaving Cert cycle
- **SPHE:** Social, Political & Health Education
- **ESL:** English as a Second Language, for many people in Ireland English may not be their first language
- **CSPE:** Civic, Social & Political Education
- **STEM:** Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics
- **NEPS:** National Educational Psychological Service provides advice to schools on learning, behaviour, social & emotional development
- **BTSCFA:** Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance is a scheme of financial assistance towards the cost of uniform etc. To find out more contact mywelfare.ie

Schools in County Wexford

There are 23 Post Primary schools in County Wexford with over 14,000 students between them. Some schools are multi-denominational, some have a Catholic ethos and all schools aim to be as inclusive as possible. Catholic schools will take pupils from other faith backgrounds and non-faith backgrounds.

Here are the schools in Wexford, the student numbers are from school year 2023/24:

Area	School	Ethos	Students
Adamstown Y21KO39	Coláiste Abbain	Multi – denominational	435 mixed
Bridgetown Y35R628	Bridgetown College	Multi – denominational	638 mixed
Bunclody Y21FW99	Bunclody Vocational College	Multi – denominational	284 mixed
Bunclody Y21K284	FCJ Bunclody	Catholic, co-educational	1003 mixed
Enniscorthy Y21XW97	Meanscoil Gharman	Multi-denominational	245 mixed
Enniscorthy Y21YX56	Enniscorthy Community College	Multi- denominational	420 mixed
Enniscorthy Y21EF82	Colaiste Bride	Catholic, girls	761 female
Enniscorthy Y21TK35	St. Mary's CBS	Catholic, boys	755 male
Gorey Y25V6Y9	Creagh College	Multi-denominational	1049 mixed
Gorey Y25YX29	Gorey Community School	Multi- denominational	1526 mixed
Gorey Y25A7V7	Gorey Educate Together Secondary	Multi-denominational	189 mixed

Area	School	Ethos	Students
Kilmuckridge Y25C952	Coláiste an Átha	Multi- denominational	367 mixed
New Ross Y34XR63	St. Mary's Secondary	Catholic girls	668 female
New Ross Y34WR12	CBS Secondary	Catholic, co-ed	423 mixed
New Ross Y34R297	Good Counsel College	Catholic, boys	780 male
New Ross Y34YW08	Kennedy College	Multi-denominational	202 mixed
New Ross Y34FT82	Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary	Catholic girls	210 female
Ramsgrange Y34YY17	Ramsgrange Community School	Multi-denominational	626 mixed
Wexford	Loreto Secondary School	Catholic, girls	901 female
Wexford	Presentation Secondary	Catholic, girls	958 female
Wexford	Selskar College	Multi-denominational	391 mixed
Wexford	St. Peter's College	Catholic, boys	782 male
Wexford	Wexford CBS	Catholic, boys	711 male

Additional Needs

For any child with Special Educational Needs it is very important to check the level of support that the school will provide. Schools have a commitment to inclusion and providing education to all students. Some children benefit from additional support from a Special Education Teacher and a Special Needs Assistant. When a child is allocated additional support the details will be set out in their IEP (Individual Education Plan). The IEP needs to transfer with the child to second level and the new school needs to know about the additional needs before the child transfers. When your child is in 6th class make sure that there is clear communication between the two schools to ensure that the right supports are in place for when they transfer to second level.

Mental Health Matters

The Junior Cycle includes topics such as health education and wellness.

'Positive mental health is about reaching our potential and feeling like we always have the chance to give everything our best shot. Not just feeling positive, but also getting out there in the big bad world. Positive mental health not only prevents mental ill health, it also leads to greater enjoyment and satisfaction with one's life'

- Spunout.ie

For parents and children, the move to second level education is a big milestone. There will sometimes be challenges and stresses. Therefore it's important to remember the healthy '5 a day':

- Connect with others – family & friends
- Be active – a walk, dance, run, sport, gardening
- Take notice – slow down, take a deep breath & appreciate where you are
- Learning is for life – keep learning, a book, a recipe, a craft, a language
- Give – a smile, a compliment, a small act of kindness

Cost

Preparing for secondary school can be expensive. Between extra books, IT equipment, bags, sports gear, uniform, lunch and transport there is a lot to budget for. Uniforms are costly and you may be entitled to the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BTSCFA). Contact MyWelfare.ie to find out more – to apply online you will need a PPS card and a MyGov.ie account. Other organisations that may be able to help with the cost include St. Vincent De Paul, Barnardos and the Simon Community.

Find out what the healthy & affordable options are for lunch, this will vary from school to school.

Remember What You Can Do

By staying calm and supportive there are many ways you can help your child to prepare for a smooth transition:

- Acknowledge their thoughts and feelings
- Be a good listener – but don't force them to talk
- The 'small stuff' might be a big deal to them
- A safe, calm atmosphere is good for communication
- Show good social skills – active listening, empathy, sharing & connecting
- Balance & boundaries – encourage responsibility & self reliance
- Negotiate and agree rules on social media use – a phone switched on in the bedroom at night time can be very unhealthy
- Conflict resolution, early problem solving. Don't let things simmer
- Affirmation – remind & reassure them about their strengths, skills & opportunities
- Checklists – uniform, bag, lunch, extras
- Helping them with good habits – routines, food, sleep. They are going to be tired and good sleeping habits are essential

Taking the Next Steps Positively

Try to maintain a positive outlook as everyone adjusts to the experience of moving to post primary education

- Keep things in perspective – it's one small step on a much bigger journey, school is not the be all and end all, life is
- There's going to be plenty of days that aren't perfect, it's okay to have a bad day
- Encourage an enjoyment of learning, the value of education and being part of the school community
- 'Nine tenths of education is encouragement' Anatole France
- 'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world' Nelson Mandela
- 'Teachers open the door but you have to enter by yourself'
- 'They cannot stop me. I will get my education if it is in the home, school or anyplace' Malala Yousafzai

Useful Websites

ncse.ie NCSE – National Council for Special Education – a national body that works to improve educational services for people with Special Educational Needs

curriculumonline.ie thorough information about the education system

schooldays.ie – Ireland's online resource for parents www.schooldays.ie

citizensinformation.ie – free information and advice 0818 07 4000

stepup.ie – a website for parents and young people preparing to move to secondary school

spunout.ie Ireland's youth information website





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