



# Information for parents of children aged 2-5 years on the early childhood care and education (ECCE) and primary school systems in Ireland

This information note explains when children can enrol in early years' education through the national ECCE programme, and in primary schools.

You may find it useful to understand what is available to your child and what they will experience in early learning and care settings or in primary school, so you can decide what is best for them at this stage.

## Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE)



- Free to parents
- 3 hours per day
- 5 days per week (except Public Holidays)
- 38 weeks from September to June
- Available for children from age 2 years 8 months–5 years 6 months

### Birth date between:

### Eligible Enrolment date(s):

- 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018 → 1 September 2021 & 1 September 2022
- 1 January 2019 - 31 December 2019 → 1 September 2022 & 1 September 2023
- 1 January 2020 - 31 December 2020 → 1 September 2023 & 1 September 2024
- 1 January 2021 - 31 December 2021 → 1 September 2024 & 1 September 2025

Most children in Ireland attend the ECCE programme. In 2020/21, 95% of eligible children participated.

- Depending on their age, children can be enrolled on the ECCE programme for up to 2 years.
- Some ECCE providers offer additional activities for a fee.

How to find an ECCE provider  
Contact the City and County Childcare Committee for your area. Details are available at [myccc.ie](http://myccc.ie).

The ECCE programme focuses on early learning through play. The learning is child-centred and responds to children's interests, strengths and challenges to deliver meaningful learning experiences.

Children with disabilities are supported in ELC settings through the Access and Inclusion Model, sometimes called AIM. Further information is available at [aim.gov.ie](http://aim.gov.ie).

More information about how children's learning in early learning and care settings is guided is in these documents:

[Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework](#)

[Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education.](#)





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## Starting Primary School



- All children are entitled to free primary education.
- Most children in Ireland, over 80%, are aged 5 starting primary school.
- Your child must be at least 4 years of age at the start of the school year (September) to enrol in primary school.

**Ethos:** Schools may have different ethos (religious schools, non-denominational schools, multid denominational schools).

**Language:** Schools may have English or the Irish language as their language of instruction.

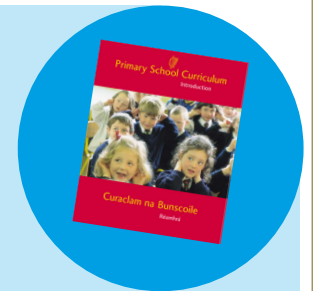
**Gender:** Schools may be for both boys and girls, for boys only, or for girls only.

## Types of Primary School



## Primary school: junior Infants to sixth class.

- Primary education lasts for 8 years. The classes are junior infants, senior infants, and first to sixth classes.
- All children learn the primary curriculum set out by the Department of Education. You can read more about this at [curriculumonline.ie/primary](http://curriculumonline.ie/primary).
- The curriculum is designed to nurture the child in all dimensions of his or her life—spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, social and physical.



Some schools are divided into junior (first four years) and senior (second four years) schools.

Children with special educational needs are supported in primary schools using the National Educational Psychological Service *Continuum of Support*. Further information on the Continuum of Support is available at [gov.ie](http://gov.ie).

## Useful Websites and Resources

### Government of Ireland:

- [Gov.ie/Ukraine](http://Gov.ie/Ukraine)
- [Gov.ie/letsgetready](http://Gov.ie/letsgetready)
- [Gov.ie/schools](http://Gov.ie/schools)

**The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment:** [ncca.ie](http://ncca.ie)

**The National Parents Council:** [npc.ie](http://npc.ie)