

# **Guidelines for HSCL Coordinators**

## **Supporting Families in the Transition**

### **From Preschool to Primary School**



**Seirbhís Tacaíochta  
Oideachais Tusla**

Tusla Education Support Service

## **1. Context**

In line with the cross-governmental policy documents, Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures 2014-2020 and First Five, 2019-2028, DEIS 2017 and Circular 0016/2019 has identified the need for schools to support families in transition throughout the education continuum. One of the key actions of DEIS 2017 is to restate the role of HSCL Coordinators to support families in the transition from preschool to primary school.

The ESRI and the NCCA have published a report, entitled *'The transition to primary school: Insights from the Growing Up in Ireland study'*, which is based on 9000 Irish children's experiences. A full copy of the report is available on <https://doi.org/10.26504/bkmnext360>. NCCA has been tasked with reviewing existing transition practices and has also developed templates and a suite of support materials to support families, preschools and primary schools in the successful transition from preschool to primary school. This information is available on [www.ncca.ie/earlychildhood](http://www.ncca.ie/earlychildhood)

## **2. Supporting the School Community with the Transition to Primary School**

***Developing relationships and preparing school and preschool staff for transition is key to supporting children and families.***

***Is your school 'school ready'?***

- ✓ Include transitions in school DEIS plans and HSCL annual plan.
- ✓ Inform whole school staff of the importance/ progress of transition programmes on a regular basis (e.g. staff meetings)
- ✓ Visit and develop links with all feeder preschools, or as much as is practicable given workloads/ number of preschools.
- ✓ Arrange formal meeting with preschool(s) early in year (September – December) and discuss ways for collaboration and how best to support transfer of written documentation.
- ✓ Support the transfer of *'Mo Scéal: Moving from Preschool to Primary Reporting Templates'* between preschool and primary school, with the consent of the parents.
- ✓ School enrolment forms may need to be updated to include permission to contact the child's preschool.
- ✓ Request *'Mo Scéal'* documents from preschools
- ✓ Review *'Mo Scéal'* documents as part of Care Team

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- ✓ Support Junior Infant teachers to develop positive relationships with the parents in the first few weeks of school. A good example of how to do this is found on p.60 of the 'Ambitions for Transitions' document, available at <http://www.limerickchildcare.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Ambitions-for-Transitions-A-Guide-to-Support-Every-Childs-Progression-from-Early-Years-Services-to-Primary-School.pdf>
- ✓ Read the NCCA tip sheets on '*Suggested activities for schools to support a positive transition to Junior Infants*'. This includes ideas such as having the classroom layout similar to the preschool, having a photo of the teacher on door and using a visual timetable.
- ✓ Play-based pedagogies, including as many outdoor experiences as possible, in Junior Infant classes should be prioritised by the school, in line with *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009), as this significantly supports children's learning and development.

### **3. Recommendations for HSCL Practice – Universal Support**

***Transition should be considered a year-long process, often running from January to January, allowing families to be supported before, during and after starting in school.***

- ✓ Invite parents to school events in their child's last year in preschool/ year before they start Junior Infants. Examples include Christmas concerts, open days and sports day
- ✓ Hold information sessions/ open days/ coffee mornings for parents. Topics should include general school information (e.g. lunch, uniform, breaks etc.), the importance of attendance and what courses are available for parents. The school support staff (e.g. HSCL, SEN, SCP, EWO) should all be present and explain their role. Information about local supports (e.g. Community Welfare Officer, Vincent DePaul, Primary Care etc.) should be available to parents.
- ✓ Meet all parents at least once, before September.
- ✓ Distribute information packs to all families before they start in September. Parent packs may include tips for starting school, HSCL contact details, importance of attendance, list of local supports and a local library card. HSCL Coordinators should be mindful of the literacy levels within their school community and may need to provide information in different languages. Ensure

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all information is written in 'plain English' ([www.simplyput.ie](http://www.simplyput.ie)). Information included in the packs may need to be explained verbally to parents. Children's packs may include pencil, parer, paper, blank art sketch pad, colours, playdoh and a story book. It is important that 'school work' is not given to children.

- ✓ Home visits to families before, during and after transition.
- ✓ Run at least one literacy/ numeracy programme run for parents of Junior Infants during their first year in school. Please refer to the '*HSCL Sharing Good Practice – Parental Involvement at Primary Level*' document for suggestions.
- ✓ Deliver a programme focusing on oral language development, with approximately 40% of places given to families on the HSCL target list.
- ✓ Actively invite parents, especially new and target families, to all HSCL courses being run.

#### **4. Recommendations for HSCL Practice – Targeted Support**

Mindful of HSCL Coordinator's workload, the number of families in receipt of individual support during transition should be manageable and realistic. This work should not be done in isolation, but as part of consultation with school principal(s), SCP, EWS and other relevant services. Please also refer to the '*Guidelines for Identifying HSCL Target List*' to support the identification of needs.

Approximately 20% of children will have difficulty in the transition to primary school. However, international and Irish research has found that this figure is considered to be significantly higher for children living in socially disadvantaged areas and, particularly, those attending DEIS Urban Band 1 schools. Children in rural DEIS schools are comparable to their peers in non-DEIS schools (Smyth, 2018; Stephen & Cope, 2003; O'Kane & Hayes, 2006). Furthermore, 16% of children in DEIS schools have not previously attended a preschool, in comparison with the national average of 4% (Smyth, 2018). Risk factors include:

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- Children who have not previously attended a preschool
- Children with difficulty concentrating and listening
- Children with Speech and Language difficulties
- Children with low self-esteem
- Children who had socio-emotional difficulties at age of 3
- Children with behavioural problems
- Children with SEN/ disabilities
- Children from different cultures
- Lone parent families
- Children from large families
- Male children
- Children with pattern of poor attendance/punctuality in preschool
- Children in care
- Family history of early school leaving
- Families already linked to Tusla Social Work, Tusla PPFS, HSCL, SCP, EWS etc.
- Families who are/ at risk of being homelessness
- Families who are socially isolated
- Families who may struggle with financial implications of starting school
- Separation/ parent anxiety
- Parents' own lack of confidence/ negative experience of school

*(Smyth, 2018; Stephen & Cope, 2003; O'Kane & Hayes, 2006; HSCL Survey, 'Supporting Transition to Junior Infants', 2017)*

- ✓ Hold formal meetings with preschool(s) to discuss any concerns they have about individual children. Ensure parental consent is sought prior to the meetings.
- ✓ Identify (with principal, preschool, Care Team, SCP and EWS) children who may struggle with transition in Term 2, prior to starting in Junior Infants. These children should be prioritised for a home visit.
- ✓ Prioritise home visits to target families before and after starting school.
- ✓ Ensure the school's approach is tailored to the needs of the community.
- ✓ Families from different cultures need practices to be very explicit. HSCL workshops on how schools/ services operate would support these families.
- ✓ Preschool friendships to be catered for, as much as is practicable, in class allocation.
- ✓ Within your family/ local cluster, prepare a list of local supports families may need to access (e.g. Primary Care, Vincent dePaul, Community Welfare Officer, Money Advice Bureau, MABS etc.)
- ✓ Build links with Tusla Social Work, Tusla Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) and local Tusla Child and Family Network Coordinators.
- ✓ Help families access additional supports (e.g. Meitheal, Primary Care)
- ✓ EAL Families to be prioritised for English language support.
- ✓ Families of children with SEN to be prioritised for support groups/ personal development.

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- ✓ Families who are struggling with transition by October should be prioritised for additional support, where possible, via care teams. Their progress should be reviewed again by January and additional interventions put in place, where appropriate.
- ✓ Families who are still struggling with transition by January may need additional support

#### **Children with Special Educational Needs**

- ✓ Information about children with special educational needs will go to schools in March, as outlined by the NCSE. Mo Scéal will be passed on to schools at a later date and provides a snap shot in time of the child's learning and development using a strengths-based approach. It doesn't include any reports that a child may have. They will have gone earlier.

## **5. Useful Resources/ Readings**

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

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

NALA Plain English: [www.simplyput.ie](http://www.simplyput.ie)

Tip sheet helping young children develop positive dispositions:

<http://aistearsiolta.ie/en/Curriculum-Foundations/Element-3-Themes-of-Aistear-/Helping-young-children-to-develop-positive-learning-dispositions-3-6-years-.pdf>

ABC Start Right (2018). *Ambitions for Transitions: A guide to support every child's progression from early years services to primary school*. Available online at:

<http://www.limerickchildcare.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Ambitions-for-Transitions-A-Guide-to-Support-Every-Childs-Progression-from-Early-Years-Services-to-Primary-School.pdf>

Department of Education and Skills (2017). *DEIS Plan 2017*.

<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/DEIS-Plan-2017.pdf>

Government of Ireland (2018). *First 5: A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028*.

<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/DEIS-Plan-2017.pdf>

Government of Ireland (2014). *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, 2014-2020*.

[https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/cypp\\_framework/BetterOutcomesBetterFutureReport.pdf](https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/cypp_framework/BetterOutcomesBetterFutureReport.pdf)

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O’Kane, M. & Hayes, N. (2006). The transition to school in Ireland: Views of preschool and primary school teachers. *International Journal of Transitions in Childhood*, 2, pp.4-16.

Smyth, E. (2018). The transition to primary education: Insights from Growing Up in Ireland study. *ESRI & National Council for Curriculum and Assessment*.  
<https://doi.org/10.26504/bkmnext360>

Stephen, C. & Cope, P. (2003). An inclusive perspective on transition to primary school. *European Educational Research Journal*, 2 (2), pp. 262-276.

## **6. Recommended Reading List for Families**

1. **Starting School** by Roderick Hunt & Annemarie Young
2. **Going to School** by Grace Jones
3. **Starting School** by Janet & Allan Ahlberg
4. **Do I have to go to school? A first look at starting school** by Pat Thomas
5. **Going to School: Usborne First Experiences** by Anne Civardi
6. **Owl Babies** by Martin Waddell (deals with separation anxiety)
7. **Tony Goes to School** by Valerie Sheehan (for parents and teachers of children who see the world differently)

## **7. To Conclude**

*‘We started contacting parents / playschools two years ago and this has made a huge difference in the transition from preschools to primary. The information gleaned and contact made can help children and parents to be more relaxed coming into the school and the school staff can plan for any challenges that may be presented’.*

*HSCL Coordinator*

*‘Starting well is of utmost importance – positive, supportive and encouraging interaction with families at an early stage sets a good foundation for future relationships between home and school’.*

*HSCL Coordinator*