

TRANSITION FROM PRIMARY TO POST-PRIMARY: A GUIDE FOR PARENTS



A MESSAGE FROM FOLENS

We've been working in education for over 60 years, constantly listening and adapting to the ever-changing needs of teachers and children. Through our Folens Giving programme, we support initiatives that make a difference in the lives of school children, their teachers and their parents.

From our own research, we understand that children today need more support than ever when making the big transition from primary to secondary school. This is why we commissioned this information guide to help parents prepare their children for the next step in their education. We updated the guide this year to take into account all the changes that Covid-19 has brought with it.

About the Author

Graham Richmond is a secondary school teacher, counsellor and sports coach in East Glendalough School. With over 20 years' experience working in education, he is acutely aware of the difficulties and challenges many students face during the transition from primary to secondary school. Graham also gives talks to parents, across Dublin and Wicklow, providing them with information and guidance on how best to support their children during this transition.

STAY IN TOUCH

Think back to your child's first day in primary school. Chances are, it was an exciting time for everyone, even if there were nerves involved. There was so much new information to take in and a whole new routine to grapple with. In many ways, the move from primary to post-primary is similar. On the surface, of course, things look different. And in many ways, there is a world of difference between your child on Day 1 of primary school and Day 1 of post-primary school. But in other ways, things have not changed at all. It's still really important to ask your child how their day was – and it's still really important to listen for their answer. Your child's answer might be contained in what they say – or what they don't say. But *you* are still the person who knows your child better than anyone. So stay interested, stay engaged and stay in touch.



BE POSITIVE, NOT PUSHY!

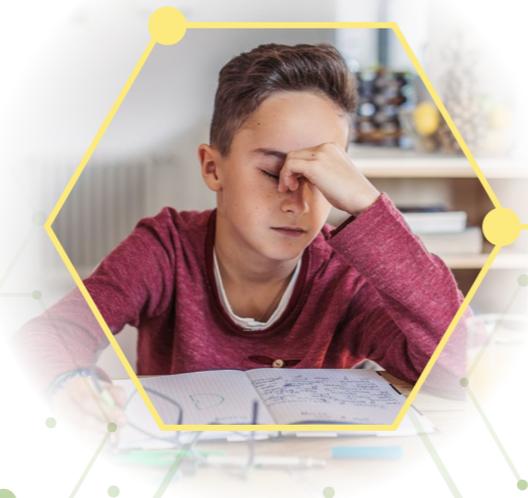
'Why didn't you get an A?'

Some of us grew up hearing questions like these from our parents. Of course, we know now that it's not the best approach. Most people, regardless of age, respond best to a consistent and positive tone. You want the best for your child so, of course, you want to steer them in the right direction. But it's important to steer, rather than push. It's best not to fixate on the results of every single exam. There are times as parents when we need to step back in order to gain perspective.

Remember that every young person makes their own journey through school. It's our job as parents to be positive role models and to make space for each child's unique journey. Maybe you loved studying *Gaeilge* in school but your child struggles with the subject. Maybe you hated Science but it's clearly your child's strongest subject. Help your child to understand that the most important thing is to have a good overall attitude to education. Explain that some subjects will



come easily to them, and some will need a bit of extra work. Remind your child that the important thing is to seek out support whenever they need it, because all learning is valuable in the end.



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BE PREDICTABLE – IN A GOOD WAY!

All children respond well to routine. By the time your child is leaving primary school, day-to-day life can feel very settled and comfortable. Then post-primary school comes along and a whole new world has to be navigated. Routine will help you here. Structure the day so that things are predictable. It helps children a lot when they know what time of day they're expected to wake up, eat, sleep, and so on. Of course, the routine will be shaken up from time to time. We all lead busy lives and there will always be unforeseen events. However, if the core routine is solid at home, this helps your child to take things in their stride during the school day.

The early days at post-primary school will probably feel like a shock to the system for your child. Overnight, they are faced with a new school, new building, new teachers, new friends, new books and new subjects. Before your child enters this world, ensure they are at least somewhat familiar with the new environment. If your child's first day as a First Year is the first time they know anything about the school ... then that's too many firsts! If you and your child cannot visit the school in advance of the first day, ask if a virtual tour or other online resources are available so that your child can see the location and basic layout of the school in advance.



Think about how your child will travel to school too. Choose the best and safest option for your child and discuss this with them in advance. Whether you travel by car, bike, bus or on foot, your child needs to know how, when and where they will travel to school.



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HELP THEM FIND THEIR FEET

Explain to your child that this transition won't just be a change of location, it will be a different environment too. Their new school will be full of teenagers of every age and size. Your child used to be one of the 'older students' in primary school and they probably thought the Junior Infants pupils were really sweet. In this new environment, your child is one of the 'little ones'. They need to be prepared for this. Tell them not to be afraid of the size of the Sixth Years. Remind your child that there is space for everyone in this new environment.

If your child knows something about their new environment in advance, this makes it easier for them to figure out *what* to do once they're in there. It's important to give your child this head start, since the new timetable in particular can be a source of stress. The whole idea of a strict timetable can feel odd at the start of First Year. In primary school, your child may have had all their classes in a single classroom. In post-primary, your child may change groups/locations throughout the day. Prepare your child for this, as it can take some getting used to. When your child receives their timetable, look over it together at home. Ask your child to walk you through it. As they explain their timetable to you, this will help them to form a clearer picture in their own minds. If it's obvious that your child is confused by any item on their timetable, contact the school. Teachers are there to help. They will quickly answer any queries to help your child settle into the new routine.



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THINK AHEAD

Once the timetable is clear, your child can think about what books and materials are needed each day. This can be a challenge, but your child learns valuable life skills here. It's an opportunity for them to learn how to plan, organise and be responsible for their belongings.

Depending on your school, students could have a new set of books for each subject or a new tablet to decipher. Either way, they will have different sets of notes or copies for different subjects. Many students find it helpful to have a separate folder dedicated to each subject. The folders can be labelled and colour coded. Even if your child keeps all their notes on a tablet, they will need a system so that they can file and locate things easily.

If your school uses lockers, help your child to manage that. If the locker has a built-in lock or code, make sure your child knows how to use it. If you need to buy a lock for your child's new locker, choose one that is secure but easy to use. Remember that all these little things can make the difference when it comes to your child having a positive experience in the first few days at their new school.



Some students find it helpful to have a duplicate set of books at home, but this is not necessary. Many textbooks come with a free ebook version. This is a wonderful resource for your child so, at the start of the year, ensure you can access these ebooks at home. This means that if your child forgets to bring home a textbook, they can go online to access the ebook version to do their homework.



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LIGHTEN THE LOAD

Your child's schoolbag can be a visual indicator of how your child is getting on in their new school. An empty bag might be a sign that your child is disengaged or that they are not organised enough. A heavy bag might mean that your child has a fear of forgetting something. Some children will want to bring everything with them every day. Remind your child that it's better to think ahead and bring only the things that are needed on any particular day.

One study showed that the average First Year's schoolbag weighs up to 10kg by Friday afternoon. This is too much pressure on a growing body! Ensure that your child does not strain themselves. Show them how to plan ahead, especially in the early weeks. Ask your child if you can go through their schoolbag together so that you can figure out what they need (or don't need) to bring.



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WATCH THE HOMEWORK

This is another area where it pays to plan ahead. Your child may not have every subject every day, so it's important to be organised. Encourage your child to do the homework on the day it is set – otherwise, it can build up or be forgotten. Ask your child to show you their homework journal from time to time. Make sure that your child has a clear way of recording the homework tasks their teachers give them.

Some teachers set homework from online sources or apps. You need to be aware of this. Ask your child to give you a demo of how they access this information. You can contact your school at any time to ask how and why your child is accessing online material or apps. It's vital for all of us – parents and teachers – to be vigilant about children's safety online.

Encourage routine when it comes to homework. It is ideal if your child has a set place where they do homework, e.g. the kitchen table or a desk in their bedroom.



On average, a First Year will have up to two hours' homework every night. Be a conscious observer. Keep a close eye on your child's homework and form your opinion over time. If you are worried that your child is not doing enough, track their homework journal and be firm with them. On the other hand, if your child is being pushed too hard, try to identify where the problem areas are and talk with your school. Teachers understand that balance is important: they will want to see students working well, and they also understand that every student needs to be able to switch off too.

EMBRACE THE CHANGE

In school, your child was part of one class that had all its lessons in one room with one teacher. In post-primary, there could be days when your child greets a new teacher every 40 minutes. Because of this, it can take longer for post-primary teachers and students to get to know one another. Each teacher is different and has their own style and methods. Ask your child how they're getting along with their new teachers. Listen carefully to your child and always keep an open mind and a balanced point of view.

Remember that teaching methods have changed enormously in recent decades. If you don't understand why a teacher is doing something, talk with your school. Good teachers know what they're doing and why – and they will be happy to see you taking an interest in your child's education.



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EAT WELL

Every young adult will have a more positive post-primary experience if they are in good health. There is so much that we can do as parents to help our children stay well. A healthy, balanced diet is a huge step in the right direction. Steer your child away from junk food and takeaways. Focus on fresh, simple foods. You don't need to be a *MasterChef* contender! Just ensure your child eats regular meals that include plenty of fruit, vegetables and complex carbohydrates.

SLEEP WELL

Many parents notice that their child sleeps more once they reach post-primary age. This is not a cause for alarm. Your child is being challenged constantly and needs plenty of rest to recharge their batteries. Sleep offers great healing, so provide your child with an environment that promotes sleep. Remind your child that their bed is a place for sleeping – not homework or surfing the internet! Regular, uninterrupted sleep is vital for young minds and bodies.



Nobody needs to have a smartphone in their bedroom. The phone opens up a different world that never sleeps. Even a tiny beep or vibration can interrupt sleep and draw our attention to a device. And there is no escaping the role played by technology in bullying. One way to reduce the risk of online bullying is to encourage your child to turn off their phone!

MOVE MORE

Physical exercise is another way you can promote regular sleep. In fact, the benefits of regular exercise and fresh air cannot be overstated. Nowadays, it is too easy for all of us to spend our entire day indoors. As parents, it's up to us to set a good example. So find a way to get outside and to get moving. Every bit of physical activity counts – even if it's just a short walk. Sport is to be encouraged, but remember that it doesn't have to be competitive to bring health benefits. If your child really isn't sporty, encourage them to be involved in other activities. They could do yoga or take up dance lessons. The important thing is to be active and to spend time with friends.

KEEP IT REAL

As modern parents, we need to help our children understand what friendship is. Technology has improved our lives, but it has also brought challenges. One of the biggest issues facing young people today is being able to distinguish what is real from what is make-believe. Encourage your child to have friendships in real life. Help them to understand that a friend is someone you know, see and talk to.



Young people are naturally curious and inquisitive, so it's likely they will want a smartphone. Remember that, if you give your child a smartphone, you are possibly giving them instant access to content over which you have no control. You can't constantly monitor your child, so you need to educate them about using the internet and social media responsibly. Explain to your child that anything they see on a screen can be real or fake. Encourage them to open their eyes to the real things and real people all around them. This helps pave the way towards psychological wellbeing.

MIND YOURSELVES

As a society, we are learning more all the time about good mental health. We know that a healthy diet, quality sleep and regular exercise are important for staying well. And we can see that psychological health is vital too. A problem shared is a problem halved. Nobody should suffer in silence. If you or your child are having any issues, remember that help is available. Your GP is a great source of advice, as are the counsellors at your school. Confide in the people who can help.

The transition from primary to post-primary is a journey. Inevitably, there will be ups and downs – for your child and for you. We can't predict everything that will happen, but we can prepare ourselves well. Knowledge helps us to meet whatever challenges might lie ahead. If we stay present and keep learning, we will know that we did everything possible for the next generation.



COPING WITH COVID-19

The past year has seen massive changes in how children need to prepare for their move from primary to post-primary school. Below are some tips in key areas that will help you to support your child to make a smooth transition – even during a pandemic!

1. PREPARING FOR EACH SCHOOL DAY

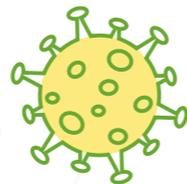
During Covid-19, it has become even more important to think ahead for each school day. In many schools, lockers and storage facilities are no longer used. So, each day, students are expected to bring all the books and materials they need for that day. Your child might need extra help to manage this.

Collaborate with your child to ensure that their timetable is crystal clear – to you and them. Your child could display a copy of their timetable at their homework station, and you could display another copy somewhere prominent in your home, such as on the fridge. This way, you and your child will know which books are needed for any particular day. It can be useful to highlight special items, such as sports gear.

Try to organise things *with* your child, rather than *for* your child. Covid-19 brings many logistical challenges – but it also brings more opportunities for your child to learn the vital skills of planning and organising.

2. MOVING (OR NOT MOVING!) FROM CLASS TO CLASS

Before Covid-19, in many post-primary settings, students moved rooms up to nine times a day. For health and safety reasons, this might no longer happen. If your child is more confined nowadays, encourage them not to become too inactive. Even if your child is not switching rooms, it's a good idea for them to stretch their legs between classes. Being stuck in the same seat for long periods of time can be hard on the body and the mind. Even if your child has several online classes in a row, remind them of the benefits of a little bit of stretching and moving in between those classes.



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3. WEARING MASKS AND WASHING HANDS

Protective masks are part of our 'new normal' and they may well be part of our future. Ensure your child has an ample supply of masks and that they always have a spare one in their schoolbag. For hygiene and safety, encourage your child to use a fresh mask at regular intervals. Model this for your child so that it becomes second nature to them. Help your child to find a mask that fits snugly while also being as comfortable as it can be. With your child, practise putting on and taking off a mask.



Hand hygiene is more important than ever. Model good handwashing techniques with your child and also ensure that they are alert to hand sanitiser stations. Schools will ensure that hand sanitiser is available, but it's a good idea for your child to also have a mini hand sanitiser in their pencil case.

4. SUBMITTING HOMEWORK AND CLASSWORK

For many students, work is now submitted remotely. Ensure that your child and their teachers are communicating well so that everyone understands how best to share work. If your

child prefers to handwrite their work, they can write out their assignments before submitting them online. While this will take extra time, it will help your child to learn the skill of writing drafts to improve their work. It will also provide valuable revision of topics.

5. NAVIGATING ONLINE PLATFORMS

Many schools now use online platforms such as Google Classroom. Ensure that your child knows how to navigate their school's chosen platform. Ask your child to give you a demo of the platform early on. If your child knows exactly how to use the platform, they'll be glad to show off their skills to you! And if there are any teething problems, these will quickly come to light and you can work with your child's teacher to resolve any issues.

Many schools now organise a dedicated email account for each child. Ask your child to log in and show you an example of the kinds of emails they exchange at school. This will be a gentle reminder to your child that the school email account is for schoolwork only – it is a place for serious emails that relate to homework or classwork.



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6. TRAVELLING TO AND FROM SCHOOL

Transport methods have changed a lot during the Covid-19 pandemic, and this has brought stress for students. Children may have previously shared lifts to school, and this may not be advisable now. Your child might be used to getting the bus, and now they need to sit far apart from other children. Perhaps your child walks to school and, while they can still do that, they now need to walk in pairs or very small groups. Explain to your child that, while all this can feel very isolating, it is for the greater good of reducing infection rates. When it comes to Covid-19, we're all in this together and we need to make smart choices to protect ourselves and other people.

7. ACCESSING EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

When starting post-primary school, it can be hugely beneficial for children to get involved in different areas of school life. During the pandemic, many activities have been curtailed, but some are still available in limited capacities. Find out which activities are still available in your school and encourage your child to get involved in anything that interests them. There is more to school than classwork and homework.



Since many sporting activities have been curtailed, exercise is more important than ever. With the increase in online learning, children are now exposed to more screen time, and this can cause havoc with sleep patterns. Help your child to find extra-curricular activities that will take their bodies and minds away from screens and schoolwork for at least a little while every day.

8. MEETING NEW CLASSMATES

In any new school, your child will meet children that they have not met before. While physical distancing is vital during Covid-19, try to find ways for your child to interact with their new friends. Maybe children could video chat from time to time so that they can see the faces behind the masks! If it's safe to do so, organise outdoor socialising where children are physically distant enough that they do not need to wear masks. Listen carefully to public health advice about what is safe and what is not – and try to find creative ways for your child to socialise safely.

9. MANAGING YOUR CHILD'S ACCESS TO NEWS

Unfiltered access to news (and hearsay) can have a negative effect on your child's mental wellbeing.



You can play a huge role in ensuring that your child is well informed and that they do not access inaccurate information that could upset them. Stick to reliable sources of news.

Avoid making speculations, especially when your child is within earshot. We all have worries about Covid-19 and these worries need to be managed. Try to avoid using the language of a catastrophe! Even the word 'lockdown' can send many children into a spiral of worry.

Regularly talk through the facts with your child. Acknowledge that we all need to be vigilant and that this is a very difficult time. But remind your child that it will pass eventually, and there is so much we can do to help the situation. We need to keep our ears open to the best advice from the scientists and the experts who will help us to navigate safely through this period.



10. DEALING WITH THE FEELINGS

Your young adult is at a crucial stage in their development. Their lives have been stalled somewhat by a situation beyond their control. At a stage when they should be having new experiences and trying new things, it feels like life has been put on pause.

Covid-19 has changed daily life for young adults all around the world. There is no doubt that this impacts on their maturity and development. As parents, it's best for us to forget about how we thought things *would* be or *should* be at this stage. We need to deal in the present. Let's meet our children where they are right *now*.

As the situation with Covid-19 continues to evolve, keep the communication lines open, no matter what. If your child feels frustrated or anxious or bored, allow them to express that. All these feelings are a normal response to a difficult situation.

Remind your child that they – and you – are already coping much better than you probably give yourselves credit for. So, hang in there, knowing that this storm will eventually pass. We have so much to look forward to in the future.



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