An Chomhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta
National Council for Special Education

Moving from Primary to Post-Primary School

Guidelines for parents and guardians of students with special educational needs

National Council for Special Education (NCSE) 2023

Originally published in 2016: First revision 2023

We use the word ‘parent’ to include guardians of children.
This document uses gender inclusive language.

Contents

Introduction 2

Steps in planning the move to post-primary school 3

Step 1: Gather information 4

Step 2: Enrol in a school 10

Step 3: Plan with the school 12

Step 4: Prepare for change 22

Further Information 29

Useful contacts 32

Introduction

All young people must manage changes in their lives. One change is the move from primary to post-primary school.

This guide gives information to help parents and students with special educational needs move on successfully.

We hope this helps reduce the worry that some students and parents feel at this time. The guide also shows examples of good practice.

Steps in planning the move to post-primary school

There are several steps needed to plan for moving into post-primary school. We give information and advice about each step in the sections that follow.

Step 1: Gather information

Step 2: Enrol in a school

Step 3: Plan with the school

Step 4: Prepare for change

Step 1: Gather information

Prepare early

Make sure to prepare early and gather enough information. This is the key to planning a successful move to post-primary school.

Types of schools

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 schools
- community and comprehensive schools
- Education and Training Board schools (ETBs)

Special schools also enrol students of post-primary age.

In most cases, parents choose a mainstream post-primary school for their child. In these schools, students with special educational needs are supported by subject teachers and special education teachers. These teachers give extra help to students with learning needs.

Schools use a framework called the Continuum of Support to help identify and support the needs of all children including those with Special Educational needs.

In addition to the subject teachers and special education teachers (SETs), schools also have Special Needs Assistants (SNAs). They support students with significant care needs who are unable to manage their own care needs independently.

It is important to note that access to special education teaching and SNA support is based on needs and not a diagnosis. This means you no longer need a diagnosis to get the support of a SNA or special education teacher.

School transport

School transport is available for students with special educational needs who:

- cannot use the transport in place
- attend the nearest school or special class that can meet their special education needs

Inclusive education

We, in the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), think it is best that students with special educational needs are educated in a mainstream school with children their own age. However, we advise this only when it is consistent with the student's best interests and the interest of the other students.

Deciding on the best school for your child

Some students with more complex needs may be better placed in a more specialist school setting. For example, a special class in a mainstream post-primary school or in a separate special school.

A decision on what setting is best for your child will depend on things like your child's strengths and needs and their preferences. Other factors must also be considered.

Your child's voice at the centre of decision making

In deciding anything about school, the views of your child are more important than anyone else's. You should do everything you can to find out what their wishes, understanding and preferences are in relation to any school decisions.

Consider all options and discuss things with relevant professionals. Then you can speak with your child and decide together about what type of post-primary school they will attend. This means deciding if they will attend:

- mainstream school
- a special class in a mainstream school
- a special school

It is important for parents to consider all the post-primary options available for their child.

Support from professionals

Your child's primary school principal or teacher will be able to advise and assist you.

Advice from other professionals that are involved with your child may be able to assist you. They may include:

- psychologists
- physiotherapists
- speech and language therapists
- occupational therapists

If your child is deaf or hard of hearing; or is blind or vision impaired, he/she may be linked with a visiting teacher who will be able to help you to prepare your child for moving school.

You can also contact your local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) for information about services available for your child including:

- placements available in your area
- educational supports

SENOs provide a direct service to the parents of young people with special educational needs and to schools in their area.

Visit schools

To get a sense of a school, we advise parents to attend:

- open days
- parents' evenings
- induction events

Your son or daughter may accompany you to these evenings. This will give them time to prepare for changing to another school.

Some young people prefer to arrange a school visit at a separate time because they would feel overwhelmed by large groups or the sounds and smells of open days or evenings.

It is important to support your child so they can get a good first impression of a school.

As parents of a child with special educational needs, you should expect the following 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.

We in the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) hold information meetings for parents in the year before their child starts school.

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. What is the deadline for applications?
3. How will the school support my child?
4. As a parent, how can I help the school to support my child?
5. How will my child be included in school or class activities with other students?
6. How will the school manage my child's medication during school hours?
7. How will my child access assistive technology, if required?
8. What forms of home-school communication will be available?
9. Who in the school should I contact if my child is having difficulty?
10. Will special school transport be available for my child?

Step 2: Enrol in a school

Applying for a place

When you have decided on the school or schools you and your child prefer, you need to apply in writing for a place. All schools publish Admission Notices on their website before the new school year, typically in the autumn. Admissions Notices give:

- the deadline
- the procedures
- the number of places being offered in the next academic year

Application date

When you have decided which school you prefer, make sure to apply before the school's closing date for enrolment.

Getting support

Some parents can sometimes have difficulty finding a place for their child in a local post-primary school. This can happen when schools have more students wanting to enrol than there are places available. Sometimes, there may be no 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 Tusla Educational Support Service (TESS). Contact details for TESS are available on the Tusla website on the Get in Touch section.

As your child has special educational needs, you can also contact your local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) for help. Their contact details are available on the NCSE under the SENO Contact Information. We advise you to make contact with the SENO as early as possible.

Step 3: Plan with the school

Planning and preparation

Once your child has a confirmed school place, careful planning and preparation will make it easier for students with special educational needs to move successfully from primary to post-primary school.

Parents, primary and post-primary schools all have an important part to play. For students with complex special educational needs, planning should start two to three years before they move. Ideally, when they are in 4th or 5th class of primary school.

Transition plan

Many young people with special educational needs need a transition plan to help them transfer to post-primary school. Transition planning will involve you and your child, as well as relevant teachers from their primary and post-primary schools.

In some cases it may be helpful if other professionals who know your child are also involved, such as

- psychologists
- health professionals involved with your child
- the local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO)

If your child needs a more specialised placement, like a special class or special school, an updated psychological report may be required by the school.

Once your child is enrolled, the school will send this to the SENO so that the NCSE can provide resources to the school.

Link between schools

Most post-primary schools will have links with 'feeder primary schools'. The young people from feeder primary schools typically attend particular post-primary schools. This makes it easier to transfer with your permission.

Usually, there is contact between the 6th class teacher or special education teacher or both, and the receiving post-primary school. This helps to connect what was taught in primary and the starting point in certain subjects in post-primary.

It is important to plan your child's move by working together with the schools.

Planning meetings

Schools often hold a planning meeting before students with more complex special educational needs start school. This is good practice. The planning meeting can include:

- your child, (where possible)
- you, the parent
- the school principal
- the class teacher
- the year head
- other professionals who were involved with your child before they started school.

While your child is moving, National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologists may advise the school. They may discuss possible transition programmes, strategies and other interventions to support your child during their move from primary to post-primary school.

At this planning meeting, you can let the school know about your expectations (and those of your child) for post-primary education. You can also talk about any particular worries your child has about the move.

Open communication with the school can help to address concerns quickly before they have an impact on your child's experience of school.

Sharing information

It is important to share as much information as possible about your child's needs once your child's school place is confirmed. This helps the school to plan supports. The type of information you share may include relevant professional reports, for example reports written by:

- psychologists
- speech and language therapists
- occupational therapists

Sharing information can help to make sure that the school is aware of your child's strengths, abilities and needs.

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

School staff may find it helpful to talk to other professionals

The school staff may find it helpful to consult with relevant professionals who know your child. These professionals may include:

- visiting teachers for young people who are blind or vision impaired
- visiting teachers for young people who are deaf or hard of hearing
- psychologists
- speech and language therapists
- occupational therapists
- physiotherapists

Where a child has a serious medical condition, the post-primary school may wish to consult with your doctor.

Planning for students with complex special educational needs moving from primary to post-primary should begin at least two years before they are due to start post-primary.

The school will ask you for 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 identify who in the new setting will be your contact person. You may also want to know which staff will have access to any confidential information about your child.

Student Support Plan

All this information will help the post-primary school to develop a Student Support Plan for your child. Many different types of plans can be support plans for example:

- a care plan
- an individual learning profile
- an individualised educational plan
- a behavioural plan

As appropriate, a Student Support Plan may include information on your child's strengths, preferences and needs such as:

- Learning
- Social and communication
- Care
- Sensory
- Physical
- Life skills and independence skills

Your child's support plan may include information about their strengths, likes/dislikes, learning needs, and their social and communication needs.

Care needs

It may also detail their care needs focusing on activities of daily living (ADL), for example:

- dressing
- toileting
- mobility
- physical transfers
- medication needs

Sensory and regulation needs

The plan can include information about things like a child's sensitivity to things like:

- noise
- textures
- lights

The plan can include information about your child's sensory likes and dislikes. This information can help the new school to support your child's regulation and overall wellbeing.

Physical needs

The plan can include information about any needed environmental adaptations like:

- adaptations to the school building
- changing the layout of rooms
- adapted seating
- other specialised equipment

If necessary, occupational therapists and physiotherapists may be consulted about adaptations to the environment.

Information in your child's support plan

This plan will outline everyone's roles and who your point of contact is if you have any questions or concerns. It is good to agree a joint approach to support your child. The school should tell you how it will share relevant information from professional reports with teachers.

School will use information to apply for supports

Schools use the information and professional reports to apply to us for additional supports for your child, where necessary. They will ask for your permission (consent) before they do this.

Such additional supports can be for things like:

- transport
- assistive technology

Schools also submit relevant applications to the Department of Education for necessary adaptations to school buildings, specialist equipment and so on. Where required, the school principal will need copies of professional reports to make these applications.

Education Passport

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.

Find more information about the Education Passport on the NCCA website.

Access to supports

Additional supports that your child receives in primary school do not automatically transfer to post-primary school. This is because a young person's needs change over time and they may need more or less support to manage in a post-primary school.

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

- sending reports to the school in advance
- sharing your own knowledge and experience of your child

As a parent, you can help the post-primary school to plan by arranging to have your child's professional reports sent to the post-primary school in advance. This will make sure that the necessary supports can be in place before your child starts school.

It is really useful if you share your own knowledge and experience of your child's strengths, abilities and needs and what works best in helping your child to learn. This will help staff in the new school to plan for your child.

Step 4: Prepare 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. Some have worries about this change in their lives. This is a natural reaction that all young people can experience.

Research has identified that some of the worries that young people have expressed, are around:

- security
- getting to know people
- getting to know the new environment
- fitting in
- bullying
- curriculum
- lack of support

Student worries

Some of the worries students have can include:

Fear of loss

- Losing the security of their primary school, their primary school teachers and the friendships they have there
- Losing a sense of social standing and fear they will be bullied – they will go from being the oldest in primary school, to being the youngest in post-primary

Fitting in with peers

- Making new friends
- Learning to fit in among new students of their own age and with older students

About education

- Following new rules
- Getting to know their post-primary teachers and teachers understanding their needs
- Keeping up with the school curriculum
- Not having support

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

Preparing your child for the transition

The primary school class teacher usually prepares all 6th class students for the transition.

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 them.

Remember that all children need to relax and enjoy their summer holiday before starting in the new school.

Here are some ideas that might help you to prepare your child to successfully move on 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, listen, answer

Talk to your child and listen to their views and concerns. Answer any questions they may have about the planned move.

Go to an open day a few years in advance

Go to open days or induction days organised by the post-primary school. Some parents of students with special educational needs find it helps to attend open days two or three years before their child's transfer to post-primary. You may wish to check with the post-primary school if you intend to do this.

School assessments

It is common for post-primary schools to hold a school assessment day for their students before they start in their new school. This day may include meeting teachers and getting familiar with the building. It is important that students with special educational needs are included and involved in these days.

We advise you to speak to the school before to find out if this would be meaningful and necessary for your child. Your child may need more supports to engage in this process. If so, it would be useful to discuss this in advance with the school.

Some students worry about these assessments. It is important to reassure them and explain that the assessments help the school learn more about the supports your child will need.

Visits and welcome days before your child starts

Some post-primary schools organise visits for students with special educational needs during their final summer term before moving to post primary.

Some schools offer activities or welcome days for incoming first years before the school term begins. If these options are available, you should encourage your child to attend. These visits can help students to become more familiar with their new school while 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 how the school runs. This includes things like the:

- school bell
- location of lockers
- noise and movement when classes end
- break times

Research the rooms and layout

If you think it would help your child, you could ask the school for permission to take photos or a video of the building. You can use these photos or videos to support and prepare your child for this change. Some schools provide transition booklets, video-recordings or have photos on their school's website. These can be very helpful for students who need visual supports to ease the transition.

Communication passport

Some parents help their children to produce a communication passport. It introduces the student and:

- identifies their interests, wishes and preferences
- explains how the student learns
- explains what they enjoy
- explains what they find easy or struggle with in a learning environment

It may sometimes outline your child's sensory profile if this is relevant to your child. A communication passport can be very useful for a student with limited communication skills or for students who are non-verbal.

Involve your child in the preparation

Involve your child in buying things like schoolbooks, uniform, and physical education (PE) gear.

Talk to your child about:

- the length of the school day
- how a timetable works
- how they are going to travel to school

Talk regularly during the summer holidays about the:

- new school rules
- physical education (PE) arrangements
- canteen
- lunch breaks

Review the video and photographs that you have gathered and encourage your child to share this information with family members.

Prepare for the impact on you

It is important for parents to prepare themselves for the change. Your confidence in the move will reassure your child and help them to settle down and feel comfortable in their new school. This can take time and your child will need your support and patience.

For more information, watch these videos on the NCSE YouTube channel

- Transitioning to Post Primary-Information for parents
- Supporting your Child to Transition to Post Primary School

Further information

Many resources are available to support students moving from primary to post-primary school.

National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) has produced three very useful documents on this transition process.

The documents are:

- A Transfer Profile. Parents and teachers can use this to share information between primary and post-primary schools.
- An Information and Support Pack. This can be used for the transfer of information to post-primary school for parents and teachers
- Sample transfer programmes and workbooks. These can be used by teachers to prepare students for the move.

Where to find them

The three documents are all available on gov.ie under National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).

National Parents Council

The National Parents Council (Post Primary) has additional resources on their website under the From Primary to Post Primary section.

National Council of Special Education

The NCSE has developed a two-part video series on Starting Post Primary School. It includes useful information on:

- educational options
- enrolling in a school
- planning
- strategies to help your child prepare for the move

Support videos

You can find useful videos on the NCSE YouTube channel:

- Transitioning to Post Primary – Information for Parents
- Supporting your Child to Transition to Post Primary School
- Getting Extra Help in Mainstream Schools

Information is available for parents to help students move from 6th class to post-primary school.

You can get more information in our publication:

- Information Booklet for Parents of Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs

We have 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 booklets and leaflets are available from your local SENO or on the NCSE website under Information Booklets & Pamphlets for Parents.

Useful contacts

NCSE Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO)	ncse.ie/seno-contact-information
Health Centre	www.hse.ie
Department of Education	https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-education/
National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)	https://www.gov.ie/en/service/5ef45c-neps/
National Parents Council	www.npc.ie
Tusla	www.tusla.ie
Visiting Teacher Service (for children who are blind or vision impaired; or deaf or hard of hearing)	ncse.ie/visiting-teacher-support

Plain English
Approved by NALA