

# Supporting the transition to primary school in 2020 (Part 2)

Mary Daly, NCCA



The approach of September usually brings the transition of children into junior infants to the forefront of the minds of people all over the country as we watch snippets on the RTE news of parents and children

navigating that first day at 'big school'. This year the transition may be more of a challenge for many children as they have been unable to benefit from all the different preparation activities preschools normally undertake due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nor have children been able to have the usual orientation visits to their new school to see their classroom and meet their teacher, so it's all a bit unfamiliar and for some a bit daunting. In this second article, I am asking for your help again. This time I'm asking you to share some practical ideas with the parents in your setting who have a child starting primary school. I'm also asking you to encourage them to complete the Mo Scéal parent form. This will hopefully help ease the transition for all involved.

## Supporting transitions is a shared responsibility

Supporting the transition to primary school is a shared responsibility between all involved - the child, family, preschool and school. There is now a focus on schools being ready for the cohort of children coming into them rather than an onus on the child to be ready. Parents play a vital role in helping children with this transition to school and in 2020, due to our changed circumstances, they have played a particularly important (though sometimes



very stressful) role in supporting children's learning and development. To help parents share important information with their child's new teacher, the *Mo Scéal* template (<https://ncca.ie/en/early-childhood/mo-sceal>) was specially adapted as part of the Government's Let's Get ready for school initiative (<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/1e8a3-lets-get-ready/>) where 70,000 transition packs were distributed to parents of children who are starting primary school this Autumn.



## Mo Scéal moving from preschool to primary school 2020 parent form

*Mo Scéal* means 'My story' and the adapted form helps parents to tell the child's story – their interests, strengths and challenges along with space for ideas for the teacher that might help the child settle into junior infants. It is also important for parents to make the school aware of any significant family events that happened during the pandemic period which may be affecting the child, for example, separations due to quarantining, death

of a grandparent etc. These nuggets of information will be invaluable to teachers in helping to support children. Could I ask you to remind parents to encourage and support children to draw on the card that is included in the pack too so that the child's voice can be heard as they make the move to school? There is no requirement for parents to complete this form but if they do, they can give it to the teacher on the first day of term. I know that settings around the country facilitated the distribution of these packs to parents so could I ask you now to remind parents about the contents of them?



There are lots of other activities that parents can do in the final weeks of August to help children feel more comfortable about starting school and here are a few of them.

### **Meeting up with other children who will be starting school**

Encourage parents to organise play dates/virtual get togethers between their child and other children who will be attending the same school. We all know it's nice to see a familiar face when you get to a strange place and it's no different for children.

### **Learning about what school will be like**

It is natural for children to be curious about starting school and normally a lot of conversations and learning would have happened about this in preschool. This year it is important that parents provide

time and space to chat to their child about starting junior infants. You might encourage parents to:

- Read and discuss books about starting school. The local library or other family members and friends may have books about school which parents can borrow. There are a host of these available in English, Irish and in a variety of other languages. Encourage parents to talk about what this experience is like for the children in the story. Parents could also point out the similarities and differences between preschool and school – still being able to play, to enjoy being with friends, to have fun in the playground, but that it may be a larger building, longer day, they may have to wear a uniform. There may be boys' and girls' toilets like when you go shopping and there will be lots of hand washing!
- Provide opportunities for their child to play school before they start and during the first term. They could have a box at home with items such as threading beads, jigsaws, picture and nursery rhyme books, pencil case (with pencils, eraser, sharpener), blank sheets of paper, scissors, ruler, sticky tape, school bag, copies, folders with fasteners, lunch box, water bottle. Older siblings might like to join in the play too and they will be able to help children understand more about what school will be like. Observing the play will help parents gain insights into their child's experiences at school.



We have a [tip sheet](#) with links to resources to help support children's learning and development in preparation for starting school and it might be useful to share this with parents.



**Last but not least – be positive!**

It's very important to remind parents to talk about the transition to school in a positive light so that their child can feel excited about the opportunities that primary school will bring. If parents are feeling a little apprehensive, it is important not to pass this feeling on to the child. Instead, they need to reassure the child if he/she is worried and to explain that we all feel a bit nervous trying out new things and even though it may take a while to settle in, it is also an exciting time and is part of growing up. Stay safe and a big thank you from the NCCA for all you have done to support the preschool class of 2020 – a year never to be forgotten!

If you would like to learn more about NCCA resources please go to [Mó Sceal](#) or to the [Aistear Síolta Practice Guide](#)

You can also contact me at [mary.daly@ncca.ie](mailto:mary.daly@ncca.ie)