

## **Title: Most children settle in well to primary school**

### ***Subtitle: Report looks at ways to help children who face greater challenges***

The vast majority of five year olds are positive about school, look forward to going to school and say good things about school according to a new ESRI study, commissioned by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. The study uses *Growing Up in Ireland* data to examine how 9,000 children adjusted to primary school. It did this by examining their vocabulary skills; their early literacy and numeracy skills; their attitudes to school, their relationships with teachers, and their socio-emotional skills, which include being able to concentrate in class, communicate their needs and to take turns/share with other children. The report also suggests a number of ways to help all children settle in well to primary school.

The research found that only a small proportion (4-5 per cent) of children often complain or are upset about school. However, the study showed that children start school with different skills and capacities and some children face greater challenges.

The largest skills gap, both academic and socio-emotional, is between children with disabilities or special educational needs and their peers. In addition, boys have lower vocabulary test scores and teachers report that boys are more likely than girls to have poorer literacy skills, negative attitudes towards school and greater socio-emotional difficulties. Children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds have more negative attitudes towards school, more socio-emotional difficulties and poorer literacy and numeracy skills than those from other backgrounds.

These findings indicate a need to develop supports for children to enhance the transition to primary education. The study suggests a number of ways to help children experience a positive transition to primary school.

### **What could help children to adjust?**

Supporting teachers to build stronger relationships with all groups of children and to develop a positive classroom climate could help ease children's adjustment difficulties.

At present, primary school teachers receive little information about a child's skills and challenges when they start school. This could be resolved by developing templates to transfer information between preschool staff and primary school teachers to provide greater continuity of learning for children.

Increasing play-based activities could promote learning and engagement among young children. Across most schools there is a decline in play-based learning in senior infants. Additionally, junior infants pupils in multi-grade classes experience less play-based learning as teachers must balance teaching multiple grades simultaneously.

Promoting home learning activities in the preschool years could help to prepare children for school life. Activities, such as reading and creative play, are associated with a more successful adjustment to school.

Professor Emer Smyth, author of the report commented, "Even at the age of five, important differences are evident in children's wellbeing and skills. It is important to provide early interventions at this stage to enhance children's engagement with school and equip them with the skills they need for the rest of their primary education. This study indicates that building positive

relationships between teachers and students may play a critical role in helping children to overcome transition difficulties”.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment commented, “NCCA is delighted to be involved with this unique study, which provides a window into this fundamentally important phase of each child’s life. It indicates that there is a strong base from which to build enhanced learning experiences through play in the infant classes. The publication in Autumn 2018 of the NCCA’s national reporting templates for the transition from preschool to primary school will respond to the need identified for the transfer of such information. Drawing on *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*, this work will also include examples of good practice from preschools and primary schools in supporting children to make the transition. NCCA’s ongoing work on the redevelopment of the Primary School Curriculum will benefit from the comprehensive picture provided in the report, particularly in terms of the relationship between the preschool years and the early years in primary school.”

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**Notes for editors:**

1. *The Transition to Primary Education: Insights from the Growing Up in Ireland Study* by Emer Smyth will be published at 00:01, 30 May 2018. It will be available to download from the ESRI website.
2. The report is published jointly by the ESRI and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). The NCCA funded the study.