

NCCA — EARLY CHILDHOOD · JUNIOR & SENIOR INFANTS

Naíonáin agus Aistear

Infant Classes — Junior & Senior Infants

Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

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Aistear

The national early childhood curriculum framework for all children from birth to 6 years. 'Aistear' means 'journey' in Irish. It guides learning and development from crèche through to end of Senior Infants.

2

Four themes of Aistear

1. Well-being; 2. Identity and belonging; 3. Communicating; 4. Exploring and thinking. These are integrated — all present in every good early childhood experience.

3

Play-based learning

Aistear places play at the centre of early childhood learning. The infant classroom should have areas for structured and unstructured play. Learning through play is the official approach.

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Junior Infants

The first year of primary school — children are typically 4–5 years old. In many schools, children start aged 4 (earlier than in England where the compulsory age is 5).

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Senior Infants

The second year of primary school — children are typically 5–6 years old. By end of Senior Infants, most children will be reading independently (phonics programme aligned to PLC).

6

Primary Language Curriculum (PLC)

Introduced 2019, the PLC integrates English and Irish language learning from Junior Infants. Skills learned in one language reinforce the other.



classroom environment

What Aistear requires

- **PLAY AREAS:** the infant room should have distinct areas for different types of play — home corner/role play, construction, books, art/creative, investigation, sand/water
- **CONTINUOUS PROVISION:** children should have access to play areas throughout the day, not just at set times
- **OUTDOOR PLAY:** outdoor learning is part of Aistear — not a break from it. Daily outdoor time is required
- **GAEILGE IN THE INFANTS:** Irish is introduced from Junior Infants. Songs, games, and daily routines in Irish build the passive understanding that develops active language
- **LITERACY IN INFANTS:** phonics taught in both English and Irish (PLC approach). Letter recognition, phonological awareness, print awareness
- **ASSESSMENT:** no formal tests in Infant classes. Assessment is through observation, portfolio, and professional judgement
- **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT:** Aistear emphasises partnership with parents — the transition from home to school is acknowledged as a major life event for child and family

