

Choosing a Secondary School in Ireland

Read the article below, adapted from the Irish government's information website www.oasis.gov.ie, and answer the following questions with a partner:

1. How many years, on average, does a student spend in secondary school in Ireland?
2. In what way has the secondary educational system in Ireland improved in recent years?
2. What are the reasons for having a transition year?
3. How many types of Leaving Certificate programmes can a student choose from?
4. Which type of Leaving Certificate programme would suit a student who is not very academically oriented but good at making things?
5. What are the different types of secondary schools available in Ireland?
6. Are there any international secondary schools?
7. What should you do before choosing a secondary school for your child?
8. Why should you not leave choosing a school until the last minute?
9. Would you describe the writer's attitude to secondary education in Ireland as positive or negative?

Secondary School

The Irish secondary school cycle is generally 5 or 6 years long. Children begin their secondary school studies at around the age of 12 and leave around the age of 17 or 18, having taken two state exams in that period.

Whether you are coming to Ireland for the first time or whether you are returning after an absence, you may find the Irish educational system very exam-focused. However a lot of changes and improvements have been made to the educational system over recent years and a far greater range of options is now open to students than in the past

Most schools offer students the option of a Transition Year after they have completed the first three years of secondary education. This allows students to explore other non-academic interests, whether they are social, creative or linked to the world of business. It gives students time to look around and to mature a bit before starting the senior cycle.

The exam system has also been altered. The Intermediate Certificate examination has been replaced by the more flexible Junior Certificate and final year students may now choose from 3 different Leaving Certificate programmes. In addition to the traditional Leaving Certificate they can choose from the Leaving Certificate Vocational programme and the Leaving Certificate

Applied programme both of which focus on more practical and technical abilities.

The secondary school system includes secondary schools, vocational schools, community or comprehensive schools and private secondary schools. The majority of Irish children go to secondary schools, which are privately owned and managed and often run by religious orders, although the teachers in these schools are generally lay staff. The majority of secondary schools are free, but there are fee-paying schools also.

Vocational schools and community or comprehensive schools are all free. These schools usually provide both academic and technical education and they often provide additional further education opportunities for school-leavers and adults in the local community. There are a small number of private international schools in Ireland including a French school, a Japanese school and a German school.

When you are choosing a school you should gather as much information as possible about the schools in which you are interested. Schools can vary considerably in the ways in which they operate and the emphasis they put on areas such as exams, sports, the arts, personal development, religion, social affairs, European languages and practical skills acquisition. Talk to teachers and, if possible, to other parents to see if the school is likely to suit the needs of your child

Some schools have a waiting list. They may favour children who already have a relative in the school or children who come from a particular national school. You will need to investigate the admissions policy of the school in which you are interested and it is possible you may need to plan the enrolment of your child well in advance.

Adapted from: http://oasis.gov.ie/moving_country/moving_to_ireland/

Focus on Vocabulary

Find words or phrases in the text which mean the same as:

1. a much larger choice
2. non-religious employees
3. collect
4. be different, change
5. give preference to
6. find out information about something

Task 1

Your eldest child started sixth class in September and will be going to secondary school next year. You must now choose a suitable secondary school for him or her. Before you do, you would like to speak to the headmasters/ head mistresses of some of the schools in your area or which are easily accessible by public transport. What information would you like to find out?

Work in small groups to prepare a list of questions to ask the headmaster/mistress.

Compare your list with somebody from another group.

Work as a whole class. Appoint a secretary and draw up a list of questions for the whole group.

Are there any important questions you have forgotten?

Choosing A Secondary School

MODULE: Education

LEVEL: R2L and R2U

Time: 2 hours	Focus: Irish Secondary Schools
Class organisation: Individual/ pair work/ small groups/ whole class	Type of activity: Reading comprehension/deducing meaning from context/leading to discussions
FETAC: Lang 4 Reading	
ELP: B1 read and understand information that is available in public leaflets, community information, etc.	

For this activity you need...

1 worksheet per student

N.B.

In Class Procedure at a Glance

1. Introduce the government's website Oasis www.oasis.gov.ie which provides information on several aspects of life in the republic.
2. Tell learners they are going to read an article from this site on secondary education.
3. See if any of the learners have children currently in secondary education. If there are, ask them how they chose the school and if they are happy with it so far.
4. Give learners plenty of time to read the article (20 minutes approx.)
5. Discourage use of dictionaries but encourage learners to underline any unfamiliar words or phrases.
6. Let learners answer the comprehension questions individually. .As they finish put them in pairs to discuss their answers
7. Once most of the class have finished discuss the answers as a whole class.
8. Encourage learners to identify the parts of the text which justify their answers, particularly where there is disagreement.

9. The Focus on Vocabulary could be left to the end or done as homework but on balance it is probably better done before moving on to the discussion task as some learners will not be happy leaving the article until any vocabulary doubts have been cleared up.
10. Let learners use Eng-Eng dictionaries to check their answers before moving on to check the answers as a whole group. 1) a far greater range 2) lay staff 3) gather 4) vary 5) favour 6) investigate
11. Put learners in small groups of four or five (depending on the size of your class) and explain that they should draw up a list of questions to ask the head of the school where they are considering sending their son/daughter. Try to arrange the groups so that there is a good male/female divide as well as a mixture of parents/non-parents and a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. This will maximise the potential for discussion.
12. Circulate helping out with vocabulary where necessary and prompting ideas if necessary. Questions could include everything from the school policy on learners found to be taking recreational drugs to the religious/ethnic composition of the school, the range of subjects taught, the facilities available, extra curricular activities, the schools academic record *etc. etc.*
13. Each student in each group should make a note of the questions as they come up with them.
14. As the groups begin to run out of ideas ask each student to find a partner from a different group so that they can compare their list of questions. If there seems to be plenty of interest let them find a second partner from another different group to repeat the exercise.
15. Make a list of all the questions on the board. See if there are any glaring omissions.

Variations / Comments / Supplementary Activities

To make the Task more realistic you could ask learners by way of preparation to find out something about the secondary schools available in their area – name, type of school, number of learners attending *etc.* They could do this either by contacting the schools directly and asking for brochure/ prospectus or by talking to neighbours. This would be very valuable but it may not always be practical and will depend a lot on the levels of motivation in the class. Even if only those with children took up the suggestion it would be worthwhile.