

ilíocht

Celebrating Diversity in Gaelscoil Bhaile Brigín



What's On



Snowflakes Autism Support Group Meeting takes place at 20.15 in Swords. See SNOWFLAKES.IE for further info.

Omniplex Cinema in Balbriggan have both subtitled and sensory kids screenings on weekends.

The sensory screenings particularly suit children on the spectrum as the lighting isn't as low and the sound is a little lower.

Contact Michelle at **0876533174** for further details.



Fáilte Ar Ais

Welcome to the first edition of ilíocht of the 2015/16 school year.

We are very lucky to have author and renowned blogger Caitriona Redmond among our tuismitheoirí and she has very kindly contributed an article on nutritious lunchbox ideas. *Stress-less Lunch Boxes* contains handy, and above all, practical lunchbox fillers that our kids might actually eat!

We are well into September and hopefully the settling in process is going well. *ASD And The Return to School* attempts to make the transition back to school a little smoother.

At this time of year, IEP (otherwise known as "yearly preparation") meetings are usually getting underway. *IEPs Explained* tries to demystify these meetings and give parents an understanding of what is involved, and what is their role in the process of planning a curriculum that meets your child's needs.

Thank you to the parent who came across and sent in the short piece "*Welcome to Holland*". It's a beautiful article and I'll let it speak for itself.

We would like to thank everyone who submitted an article for this edition. If you would like to submit a parent piece, an article of interest or get involved in ilíocht in any way please email, celinecronan@gmail.com

As always, if there is any other topic you would like us to cover please do let us know.

Autism And The Return To School

The return to school, like any big change in routine for a child on the autism spectrum, can be very daunting. Even when the return has been eagerly awaited as an escape from younger siblings (yes, I'm speaking from personal experience here) the transition from a familiar classroom and routine to a new one can still cause anxiety to rear it's disruptive head. When you add to that the possibility of a new teacher it's understandable why our kids can get so upset about starting a new term. Like most things relevant to Autism, preparation is key, so apologies that this article is a little late in that respect, but hopefully you can still gain something from it (and maybe keep it to hand next year).



BEFORE SCHOOL BEGINS

If at all possible arrange for your child to meet his new Teacher in his new classroom. This can make a world of difference when Sept comes around. Let him know where he will be sitting and that any important agreements made last year will still apply (e.g. SNA, computer time rewards etc).

If he has a new Teacher, make sure she is aware of anything that makes life particularly hard/easier for your child. Asiam.ie have handbooks for children and teachers that are designed to help the teacher understand the particular child's needs.

Keep school at the forefront in the couple of weeks before term starts by mentioning it briefly each day, for example "who are you looking forward to seeing again."

If there are negative feelings around returning to school, try make a list with your child of all the positive things about school, for example, subjects he likes, friends or Teachers he has missed, etc.

Start waking your child up earlier around a week before term begins to ensure he is not exhausted facing his first morning.



WHEN SCHOOL BEGINS

Establish a routine for his time outside of school, morning and evening, and try to stick to it. For the first few weeks at least, try to keep that time as quiet and stress free as possible. Mornings can be tricky when there's so much to be done in a short amount of time – visual schedules that show the process can make a huge difference: Wake Up – Get Dressed – Breakfast – Brush Teeth, etc. For younger children use pictures and for older kids pictures and words work well. The same can be done for after school routines: change uniform – snack- obair bhaile – etc.

Communicate with Teachers. Communication is absolutely vital, especially in the settling in period and a communication notebook can work really well. In addition to letting you know how your child is doing it also is an invaluable source of information for your child's multi-disciplinary team in terms of your child's mood/sensory needs etc.

Make sure your child has an "out" if things are getting too overwhelming for him. It can be as simple as leaving the classroom to walk to the oifig or sensory room for a few minutes. Help Teachers, SNAs and the child himself learn to recognise when he needs some time out and a way for him to leave without causing a fuss.

A Visual Timetable for school, which shows which subject is next/what time is break etc. is very useful and reassuring for a child with ASD and can play a huge part in reducing anxiety. Lots of Teachers now use them at the top of the class as all children thrive on routine and knowing what's next. Most importantly, if the Teacher is using a visual timetable it's vital that she sticks to it! She needs to highlight any changes before they happen if at all possible (however sometimes change is inevitable and unforeseen). Individual timetables which include when an SNA is arriving/leaving/taking a break work well too.

As I mentioned, inevitably there are times when a routine has to change without warning, for example if a teacher is sick. I've found in the past that a little "things I need my Teacher to know" envelope in his mála, which explains to a substitute teacher/sna etc. the things that are vitally important to the child, can go a long way towards reducing the anxiety a huge change in routine like this can throw up.

Stress-Less Lunch Boxes

By **Caitriona Redmond** Author and Renowned Blogger

Encourage your kids to fill the lunchbox themselves before heading out to school. Put the available healthy foods on the table, and ask them to pick what they like, ensuring that they have a carbohydrate, protein, and dairy source in the lunchbox. Children are more likely to eat

what they prepare themselves, even if you sometimes need to jolly them along. The key to making this kind of picnic work is that the adults choose from the same food options.

It's always tempting to keep a special food or treat for the grown-ups for lunchtime. **Normally what happens here is that the children end up clamouring for 'a taste' or 'just a bit' so I find it's just not worth it. We just eat the same food together.**

Who wants to be preparing two different lunches anyway? Food that can be grabbed by little hands and carried around is ideal for lunchboxes. Some of the things that my children like to eat on the go are: sandwiches, bananas, grapes, raisins, crackers, yoghurt tubes, cheese, apples, breadsticks, chickpeas, mangetout, and carrot sticks. They are also massive fans of sausages and sausage rolls. I know that if I pack some, if not all, of the above foods my kids will eat mainly healthy foods, and not hesitate to come back for more. **The bonus with most of these foods is that they require very little preparation, can be easily packed up, and cost relatively little. For drinks, we stick to water only. Milk can sometimes spoil if it's not kept in a cool, dark place. Cycling bottles with sports caps are generally opaque and so keep water cooler for longer.**



If it's an extremely hot weather, take a regular water bottle the night before and fill 3/4 with water. Put the bottle into the freezer, then before going out to school add to the schoolbag. It serves two purposes. The first is a handy cool-pack for the entire lunch – the second is that while the water will have defrosted by the time you drink, it'll still be icy cold. You can do the same with yoghurt tubes, which is always a success around here. If they're not defrosted the kids love the ready-made ice-pop.

Don't depend on your child to eat new foods or food combinations in a new environment in school. Do take some new food for them to try but don't be offended if they turn it down. If your child has a meltdown and refuses to eat anything, don't despair. We have all been there (trust me!), and the lunch is just one meal out of the day, and very often the week. You can feed your child up with other healthy options when you're in the comfort of your own home.



Individual Education Plans (IEP)

Participating in IEPs and the meetings involved can be daunting tasks for parents.

At first glance it's hard to know where to start. The National Council for Special Education has put together a very comprehensive document on preparing for, and writing and IEP but hopefully this more concise version may be helpful for you over the coming months.

An IEP is a written document designed specifically for each individual child with special education needs who has been assigned **Resource Hours**. **Note:** Learning Support hours are a different support mechanism which do not require an IEP. Special Educational Needs could be defined as any physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability (or other condition) which prevents a child from participating fully in, or benefiting from an education. The plan is a collaboration between the school and the family of the child (and sometimes other professionals) and is designed to set targets or goals to be achieved by the child, and to explain how these goals will be reached. The actual IEP Meeting (otherwise known as a *yearly preparation meeting*) is just one small part of the IEP Process. The meeting will usually be attended by the Child's parents, class teacher and resource teacher but other family members, the Child's SNA, Occupational/Physio/Speech Therapist (or other member of your Child's team) could also attend if required.

It's important to note that different schools will have different approaches to how the IEP is drawn up. Some schools will pull everything together at the official IEP meeting, with all present involved in all stages of the process. The plan is drawn up and signed off at the meeting. Other schools prefer to have a number of shorter meetings where the information is assimilated and drafts are drawn up before the final draft is completed at the IEP meeting. Another option is to discuss and agree on a plan at the meeting but the official document is drawn up after the meeting. Talk to your co-ordinator (usually the Resource/Learning Support Teacher) about how your Child's IEP will be drawn up.

STEPS INVOLVED



STEP 1: INFORMATION GATHERING

Once your child has been identified as fitting the criteria for an IEP, the IEP Coordinator will contact you regarding putting a plan in place. The information gathering stage is arguably the most important part of the process as this is the information the plan is formed from. The idea is to formulate a profile of the child which includes his strengths and weaknesses, abilities, skills, talents etc. It is not limited to numeracy and literacy type skills but is wide ranging to cover other essential abilities such as social and personal skills, attitude and motivation and communication skills. The nature and degree of his special educational needs would be included, in addition to how it actually affects his education. This broad spectrum of information would come from various different sources, e.g. Class Teacher, Resource/Learning Support Teacher, SNA, Parents or family members, outside Professionals such as Occupational/Physio Therapists, Psychologists etc. It can include information from outside assessments, school based assessments and observations. Class, Resource and previous Teachers can provide very useful information regarding his educational history, to what degree he accesses the school curriculum, what strategies have worked or failed for the child in the past, in addition to what subjects interest him and what interferes with learning. Parents provide a wealth of information. No one knows your child like you. In addition to the essential facts such as medical history, developmental information and general family background, there is no one better placed to talk about your Child's interests, what motivates him, what he finds stressful, what he finds easy. The student himself is an invaluable source – what subjects does he love/hate, what helps him learn, what makes learning difficult, what would motivate him to go that extra mile.

STEP 2: ESTABLISHING CURRENT LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE

This part of the process ascertains what level the child is at regarding his language, literacy, numeracy, cognitive and motor, social and emotional, mobility and self-help skills. It focuses on both his strengths and weakness. It's important that the skills are recorded accurately, for e.g. it's more helpful to say "John has difficulties in decoding long words" than "Johns reading need work."

STEP 3: ESTABLISHING PRIORITY LEARNING NEEDS

Once we have ascertained what level the child is currently at, the areas which need to be addressed become apparent. Again, the focus is not just on academic areas, but encompasses the areas mentioned above. The next step is to decide which of these needs are a priority, as we need to have a realistic amount of targets for the child to meet. When establishing these priorities, you must take into account the Childs interest and motivation in addition to his strengths and weaknesses.

STEP 4: ESTABLISHING TARGETS/GOALS

This is a vital part of the IEP. Only by setting goals can we ascertain how well the child is progressing a year down the line. It's very important that the goals are **SMART**:

- Specific** List exactly what the child will be able to do rather than a general statement such as "John will improve his reading skills."
- Measurable** How exactly will you know if the goal was reached, e.g. a test etc.?
- Agreed** Everyone, including the child must be on board.
- Realistic** There's nothing more demoralising than being set a goal that is unachievable.
- Timed** Usually reviewed in a year but some goals may be achieved sooner.

For example, John will be able to read a book from the Rang a Dó curriculum with an accuracy rating of at least 80% by the end of the year.

STEP 5: IDENTIFY STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES

This basically means what exactly will the adults be doing to help the child achieve the goals set. It may involve providing:

- Equipment (wheelchair, sensory cushions, computer software, pencil grips etc.)
- Staff support (SNA, Resource Hours, planned time e.g. working with a child in the clós, changing teaching style to include more visuals)
- Home Support (Does extra practice at home need to take place to achieve the goal)
- Environmental supports (location in the classroom, halla during assembly, etc.)
- Social Support (Using small groups to teach social skills etc.)

STEP 6: REVIEW

Once the plan is in place it is normally reviewed on a yearly basis. This review is very important to ascertain if the targets have been met or has progress been made, and if not then what needs to be done. The review becomes part of the information gathering stage for the upcoming years IEP.

Welcome To Holland

By Emily Perl Kingsley

I am often asked to describe the experience of raising a child with a disability - to try to help people who have not shared that unique experience to understand it, to imagine how it would feel. It's like this...

When you're going to have a baby, it's like planning a fabulous vacation trip - to Italy. You buy a bunch of guide books and make your wonderful plans. The Coliseum. The Michelangelo David. The gondolas in Venice. You may learn some handy phrases in Italian. It's all very exciting.

After months of eager anticipation, the day finally arrives. You pack your bags and off you go. Several hours later, the plane lands. The stewardess comes in and says, "Welcome to Holland."

"Holland?!?" you say. "What do you mean Holland?? I signed up for Italy! I'm supposed to be in Italy. All my life I've dreamed of going to Italy."

But there's been a change in the flight plan. They've landed in Holland and there you must stay.

The important thing is that they haven't taken you to a horrible, disgusting, filthy place, full of pestilence, famine and disease. It's just a different place.

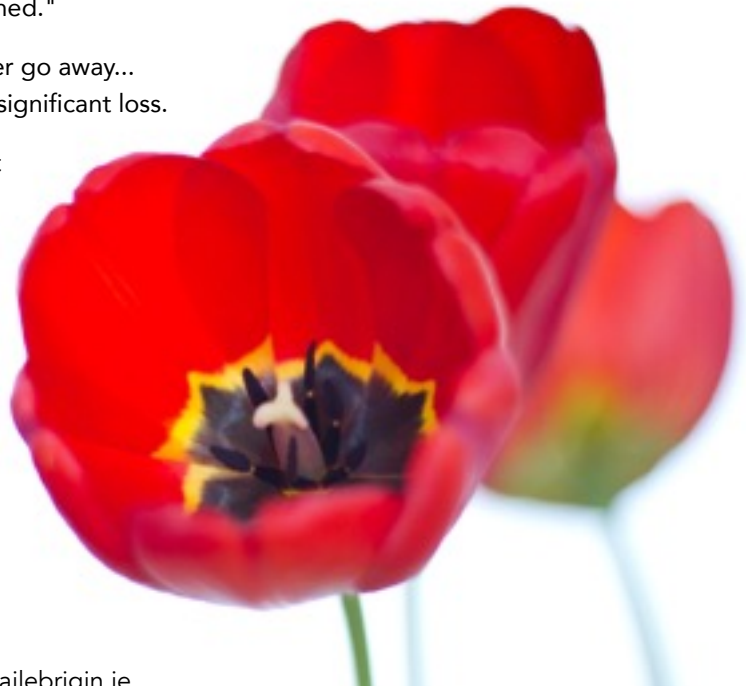
So you must go out and buy new guide books. And you must learn a whole new language. And you will meet a whole new group of people you would never have met.


It's just a different place. It's slower-paced than Italy, less flashy than Italy. But after you've been there for a while and you catch your breath, you look around.... and you begin to notice that Holland has windmills... and Holland has tulips. Holland even has Rembrandts.

But everyone you know is busy coming and going from Italy... and they're all bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. And for the rest of your life, you will say "Yes, that's where I was supposed to go. That's what I had planned."

And the pain of that will never, ever, ever, ever go away... because the loss of that dream is a very very significant loss.

But... if you spend your life mourning the fact that you didn't get to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things... about Holland.



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