

The Education System in Ireland

Education is compulsory for children in Ireland from the ages of 6 to 16 or until students have completed 3 years of second-level education.

The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme provides early childhood care and education for children of pre-school age. From September 2018, children can start ECCE when they are 2 years and 8 months of age and continue until they transfer to primary school (provided that they are not older than 5 years and 6 months at the end of the pre-school year).

Children can only enroll in pre-school in September.

How to Apply?

To get a place for your child, apply to a participating playschool or daycare centre.

You will need to provide a copy of your child's birth certificate or passport and PPS number.

Certain children who come to live in Ireland may be exempted from learning Irish in the Schools (find out from your child's school).

Primary (First Level Education)

Children do not have to attend school until the age of 6 but children may begin school the September following their fourth birthday.

Secondary Level Education

This consists of a 3-year junior cycle followed by a 2-year or 3-year senior cycle depending on whether an optional Transition year is taken following the Junior Certificate examination which is taken on the third year in Secondary school.

Students generally start the junior cycle at the age of 12. The Junior Certificate is taken after 3 years.

Transition Year follows the Junior Certificate examination.

This year is free from formal examinations and allows students to experience a wide range of educational inputs, including work experience.

During their final 2 years in the senior cycle, students take one of 3 programmes, each leading to a State examination

- the established Leaving Certificate,
- the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
- the Leaving Certificate Applied.

The Leaving Certificate is the main basis upon which places in universities, institutes of technology and colleges of education are allocated.

This 2-year programme covers a wide range of subjects.

Subjects are normally studied at either **Ordinary** or **Higher Level**.

Two subjects, **Irish** and **Mathematics**, can be studied at **Foundation Level**.

Foundation Level is geared to the needs of students who might have difficulty with those subjects at Ordinary or Higher Level.

Students normally study 6 or 7 subjects during the Senior Cycle.

In choosing Leaving Certificate subjects, students should take note of subjects that they may need for the third-level courses of their choice.

The school guidance counsellor will have the information about the subject requirements for each third-level course.

The established Leaving Certificate is assessed through a written examination at the end of the 2-year programme.

There are practical examinations and project work in certain subjects, such as Art, Construction Studies and Engineering.

There are oral examinations in Irish and continental languages.

The practical and oral tests take place during the final year of the programme. The written examination is held in June each year.

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A new grading scheme for the Leaving Certificate was introduced in 2017. The new scale has 8 grades, the highest grade is Grade 1 and the lowest grade is Grade 8.

The new 8-point grading scale replaces the 14-point scale at both Higher and Ordinary levels.

Marks between 100% to 30% are divided into seven grade bands (1-7). Each band is 10% wide.

New grading scale for Leaving Certificate from 2017	
New grades*	% Marks
H1/O1	90 - 100
H2/O2	80 < 90
H3/O3	70 < 80
H4/O4	60 < 70
H5/O5	50 < 60
H6/O6	40 < 50
H7/O7	30 < 40
H8/O8	0 < 30

The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme differs from the established Leaving Certificate in placing a concentration on technical subjects and including additional modules which have a vocational focus.

The programme consists of Leaving Certificate subjects, together with three compulsory link modules on enterprise education, preparation for work and work experience.

Students must take at least 5 Leaving Certificate subjects, one of which must be Irish and a continental language or vocational language module.

The link modules

The link modules are activity-based. They usually take a total of 2 to 3 class periods per week, compared with a Leaving Certificate subject, which generally takes 4 to 5 class periods in a week.

The subject groupings

The subject groupings put regular Leaving Certificate subjects that complement each other into groupings. There are 2 groupings:

- Specialist groupings, in which the subject content of each subject is helpful to the other,
- Services groupings, where the subjects might work well together from a business or commercial point of view.

Students must take 2 subjects from these groupings.

Assessment and examinations

The Leaving Certificate subjects are examined through the standard Leaving Certificate examination.

The link modules are assessed in a written examination representing 40% of total marks and a portfolio of coursework representing 60% of total marks.

The fee for entry for school-based students of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme for 2019 is €116.

Candidates who hold a current medical card or who are dependent on a parent or guardian who holds a current medical card are exempt from paying examination fees. Applicants who are claiming exemption from fees on this basis must provide

medical card details to the Commission. Applications from external candidates received after 15 February 2019 are subject to late fees even if the initial fee has been waived.

The Leaving Certificate Applied Programme has as its primary objective the preparation of participants for adult and working life through relevant learning experiences.

These aim to develop spiritual, intellectual, social, emotional, aesthetic and physical aspects of child development.

The Leaving Certificate Applied is not recognised for direct entry to third-level courses but it can enable students to take Post-Leaving Certificate courses.

Third-level education

This is made up of a number of sectors. The university sector, the technological sector and the colleges of education. They are substantially funded by the State.

In addition there are a number of independent private colleges.

There are universities which are autonomous and self-governing. They offer degree programmes at bachelor, masters and doctorate level.

The technological sector includes the technological universities (Tus) and institutes of technology (ITs).

They provide programmes of education and training in areas such as business, science, engineering, linguistics and music to certificate, diploma and degree levels. The Department of Education and Skills has overall responsibility for the sector.

The colleges of education specialize in training for primary school teachers.

Training for post-primary teachers is provided by many third-level institutions. In addition, there are colleges of education that specialize in the training of home economics teachers, teachers of religion and physical education teachers.

Further and adult education

Further education comprises education and training which takes place after second-level schooling but which is not part of the third-level system.

It includes programmes such as

- Post-Leaving Certificate courses
- the Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme (second-chance education for the unemployed);
- programmes in Youth Reach for early school-leavers
- other literacy and basic education programs
- self-funded evening adult programmes in second-level schools.

Special needs education for students with disabilities

Educational provision for students with special needs ranges from additional support in mainstream schools to specialist support in special schools.

A student with a disability may be enrolled in a:

- Mainstream class with additional support
- Special class in a mainstream school or
- Special school which caters for the student with his or her category of disability.

The legal school-leaving age is 16 years

Source

https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/the_irish_education_system/overview_of_the_irish_education_system.html