

Is your child ready for the Gaeltacht?

- Helpful Hints -

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UISCE



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Is your child ready for the Gaeltacht?

Every year more than a thousand students pass through the gates of Coláiste UISCE. The vast majority of students thrive while making new friends and developing a new love for the Irish language.

However, for some children it can be a daunting experience. This may be their first time away from home on their own for such an extended period. If this is the case in your household, there is a good chance that your child is filled with mixed feelings of excitement and nervousness – you probably are too!

This leaflet is our attempt to help both parents and students prepare for their upcoming Gaeltacht trip. Based on more than 25 years' experience, this document touches on some issues which we feel are important for parents to consider with their children prior to attending our course.

Homesickness

Although most experiences in UISCE are positive, it is inevitable that some students will suffer a brief bout of homesickness at least once during their stay with us. We also recognise that a small group of students will suffer from severe homesickness, especially if this is their first time away from home. It is our experience that, for a small minority of students, homesickness can be so severe that they will leave the course during the first 3 days. It is not unusual for at least one student to go home on day one!

Considering this issue is the first step in preparing your child for their stay with us. We know that by planning and preparing some strategies in advance, we can help your child cope with any feelings of homesickness, as it is always our hope to avoid an early departure from the course.

What is homesickness?

Homesickness is a form of anxiety or emotional distress that results from feeling disconnected from familiar people and places when faced with a different environment and routine.

Homesickness manifests itself in many ways, both physically and psychologically. Telltale signs include; constantly wanting to call home, complaining of a sore tummy or feeling unwell, withdrawing from or completely refusing to participate in some or all the activities.

Most students settle into their new routine after day two. However, some find adjusting to their new environment particularly difficult. They may feel overwhelmed or have difficulties understanding and adjusting to being fully immersed in the Irish language. Sometimes they can feel lonely for their parents and peers at home, especially when they do not have 24-hour access to their mobile phones.

We have found that even parents can feel a little anxious about sending their children to the Gaeltacht. Unfortunately, homesickness won't go away overnight and we may need your assistance and support to help your child get through it. Just remember, all students can be contacted daily by text between 7 and 7:20pm or



through the office if needs be. While worrying about them is natural, it is also very important to give your child the time and space they need to settle into their course.

Homesickness takes perseverance to overcome – but it is worth it for your child's personal development. While we recognise that every case is different, here are a few suggestions to help with the issue of homesickness:

- **Discuss the issue of homesickness in advance with your child**
- **Recognise and acknowledge the challenge that is about to be experienced**
- **Keep a positive attitude – homesickness is natural and can be overcome!**
- **Encourage your child to speak to the adults in charge if they have any worries**
- **Discuss how often you will contact your child and how they feel about our mobile phone policy**
- **Watch some YouTube videos on this topic with or without your child**
- **As every student is different, be prepared to discuss individual coping strategies for your child with the course principal**

Is your child open to making new friends?

How does your child react to meeting new people? Whether your child is coming with a friend or alone, be sure that they understand that they will be sharing their accommodation, classes and watersport groups with other students whom they have never met before.

Our staff will organise games and ice-breakers on the first night. This will help students get to know one another. It is our goal to make sure everyone feels included and at ease from the very beginning of the course.

Make sure your child understands the importance of making new friends. Encourage them to be open to meeting and making new friends as often existing friendships change during the Gaeltacht trip. It might be hard for your child to envisage, especially if they're feeling a little apprehensive about coming to us, but they will make friends for life during their stay here!

Tip: If you're worried that your child might feel a little shy or homesick let us know in advance. We will put a mentoring plan in place and discreetly assign a prefect, or *cinnire*, to support them, help them get to know other students and make new friends!



Does your child suffer from anxiety?

Does your child enjoy trying new things or experiences or do they normally feel anxious and look to you for reassurance in new situations?

Coláiste UISCE offers a wide variety of activities and games, which some students may not have experienced before. The most important thing for your child to remember is that many of the other students have never been to Coláiste UISCE, either. Reassure your child that everyone is in the same boat and that they are not alone if feeling a little nervous!

Encourage your child to speak to a staff member if they are feeling uncertain. Our host families, the *Bean an Tí* and cinnirí are always more than happy and willing to explain things discretely.

Tip: Make sure to contact us in advance if you feel your child may suffer from anxiety so that we can ensure they receive the support required to settle in.

During the course, if you feel your child is experiencing difficulties please contact the course principal immediately and we will discretely put a mentoring plan in place to help them settle on the course.

Encourage your child to ask the cinnirí, bean an tí, teachers and instructors questions, especially if they don't fully understand the instructions given, or are unsure of where to go or what to do.

By approaching a member of staff we will immediately be alerted to any potential problems or issues.

Is your child prepared for total immersion and the Irish language rule?

If your child has not attended a Gaelscoil or been to the Gaeltacht before this will be their first experience of full immersion in the Irish language. This can be quite overwhelming, particularly for younger students.

We understand and allow for a transitional period while students adjust to an all Irish speaking environment. However, it is important that students understand that 100% of instruction will be through Irish, and that they must use the Irish that they have during this transition period.

Our teachers are fully aware of the difficulties students face adjusting in the first few days and our lessons are prepared to facilitate this change. The cinnirí are always on hand to help with new words and phrases, and they make the Principal or *príomhoide* aware if anyone is particularly struggling.

Although it may seem daunting at first, reassure your child that they will most definitely have a better understanding and more confidence in using their Irish after a couple of days and that by the time they go home, they'll be thinking more in Irish than in English!



Tip: Print off and go through our Cúpla Focal Fiúntach dictionary with your child to help them mentally prepare for the total immersion Irish environment.

In advance of the course, tune into Irish language radio programs such as Radio Rí-Rá, Radio na Life or Raidió na Gaeltachta during car journeys. Alternatively suggest that your child looks at some TG4 programs.

If you're feeling adventurous, you could also try family games such as Scrabble or Charades as *Gaeilge* or download the Duo Lingo App on your phone and have some fun learning some new Irish phrases.

This will help to get your child to think about the vocabulary they already have, while also brushing up on your own cúpla focal!

Have you correctly indicated your child's standard of Irish?

Our main challenge every year is to change the negative attitudes and feelings that some students harbor towards the Irish language. It is our aim that each student goes home having had a positive learning experience and with a fresh outlook towards learning Irish. To do so, we need to make sure your child is placed in the appropriate class for their own personal standard and needs.

We make every effort to stream our Irish classes in accordance to age and ability. It is extremely important for us that your child's standard of Irish is outlined correctly on the application form. Placing a student in a class which is too difficult or too easy, will only lead to feelings of discomfort or boredom and will heighten any feelings of homesickness. Placing them in the correct class, however, will help them improve the language skills they already have, introduce them to new skills and boost their self-confidence.

Please note: If your child has received an exemption from Irish within the last year, or has been exempt for a number of years, our education manager must be made aware of this immediately.

Tip: If you are in doubt over your child's ability, have a quick chat with your child's Irish teacher. Also, be sure to encourage your child to talk to their múinteoir Gaeilge, cinnire or bean an tí here if they are struggling to understand or are feeling overwhelmed.

Have you discussed the Code of Behaviour, Course Rules and a Disciplinary Procedure of Coláiste UISCE with your child?

In order to maintain a positive and safe learning environment for everyone attending our courses, we have developed a code of behaviour, course rules and a disciplinary procedure.

As part of our code of behavior we implement a red card system for breaking the rules. Getting a red card will result in a detention class and missing out on the



evenings activities for a period of time. If a student receives more than 3 red cards for misbehavior or shows complete disregard of the Irish language rule, dismissal from the course may result.

However, in order to encourage positive reinforcement, we also implement a green card system called the Scéim MEAS; *Meas* means respect as Ghaeilge! Students can earn *Cártaí Glasa* (green cards) through a number of positive actions, for example; helping a friend or classmate, making an extra effort with their Irish or overcoming a personal challenge during activity classes. If a student earns a *Cárta Glais* they are awarded a green “MEAS” wristband in recognition of their effort and achievement.

Tip: We strongly advise that you download the Code of Behaviour, Course Rules and a Disciplinary Procedure from our website prior to the course start date and read through it with your child. If you have any questions, feel free to contact our Bainisteoir Oideachais (education manager), and they will happily answer any questions or queries you may have.

Prohibited Items

To ensure the safety of all students we have published a list of prohibited items. If your child is found in possession of any item on the prohibited items list, they will be subject to the Colleges Disciplinary Procedure and may end up being dismissed from the course.

Tip: Please ensure that you and your child are familiar with the list of prohibited items. It is your responsibility to check your child’s bag for prohibited items prior to their arrival.

Child Protection

Child protection is to the forefront of our policies and procedures in Coláiste UISCE. In accordance with the TUSLA “Children First” guidelines and child protection legislation we have developed a child protection policy, statement, risk assessment and procedure to ensure the highest possible standards in this area. All our Bean an Tí, staff and cinnirí who have direct contact with students are Garda vetted and are required to undergo TUSLA child protection training.

While we place a huge emphasis on child protection and supervision in Coláiste UISCE, there will be some areas when supervision is limited or impractical, for example in the changing rooms and bedrooms.

Therefore, we feel it is important that you discuss with your child the importance of recognising and removing themselves from any conversation or behaviour that they deem to be inappropriate and that they should report it at the earliest opportunity to a responsible adult – their cinnire, Bean an Tí, teacher or you, their parent.

Tip: In accordance with our child protection policy we promote a “Tell Us” culture. Encourage and ensure your child understands the importance of alerting a member of staff if they have any concerns or issues.



Anti-Bullying

Coláiste UISCE does not accept bullying of any kind. We are aware that this can be a common problem amongst teenagers, therefore, we have developed a comprehensive anti-bullying policy and procedure to:

- Protect vulnerable children who are attending our courses
- Prevent incidents of bullying during our courses
- Identify incidents of bullying as early as possible
- Encourage a “tell us” ethos and culture within the coláiste
- Manage accusations of bullying sensitively and professionally taking into accounts the rights of all individuals involved

Our full anti-bullying policy is available on our website.

As part of our risk assessment and child protection policy we aim to identify vulnerable children prior to attending our courses. It is your responsibility to inform us if you feel that your child may need additional support so that we can ensure a mentoring plan is in place.

Examples of children who may fall into this this category are those who may have experienced any of the following:

- Previous incidents of bullying
- Significant emotional trauma
- Anxiety or significant confidence issues

All information is dealt with the utmost sensitivity and confidentiality in adherence with our Privacy Policy.

Tip: It is important to inform your child of our “Tell Us” ethos where they should tell a member of staff if they become aware of or are subjected to any bullying behaviour during the course.

[Inis Dúinn/ Tell Us Poster](#)

Vulnerable children

The following is an extract from the Tusla “Children First” document

“Some children may be more vulnerable to abuse than others. Also, there may be particular times or circumstances when a child may be more vulnerable to abuse in their lives.

In particular, children with disabilities, children with communication difficulties, children in care or living away from home, or children with a parent or parents with problems in their own lives may be more susceptible to harm.

The following list is intended to help you identify the range of issues in a child’s life that may place them at greater risk of abuse or neglect.





It is important for you to remember that the presence of any of these factors does not necessarily mean that a child in those circumstances or settings is being abused.

Parent or carer factors:

- *Drug and alcohol misuse*
- *Addiction, including gambling*
- *Mental health issues*
- *Parental disability issues, including learning or intellectual disability*
- *Conflictual relationships*
- *Domestic violence*
- *Adolescent parents*
- *Communication difficulties*

Child factors:

- *Age*
- *Gender*
- *Sexuality*
- *Disability*
- *Mental health issues, including self-harm and suicide*
- *Trafficked/Exploited*
- *Previous abuse*
- *Young carer*

Community factors:

- *Cultural, ethnic, religious or faith-based norms in the family or community which may not meet the standards of child welfare or protection required in this jurisdiction*

Environmental factors:

- *Housing issues*
- *Children who are out of home and not living with their parents, whether temporarily or permanently*
- *Previous Bullying*
- *Internet and social media-related concerns*

You should consider these factors as part of being alert to the possibility that a child may be at risk of suffering abuse and in bringing reasonable concerns to the attention of Tusla.

If your child falls into any of the above categories as outlined in the TUSLA Children First document the management of Coláiste UISCE require you to notify them in advance of the course. Any such communication will be dealt with the utmost sensitivity.



Does your child have any specific needs or requirements that we should know about?

It is important to inform us in advance of any specific requirements your child has, as this will help to settle them into the course routine with much more ease. Not informing us of illnesses or learning difficulties may cause unnecessary discomfort or embarrassment. Not informing us of relevant information in regard to your child's needs could potentially lead to them receiving an unwarranted red card or the possibility of them wanting to leave our course early.

Below are some important questions for you and your child. If you answer yes to any of these questions, please contact our administration manager immediately for further assistance.

- Does your child have any specific educational, dietary or medical needs?
- Is your child taking prescription medication?
- Have they had a sports injury in the last 6 months, for example; a break, serious ligament or sprain injury?
- Has your child been a victim of bullying in the past?
- Have they had a tummy bug, contagious illness or the flu on the run up to the course start date?

This type of information is extremely important and relevant to us. All information shared is confidential and is handled with the utmost discretion.

To Summarise:

- 1) **If your child has a history of homesickness, anxiety or has any special educational or other needs please bring this to our attention immediately.**
- 2) **If your child has suffered from bullying or any form of emotional trauma, please bring this to our attention immediately.**
- 3) **If your child has suffered an illness or injury in the recent past, please bring this to our attention immediately.**
- 4) **Have a conversation with your child about the importance of approaching staff members and encourage them to do so if they have any concerns or worries. Let them know we have a "Tell Us" policy in the Coláiste and that we are here to help.**
- 5) **If you feel your child is having difficulties settling, please contact the course principal immediately and we will discretely put a mentoring plan in place for your child to help them settle on the course.**
- 6) **Please read and explain the Code of Behaviour, Course Rules and Code of Discipline to your child prior to the course start date.**



- 7) Try to encourage the use of Irish on the runup to the course start date to familiarise your child to an Irish speaking environment. Speak to your child's Irish teacher or to us if you have any concerns about their level or ability.
- 8) If your child has received an exemption from Irish within the last year, or has been exempt for a number of years, contact us immediately.

Mar Fhocal Scoir

It is our aim that your child enjoys their experience here and completes the full course. By discussing the points outlined in this leaflet it is our hope that both you and your child will be better prepared to ease into their new environment and routine. By doing so, your child will return home after having had an extremely positive and enjoyable experience at Coláiste UISCE.



UISCE

