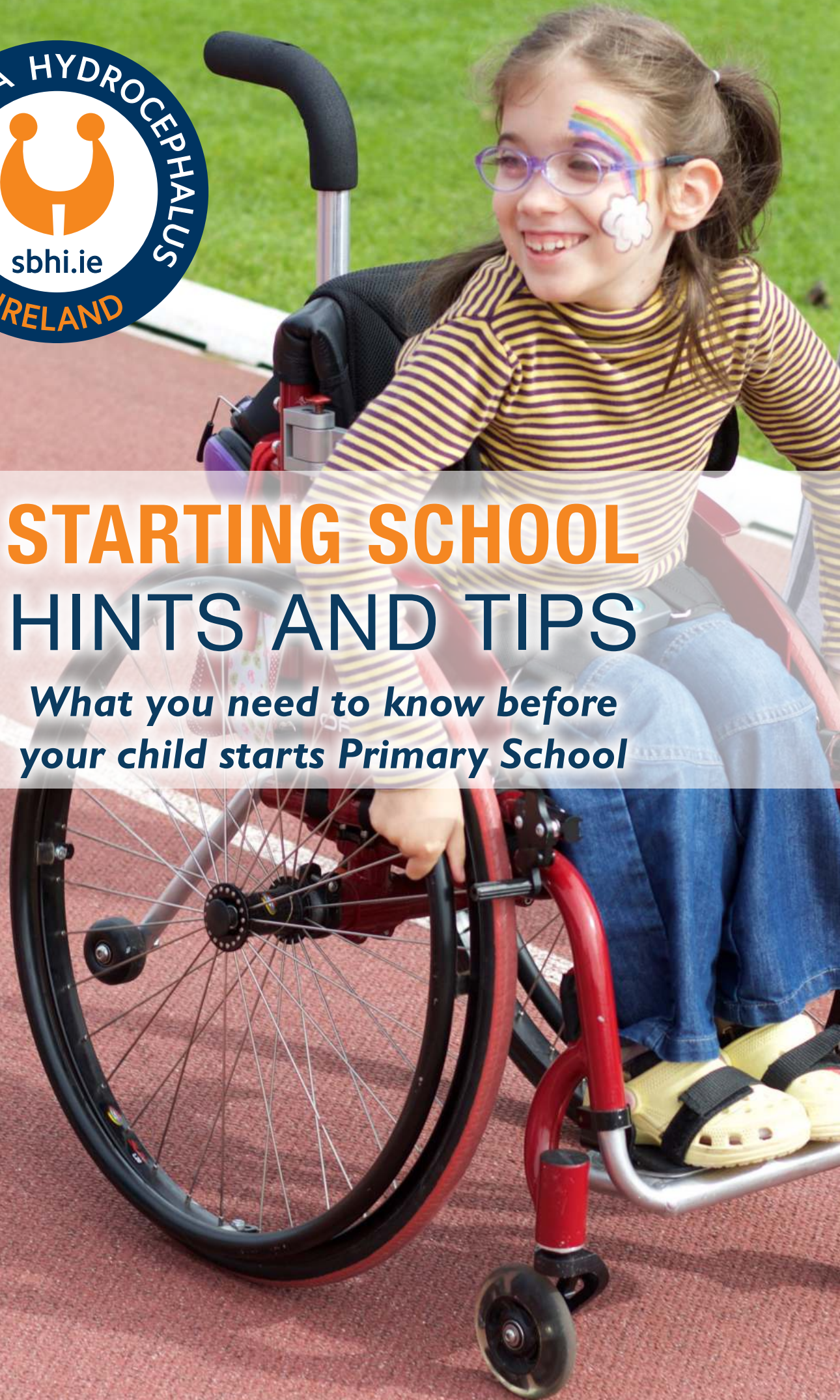




# STARTING SCHOOL HINTS AND TIPS

*What you need to know before  
your child starts Primary School*





# STARTING SCHOOL HINTS AND TIPS

## *What you need to know before your child starts Primary School*

It can be a huge emotional step when your child is starting school and particularly when your child has spina bifida and/or hydrocephalus. It is only natural for you, as a parent/guardian, to want to make sure that all your child's needs are going to be met.

This guide is a quick support resource for you, if you need further information the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) have a more detailed resource for parents/guardians and is available on the NCSE website: [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie)

There are a number of steps that Spina Bifida Hydrocephalus Ireland (SBHI) would recommend when planning for your child to start school -





### Step 1: Choosing the right school

When choosing the right school there are a number of things to consider. Do you want to send your child to the local primary school, a school with special classes, or a special school?

Many parents/guardians choose their local primary school as they have connections with their community, they know other children attending the school, because of easy access and convenience, or other relevant reasons. Please note that all schools can apply for Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support where necessary and appropriate. If your child has more complex needs, they may need to attend a special school or a school with special classes. The Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) in your area may support you by providing you with information and education options available in your area. The NCSE often hold information meetings for parents/guardians of children with special education needs in the year before they start school. Your local SENO or HSE Disability Network Team will have more details on these information meetings.

### Step 2: Communicate with the School

SBHI always recommends that parents/guardians speak with the school principal in the first instance. The majority of principals have a very open and accommodating approach to inclusion. This type of positive attitude is always a great start to ease any of the anxieties that you, as a parent/guardian of a child with a disability may have. It is at this stage that SBHI would suggest speaking about resources that may be required such as; SNA supports, school transport, assistive technology, or any other adaptations to the school that may be required.

Specific questions you may wish to ask the school are:

- How would the school support my child?
- How can I assist the school in supporting my child?
- How will my child be included in all aspects of school life, including class trips/swimming/activities etc?
- How will information be communicated between home and school?
- Is there a liaison person in the school to discuss any potential challenges/difficulties that may arise?
- For parents of children with spina bifida - How will the school meet the intimate care needs of my child?

Once you have spoken with the principal of the school and you wish for your child to attend the school, we recommend enrolling your child as soon as possible. A planning meeting prior to your child attending school is good practice and a good opportunity to discuss further any of your child's specific needs. The meeting should include you as the parent/guardian, the school principal, the class teacher, and any other professionals as appropriate.

### Step 3: Linking in with professionals

We recommend linking in with health professionals/agencies involved with your child. This may include occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, neuropsychologists, psychologists or others as appropriate. It is important to provide the school with any information that may help to meet your child's needs such as professional reports. These reports may be required for access to SNA support, assistive technology, assistive equipment, or adjustments to the school environment. The reports will also help the school to understand your child's strengths, weaknesses, abilities and needs.

#### Step 4: Preparing to start

Once the environment is ready for your child and the school are aware of your child's needs, SBHI recommends that the school develop a support plan that includes your child's:

- Learning needs
- Social and communication needs
- Care needs
- Sensory needs
- Physical needs

SBHI recommends the development of an Individualised Education Plan (IEP). If your child's primary care needs include toileting or catheterisation, SBHI recommends that the SNAs are trained by the parent/guardian in meeting his/her needs, and that an Intimate Care Needs policy is developed. SBHI have a Catheterisation in Schools policy and/or an Intimate Care Needs policy that can be provided to both parents/guardians and schools if required.

Any plans should be developed in collaboration with parents/guardians as per best practice. Each plan should include a method of communication with parents/guardians for any queries or concerns that may arise.

As many children (and parents/guardians) may experience anxiety over starting school, transitioning can be an important phase. Talking to your child and preparing him/her for starting school is a good first step. Ask the school if the child can visit and become familiar with the school and the environment prior to starting. If the school wears a uniform, try to purchase this in advance to let your child try it on and get used to it. Prepare your child to be as independent as he/she possibly can be at this stage. This may involve learning how to put on a coat, opening a bag, opening and managing their own lunch, toileting (where physically and developmentally possible) and listening to and following instructions.



#### Step 5: First day tips

- Eating a nutritious breakfast and arriving on time sets you and your child up for the day.
- Have your child's snacks and lunches prepared and packed in their schoolbag.
- The first day of school can be emotional for you both, so alleviate anxiety by smiling and chatting with the teacher or assistant on arrival.
- Help your child to hang up his/her coat and to find a seat.
- Remind your child where the toilets are.
- Tell your child and the teacher/assistant who will be collecting them at the end of the day and where the collection point is.
- Make your goodbyes short and positive, reassuring your child about who will be collecting them at the end of the day.
- Some children may take time to settle in. All children are different and will get there at their own pace, but try not to worry - teachers have a lot of experience helping children to settle in!

Spina Bifida Hydrocephalus Ireland are available as a support to you if you want to discuss your child starting school or if you need assistance. Our Education and Training Manager and our Family Support Team are always here to help and support you.

## **Supports:**

- **SBHI Education and Training Manager:**  
Tel: 087 379 2051 / 01 457 2329
- **SBHI Family Support Worker:**  
To find out who your Family Support Worker is please contact our National Resource Centre on 01 457 2329 or e-mail: [info@sbhi.ie](mailto:info@sbhi.ie)
- **National Council for Special Education (NCSE):**  
[www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie)
- **Health Service Executive (HSE):**  
[www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)
- **Department of Education and Skills:**  
[www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)
- **Special Needs Parents Association:**  
[www.specialneedsparents.ie](http://www.specialneedsparents.ie)
- **NCCA Primary School:**  
[www.ncca.ie/en/primary/resources-for-parents](http://www.ncca.ie/en/primary/resources-for-parents)

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[www.sbhi.ie](http://www.sbhi.ie)