

## Introduction to the Irish Education System *By Ciara Foley*

The Irish education system is one which is greatly talked about amongst the Irish population, due to the changing of the curriculum or the "points race" for the Leaving Certificate. I'm a 19 year old student and at last I am finally at the top of the education system! I am now in Third level education and am currently a 2<sup>nd</sup> year student at St. Patrick's College Dublin, studying to be a primary school teacher, so my days in the Irish Education system are far from over! So, I have a lot of experience with the system and hope to gain more also when I finally qualify as a teacher!

In Ireland, Education is considered a fundamental right under the constitution, and attendance at full time education is compulsory from four to six-teen. The majority of schools are free but a registration fee is usually required from the schools! There are 3 main stages in education:

### Primary School ( Year 1 to 8)

A child is usually enrolled in school at the age of 4, but this can vary ( 5-6 years) and usually finishes by the age of 12 years.

Junior Infants	4 - 5 years
Senior Infants	5 - 6 years
First Class	6 - 7 years
Second Class	7- 8 years
Third Class	8-9 years
Forth Class	9 - 10 years
Fifth Class	10 -11 years
Sixth Class	11- 12 years

### Secondary School (Year 1 to 6)

Secondary school is broken up into three parts:

**First Year to Third Year** is known as the Junior Cycle - this time is spent studying for a state examination known as the Junior Cert.

**Fourth Year** is known as Transition year. This year isn't compulsory in all schools! It is a year spent doing things that you normally wouldn't get a chance to do during the school year (cooking courses, work experience, community care, first aid). It's a good year to try and figure out what you'd like to do when you leave school!

**Fifth year to Sixth year** are the final two years of secondary school. There is usually a lot of stress associated with these two years as they lead up to the main state examination "The Leaving Certificate"! This exam determines what third level college you get into. It is determined by a "points" system.

### **Third Level Education**

This is the last part of the education system in Ireland, after the Leaving Cert. students decide what they want to study (teaching, Science, Business etc.) and go to different institutes to specialise in these different areas (depending on the points they get in the Leaving Cert.). Such institutes include:

- Universities
- Institutes of Technology
- Colleges of Education
- NUI Colleges
- Independent Colleges

That is just an outline of the education system in Ireland, a system which is changing all the time with the times, improving and introducing more and more topics and subjects to the curriculum.

"Education's purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one!"