

Starting primary

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Teaching at primary level can cause many teachers, particularly those who have trained to teach adults, a variety of problems and generate a range of worries. Unfortunately, it is common for teachers to be asked by their institution to teach young learners even though they don't have specific training. Those first lessons with the class, which are quite probably in a different institution to your regular work, can seem daunting. In this article I provide some advice on how to deal with starting work with primary level students and I give ten top classroom management tips.

Before you begin to teach

- *Find out who your pupils are*
 - Talk to the class teacher and find out if the children are complete beginners in English or have already learnt a little.
 - Are there any bilingual children in the class? If so, use them as your helpers.
 - Do any of the children speak another language?
 - You will find that the children will be highly motivated and excited about learning a foreign language. Your main aim, is to maintain this initial motivation and sustain their curiosity and interest so that they develop a real desire to learn the language, even if you don't feel they are learning very fast. You need to be realistic and so do the children about how much they can learn in the relatively short time you will spend with them.
 - It is quite normal for children to take some time before they actually start producing much language as they will need time to familiarise themselves with you - very probably the first native speaker of English they have ever met - and assimilate the language before they feel ready and confident enough to produce any.
 - Be patient and don't be afraid of repeating things again and again - children need and enjoy lots of opportunities to hear the language. Just remember to be natural.

- *Practicalities*
 - Get to know the class teacher and how they can help you.
 - How many pupils in your class?
 - What can you and can you not do in the classroom, for example, move furniture around?
 - Will the class teacher stay with you during the English lesson.
 - Find out about your school's etiquette?
 - How long are your lessons? 45 minutes, one hour?
 - Are you allowed to display children's work on the classroom walls?
 - Can you create an English corner?
 - What resources does the school have that you can use?
 - How many photocopies are you allowed to make?
 - Can you take the children into the playground?
 - Can you use a computer?

Top ten classroom management tips for successful teaching

- Plan what you are going to do in advance step by step and have clear aims so you and your pupils know exactly where you are going throughout a lesson. This is the only way you will be able to control up to 30 children in one class - and they will be the first to know if you haven't prepared and respond by becoming disruptive.
- Start your year by being firm and be consistent in your own actions and behaviour - children expect a disciplined, structured classroom environment and respond well to routines. Check with the class teacher what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and make it clear to the pupils that you expect the same behaviour.
- Learn your pupils' names and address them directly.
- Be mobile and walk round the class.
- Have a clear signal for stopping activities or when you want children to be quiet. Get silence and wait for their full attention before you start speaking and give clear instructions or demonstrations. Make sure children understand what they have to do.
- Never, underestimate children's abilities or intelligence. They may have very limited English but they still have the same interests and aspirations as any other child of their age. Keep them interested by providing stimulating content and meaningful activities.
- Always ensure that children have some English 'to take away' with them at the end of a lesson. Children will feel proud and have a sense of achievement if they leave the classroom being able to ask, for example, a new question in English, say something about themselves, or sing a song. This means (see the first point above) that your aims will be clear to the children.
- Avoid activities that over-excite - it is often difficult to return to a calm and controlled learning environment after a noisy game. Avoid activities that require a lot of movement as you will find that there is often very little space in a classroom for this type of activity. Also avoid activities that require a lot of cutting and pasting unless there is a clear linguistic outcome, as these can cut into valuable time, apart from creating a great deal of mess.
- Make positive comments about the children's work and efforts and let them see that you value their work.

Have additional material prepared to cope with faster and slower pupils' needs and don't let activities go on too long.