

Early childhood education and care

Information sheet



Introduction

The first few years of a child's life are the most critical in terms of development and learning. Developmental milestones are time-bound and the fact is they are either reached or missed. Remedial action at a later date can be both difficult and costly, for children, families, communities and the state.

While every child can benefit from quality pre-school, for children living in poverty, pre-school could be the first step on a journey of escape from the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

We want every child to have access to a guaranteed, quality, regulated childcare place, staffed by well-trained individuals capable of providing for the development and wellbeing of each child in their care and inspected to ensure compliance with state regulations.

Current Government Policy

The government has chosen to make direct financial supports to parents as opposed to investing heavily in the creation of an ECEC infrastructure. In 2007, spending on Child Benefit and Early Childcare Supplement (ECS) was €2.7bn while just over €1bn is to be invested in childcare provision during 2000-2010 under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme and its successor, the National Childcare Investment Programme (NICP). The NICP aims to create 50,000 childcare places. This will still fall far short of demand.

In addition issues of affordability and quality provision remain ongoing. The Office of the Minister for Children are introducing a Subvention Scheme aimed at reducing the price of ECEC places for some parents on low income. Meanwhile the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is completing the development of a national curriculum entitled the Framework for Early Learning. This together with *Siolta* aims to improve quality provision in all ECEC settings.

Recommendations

- The implementation of the National Economic Social Forum's blueprint for universal access to Early Childhood Education and Care providing each child with a free quality pre-school place. Roll-out of these places needs to begin with those who are disadvantaged.
- Fully resource the roll out of *Siolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* across all ECEC settings so that children can be guaranteed quality care.

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