



**Trinity College Dublin**

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

# **Inclusion and Early Childhood Education and Care in Ireland**

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# Overview of presentation

Locating my personal consideration of the issues

Introduction to the Irish policy environment for early childhood education and care [ECEC]

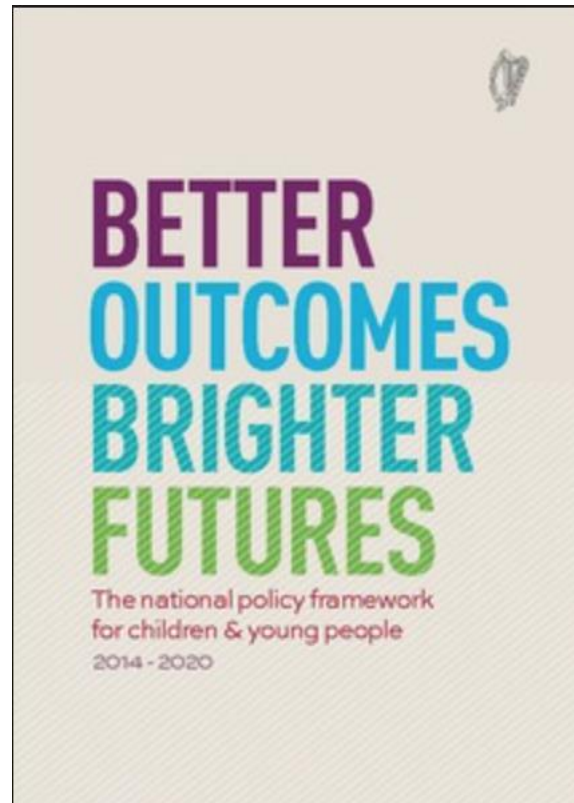
Some developments in inclusion policies

Inclusion in ECEC initiatives

A shift of focus in the inclusion agenda?

# Current Drivers of Policy in Ireland

***Better Outcomes: Brighter Futures. National policy Framework for Children and Young People*** [2014-2020] Government of Ireland



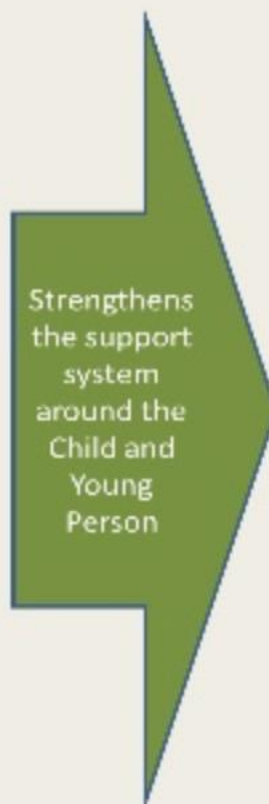
# BETTER OUTCOMES: BRIGHTER FUTURES

THE NATIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 2014-2020

## TRANSFORMATIONAL GOALS



CROSS CUTTING



## BETTER OUTCOMES



BRIGHTER FUTURES



# Education, Welfare and Rights

Childcare Act 1991

Education Act 1998

Education (Welfare) Act 2000

Children Act 2001

Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs 2004

Disability Act 2005

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – Ratified 1992

UN Convention of the Rights of persons with Disabilities – Ireland the only EU country which has **not** yet ratified this convention

# Equality and inclusion

Equality legislation in Ireland:

Employment Equality Acts 1998 and 2004

Equal Status Acts 2000, 2004 and 2012\*

National Disability Authority Act 1999

\* Based on the principle that everyone has an equal right to participate in our society and offers protection against discrimination [outside of employment] on nine grounds: age, gender, race, sexual orientation, marital status, family status and membership of the Traveller community [now recognised as an ethnic group].

Meeting these commitments – and achieving a truly equitable society - continues to be a challenge!

# The Legal Context: Equal Status Act 2012

Under the Equal Status Acts 2012 discrimination in the supply of goods and provision of services is prohibited on nine grounds:

**Gender; Civil status; Family status;**

**Sexual orientation; Religion; Age;**

**Race; Traveller community; Disability**

You are entitled to equal treatment if you have a disability.

The Equal Status Acts 2012 promote ‘reasonable accommodation’ of people with disabilities and allow for a broad range of positive measures.

# Guidance for Inclusion in ECE

Incorporate inclusive education in early years settings.

Context: Department of Children and Youth Affairs [DCYA]

*Irish Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter Guidelines* (2016)

Access and Inclusion Model [AIM]

Underpinning Influences:

Anti-Bias Curriculum [Derman Sparks]

Aistear [Department of Education and Skills]

Siolta [Department of Education and Skills]

Incredible Years [Webster-Stratton]



# Context

A diversity, equality and inclusion approach involves creating an early childhood care and education service where each child feels a sense of belonging (DCYA, 2016)

Inclusion [and diversity] is about us all . . . I am ‘other’ to you as you are to me.

The anti-bias curricular approach which underpins the *Irish Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter guidelines* is inspired by the work of Louise Derman-Sparks and the Anti-bias Task Force. It was further developed by the Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training European Network [<http://decet.org/>]

Central to the implementation of this approach is an awareness of the complexity of the issues around diversity on the part of the all those working with young children

# ECEC for children from minority communities

An initiative supported through the Department of Education and Skills Early Year Education Unit, titled *Preschool Education Initiative for Children from Minority Communities*

The initiative provided a Diversity and Equality Training programme - 'Ar an mBealach' (Murray *et al.*, 2004, 2011)

Used a *Continuing Professional Development* approach with training. Although not initially part of the project design *Mentoring* was found to be important

In line with NDA recommendations this programme supported mainstream training and practice to address wider social justice and equality issues in ECEC.

Results suggest evidence of attitudinal change in participating settings contributing to more inclusive and quality practice.

# National Disability Authority - NDA

The NDA is an independent statutory advisory body to Government on disability issues. The Department of Health sought guidance from the NDA on best inclusionary practices for young children with disability in ECEC. <http://nda.ie/Publications/Disability-Supports/Children/>

*Children should as far as possible receive their pre-school education in mainstream ECEC settings.*

*Supports for inclusion should be directed at the whole ECEC setting*

*One-to-one support for the whole day or session should be an atypical form of support for small minority of children*

*Peripatetic, interdisciplinary teams, should support settings*

*Simple short assessments of needs rather than establishing a diagnosis*

*Therapeutic supports should typically be delivered on-site and focus on supporting ECEC teachers who will be with the child every day*

# NDA influence

2015 - Report of an Inter-Departmental Group

*'Supporting Access to the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme\* for Children with a Disability'*

\* The ECCE programme is a scheme to provide universal free preschool to children from 3-5 years of age. Introduced as a one-year initiative in 2010 and extended in 2017 to two years.

Part of a series of governmental developments in ECEC responding to concerns about the quality and sustainability of the sector in Ireland. Led by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

# Access and Inclusion Model - AIM

Its goal is to empower service providers to deliver *an inclusive pre-school experience*, ensuring that every eligible child can fully participate in the ECCE programme and reap the benefits of quality early years care and education

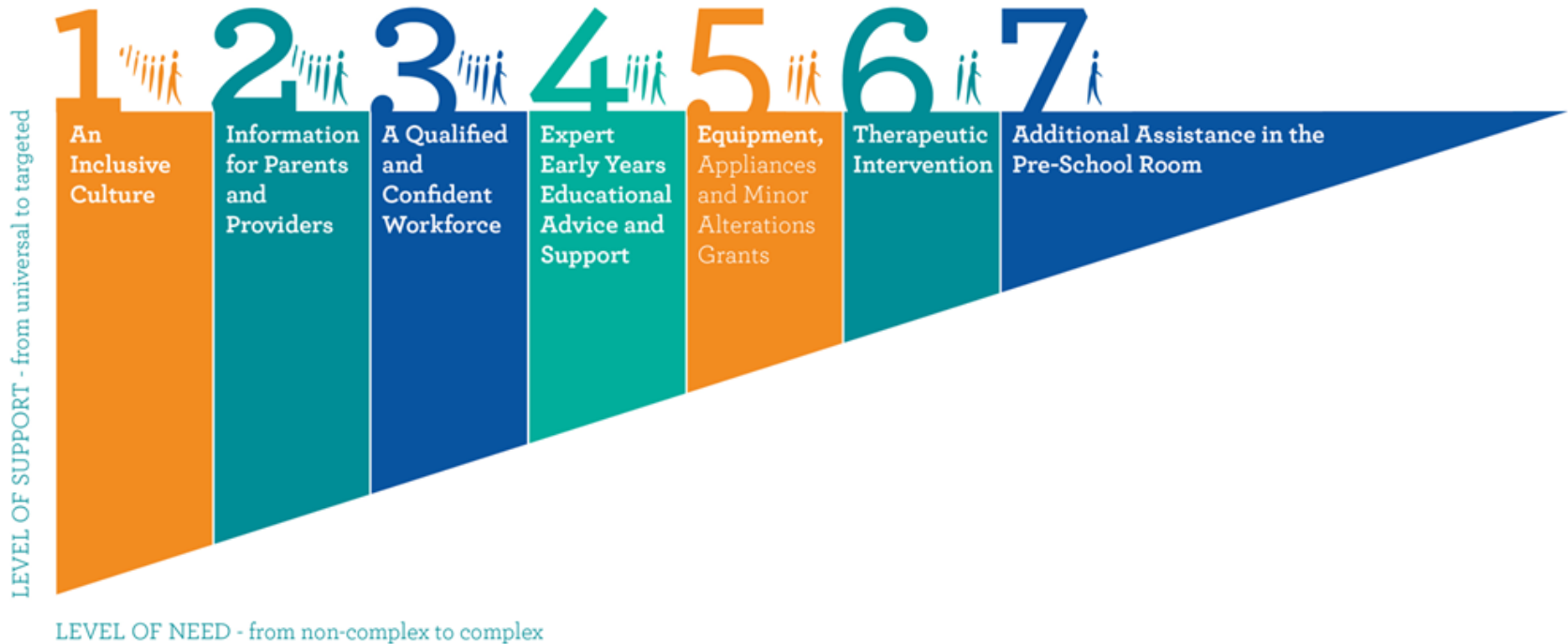
*AIM is a child-centred model*, involving seven levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted, based on the needs of the child and the service provider.

The model is designed to be *responsive* to the needs of each individual child in the context of their pre-school setting. **It will offer tailored, practical supports based on need and will not require a formal diagnosis of disability**

Supported through the National Early Years Quality Service – Better Start [<https://www.pobal.ie/BetterStart/Pages/Home.aspx>]

# A Model of Access and Inclusion – [www.aim.gov.ie](http://www.aim.gov.ie)

A Model to Support Access to the ECCE Programme  
for Children with a Disability



# Supporting AIM - 1

## *Universal Supports* (Levels 1 – 3 of the Access and Inclusion Model)

a) A new Inclusion Charter has been developed for the early years sector. Service providers are invited to sign-up to this Charter by producing and publishing their own Inclusion Policy.

b) A new higher education programme, “Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years” (LINC)

c) a broad multi-annual programme of formal and informal training for pre-school staff in relation to disability and inclusion will be funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and will be delivered by the City and County Childcare Committees

The supports at levels 1 to 3, when appropriately developed, have been found internationally to be sufficient to support many children with disabilities.[ <http://aim.gov.ie> ]

# a) Inclusion Charter for the early years

This Inclusion Charter is the early years sector's commitment to promote the values of diversity, equality and inclusion throughout early childhood care and education settings, as well as through the work of all early years practitioners.

The early childhood care and education sector will provide opportunities for all children to thrive in early education through:

- the promotion of positive identities and abilities,

- the celebration of diversity and difference

- the provision of an inclusive, participative culture and environment.



## a) Charter requirements: the sector will

*Respect* all children equally, nurturing each child's cultural identity and sense of belonging.

*Acknowledge* that parents are the primary educators and experts on their child, and support the smooth transitioning from home to the early childhood care and education setting.

In line with the *Aistear/Síolta Practice Guide*, implement a curriculum that reflects the identities of all children and recognises their abilities and interests.

*Ensure* that service planning and provision embraces the needs of all children and works to deliver an inclusive and accessible environment for all.

*Enable* all children to meaningfully participate in all aspects of the curriculum, and extend learning to challenge and promote the individual child's abilities and development.

## a) Charter requirements: the sector will

*Ensure* that children of all abilities have equal access to culturally and developmentally appropriate play-based educational activities, both indoors and outdoors, which develop their understanding, dispositions, skills and holistic development.

*Support* children to celebrate diversity and feel comfortable with difference.

*Support* children to enjoy their early childhood service in an environment free from bias, stereotypes and discrimination.

*Empower* children to stand up for themselves and others in difficult situations.

*Guarantee* the safety and well-being of all children as central to every aspect of children's learning, well-being, welfare and development.[DCYA, 2016]

## b) LINC programme

LINC (Leadership for INClusion in the Early Years) is a new national programme designed to enhance inclusion of children with additional needs in early childhood care and education settings. As the owner or manager of an Early Years setting, you now have the opportunity to nominate a staff member to participate in this Inclusion Coordinator training programme.

Early Years settings that employ an Inclusion Co-ordinator who has graduated from this course will receive a higher rate of capitation for every ECCE child (an additional €2 per child per week). The programme is fully funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and all participating learners will also receive a contribution of €200 towards costs.

## b) LINC programme

Participants must be employed by your setting and hold a Level 5 Major Award in a relevant area

LINC has been developed with reference to best practice in leading the inclusion of children with additional needs in early years settings

It will prepare learners to adopt a leadership role so they can support other staff to plan for, implement and review inclusive practice.

The programme comprises 6 modules, delivered over 3 semesters and amounting to 60 credits.

The programme will be embedded in Aistear – the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework and Síolta, the National Quality Framework within the ECCE field.

# Supporting AIM - 2

## Targeted Supports (Levels 4 – 7 of the Access and Inclusion Model)

- a) Expert advice, mentoring and support is available from a team of 50 specialists in early years care and education for children with disabilities [Better Start].
- b) The provision of specialised equipment, appliances and grants towards minor building alterations
- c) Therapy services, which are critical to a child's participation in the ECCE programme, are available through the model and will be provided by the HSE

Where the above supports are not sufficient to meet the needs of a child, service providers, in partnership with parents or guardians, can apply for additional capitation to fund extra support in the classroom or to enable the reduction of the staff to child ratio.

# Mainstreaming inclusion into policy

**Better Start** – National Early Years Quality Development Services.

Established in 2015 by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Early Years Inclusion Specialists support ECEC service at Level 4 of the AIM model

Specialists work with settings to model best practice in working with children who have a disability to facilitate their participation in the setting activities.

# Next Steps

Ireland has seen a period of intense development and investment over the last decade

In the absence of a strategy however, there is duplication and increasing demands on settings in the absence of direct sectoral investment.

Emphasis on regulation, inspection and training has moved investment out to allied professions and the development of layers of oversight.

Some concerns about the pressures and demands being made on ECEC and the impact on quality and on children's day-to-day experience.



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Thank You 😊

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