

Aistear

Creathchuraclam na Luath-Óige
The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework



User guide

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and Assessment
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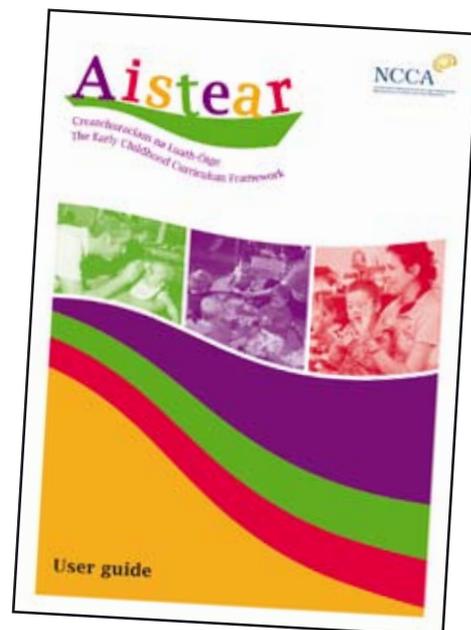


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Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

The development of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* marks an exciting milestone in early childhood education and care in Ireland. *Aistear* builds on and supports many other important developments for children under six years (see Appendix 1). This user guide outlines *Aistear's* contents and shows how you might use these to provide enriching learning experiences for children. The guide also answers some frequently asked questions about *Aistear* and gives some ideas on how to plan your work when using *Aistear*, *Síolta* and the *Primary School Curriculum*.



What is Aistear and what's its purpose?

Aistear is Ireland's **curriculum framework** for children from **birth to six years**. It contains information for parents and practitioners that will help them plan for and provide challenging and enjoyable learning experiences that can enable all children to grow and develop as competent and confident learners in the context of loving relationships with others. *Aistear* describes the **types of learning and development** that are important for children in their early years, and offers **ideas and suggestions** on how these might be nurtured.

Aistear can be used in a range of settings, including children's own homes, childminding settings, crèches, playgroups, pre-schools, naíonraí, and infant classes in primary and special schools.

What is in Aistear?

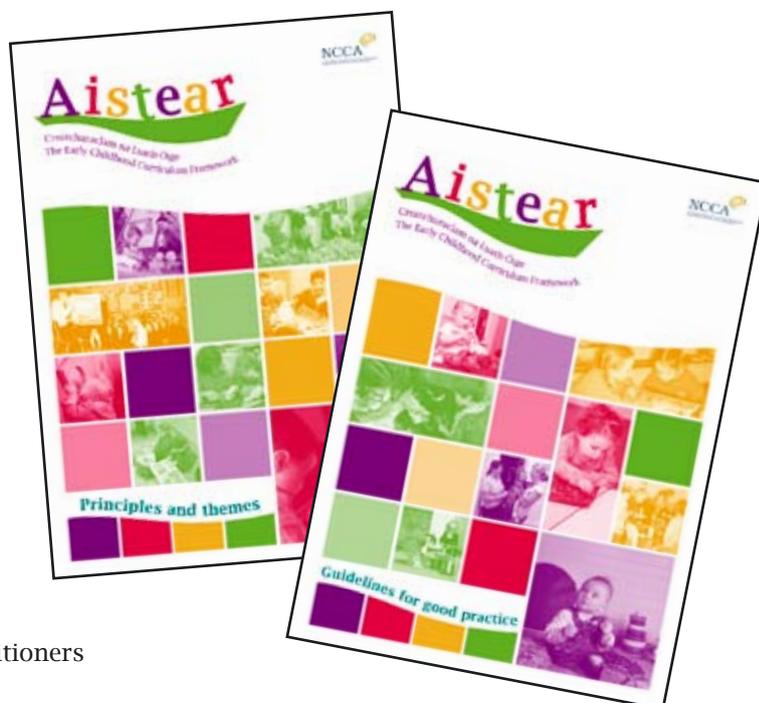
Aistear is based on 12 broad early childhood principles. Each principle is presented using a short theoretical statement, which is then explained from the child's perspective.

Aistear uses four themes that connect and overlap with each other to outline children's learning and development. The themes are

- *Well-being*
- *Identity and Belonging*
- *Communicating*
- *Exploring and Thinking.*

Guidelines offer you support in using *Aistear's* principles and themes in your work with children. These guidelines describe good practice in

- building partnerships between parents and practitioners
- learning and developing through interactions
- learning and developing through play
- supporting learning and development through assessment.

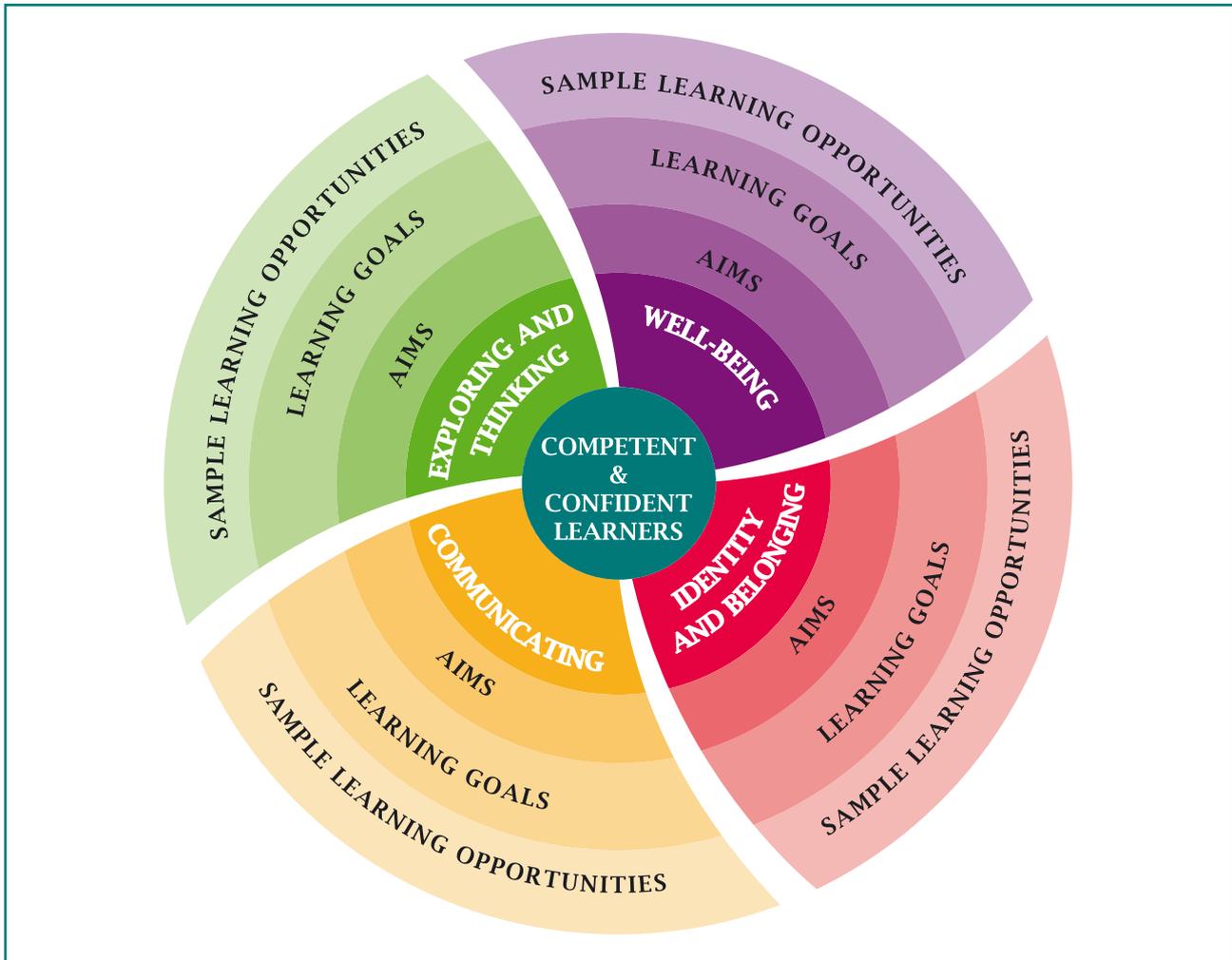




How are the themes structured?

Each theme includes *aims* and broad *learning goals* for all children from birth to six years (see Figure 1). The aims and goals outline the dispositions, attitudes and values, skills, knowledge, and understanding that the adult nurtures in children to help them learn and develop.

Figure 1: Describing children’s learning and development through themes



Each theme has a set of *sample learning opportunities*. These give you ideas about the many different types of experiences you might provide for children to help them learn and develop across *Aistear’s* aims and learning goals. The sample learning opportunities are, therefore, **suggestions**. You can adapt and extend them to suit the children in your setting.

The sample learning opportunities are presented for three overlapping age groups:

- babies: birth to 18 months
- toddlers: 12 months to 3 years
- young children: 2½ to 6 years.



Some of the sample learning opportunities suggested can be adapted for use with the three age groups, while others are more suitable to one particular age group or stage of development. In addition, some learning opportunities are more suited to children at home or in a childminding setting, while others are more useful in a group or school setting.

How are the themes presented?

The themes are colour coded:

- **PURPLE** is used for *Well-being*
- **RED** is used for *Identity and Belonging*
- **YELLOW** is used for *Communicating*
- **GREEN** is used for *Exploring and Thinking*.

How are the guidelines structured?

Each set of guidelines describes good practice and includes *learning experiences* and reflection questions. The learning experiences are detailed accounts of children learning through particular activities or events, in collaboration with other children and adults, while using various objects, play props or materials. They describe what the children say, do and make in the course of the activities or events. They also show the adult's important role in supporting and extending the children's learning and development. Some of the experiences include misspellings and/or mispronunciations which reflect the children's attempts at spelling and pronunciation. The correct spelling is included in brackets to clarify what the children say or write. In the English version of *Aistear* where a learning experience is described in an Irish-medium setting the learning experience is translated and presented before the English version. Many of the learning experiences include comments and/or short conversations between adults and children and between children and children. *Aistear* uses two distinct fonts in **jade green** to highlight these contributions by the children and adults.

The learning experiences on the CD and online are searchable by:

- age group (babies, toddlers, young children)
- setting type (home, childminding, full and part-time daycare, sessional service, infant class in primary school)
- theme (*Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, Exploring and Thinking*).

Like the four themes, the learning experiences are colour coded to reflect the particular theme in question.

Are there important terms to remember in *Aistear*?

Aistear uses the term *parents* to refer to the child's primary caregivers and educators. These include the child's father and mother and/or guardians. The term *practitioner* refers to all those working in a specialised manner with children in all early childhood settings. It includes childminders and teachers working in infant classes in primary schools. The term *adult* refers to both parents and practitioners. At times, however, some information may be more relevant to a practitioner than to parents.

In the *learning experiences* terms like childminder, pre-school leader and teacher are used to reflect the different types of setting in which the experiences are set. Also in the learning experiences terms like mammy, mam, ma, mom, mum, daddy, dad and da, granny, nanny, gran, grandad, granpa, and granda are used to reflect the different words children in Ireland use to refer to their parents and grandparents.

Where can I find out about the research that supports *Aistear*?

The NCCA reviewed national and international literature when developing *Aistear*. The curriculum experiences of other countries also provided valuable information, in particular New Zealand, Sweden and Scotland. Much of the research used to develop *Aistear* is presented in four papers which you can download at www.ncca.ie/earlylearning. These are:

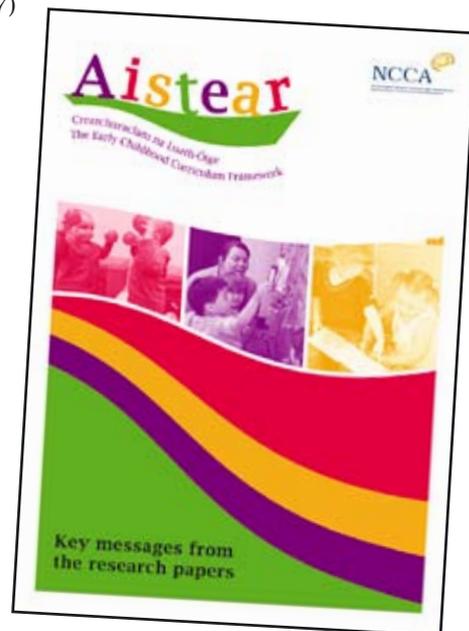
- Perspectives on the relationship between education and care (Hayes, 2007)
- Children's early learning and development (French, 2007)
- Play as a context for early learning and development (Kernan, 2007)
- Supporting early learning and development through formative assessment (Dunphy, 2008).

A summary of key messages from these papers is available on the website and on the *Aistear* CD.

How was the early childhood sector involved in developing *Aistear*?

Aistear is the outcome of a partnership between the NCCA, children, practitioners, parents, training and education institutions, and relevant agencies, organisations, and government departments. In 2004 following the publication of the document, *Towards a Framework for Early Learning*, the NCCA organised an extensive consultation process. The findings of the consultation are available in the document, *Final Consultation Report*

(2005) on the NCCA website at www.ncca.ie/earlylearning. This feedback fed directly into *Aistear*. Following the consultation, the sector contributed to the ongoing development of *Aistear* through committees, seminars and meetings.



Were children involved in developing *Aistear*?

Yes. In particular, children were involved in developing *Aistear* through a research study called *Listening for Children's Stories: Children as partners in the Framework for Early Learning*. The study was carried out in 2006 and is available for you to download from the NCCA website, www.ncca.ie/earlylearning. The study involved 12 children in 11 settings around the country. The key messages from it helped the NCCA to develop a framework which reflects and supports the experiences of children, parents and practitioners in settings in Ireland. Children were also involved through the many learning experiences, photographs and samples of work throughout *Aistear*.

What knowledge, dispositions, skills, and abilities can help me to use *Aistear*?

Knowledge

The adult

- is knowledgeable about children and how they learn and develop
- is knowledgeable about assessment and curriculum development
- knows the children well in his/her setting and uses *Aistear's* themes, aims and learning goals to plan appropriate experiences for them
- thinks about his/her pedagogy
- participates regularly in personal and professional development
- is up to date with relevant regulations and developments that impact on practice, for example, *Síolta* (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education, 2006) and the *Pre-School Regulations* (Department of Health and Children, 2006).

Dispositions, skills and abilities

The adult

- acts in children's best interests and is clear about his/her role in facilitating their learning and development
- supports children in taking an active part in their learning, respects their preferences, and involves them in decisions that affect them
- co-operates and shares information with others who have a role in children's lives, including parents, other practitioners, outside agencies, and other professionals
- promotes equality and respects difference
- seeks information and help from specialist services where appropriate
- draws on new ideas for good practice
- has good verbal and non-verbal communication skills and knows how to listen and observe
- is welcoming and friendly, and has a good sense of humour
- is aware of his/her strengths, while recognising knowledge and skills that need to be developed.

Linking Aistear with other developments

Aistear complements and supports other developments in early childhood education (see Figure 2). For example, *Aistear*, *Siolta* (2006) and the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) have many elements in common while each has a unique and important contribution to make to the quality of children's early childhood experiences.

Figure 2: *Aistear* supporting other developments



Can *Aistear* be used with other curriculum materials?

Aistear is designed to work with the great variety of curriculum materials currently in use in early childhood settings. Using the broad learning goals of *Aistear* you can decide how best to adapt your current curriculum to make learning even more enjoyable and rewarding for the children you work with. When you start using *Aistear* it will help you to achieve greater continuity in children's learning and development, particularly as they move from home to out-of-home settings, and on to primary school.

Can *Aistear* be used with the *Primary School Curriculum*?

Many of the principles underpinning both *Aistear* and the *Primary School Curriculum* are similar (see Table 1). *Aistear*'s four interconnected themes show how early learning is an integrated process and reflect the curriculum areas and subjects in the *Primary School Curriculum*, which also emphasise the integration of learning, especially for young children.

Aistear reflects recent developments in understanding how children learn and develop in early childhood. These developments include the importance of a balance between adult-led and child-led activities. *Aistear* also highlights play as a key way in which children learn and develop from birth to six years. *Aistear* can help you as a teacher to place play and active learning at the heart of the Infant Curriculum. It can also help you with different assessment methods (see the guidelines, *Supporting learning and development through assessment*). These complement the document, *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools* (NCCA, 2007). See the document, *Audit of Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework and the Primary School Curriculum* on the NCCA website for more detailed information on the connections between *Aistear* and the *Primary School Curriculum*.

Can *Aistear* and *Síolta* be used together?

Yes. The principles in *Aistear* and *Síolta* are similar, as outlined in Table 1, on page 10. Yet the two frameworks have different purposes. *Síolta* supports the improvement of quality in all aspects of early childhood practice while *Aistear* focuses specifically on enhancing children's early learning and development. While *Síolta* and *Aistear* can be used individually, there are many benefits in using them together. For example, *Aistear* can help you to develop practice in many of the *Síolta* standards such as curriculum, environments, partnership with parents and families, interactions, play, and identity and belonging. Have a look at the sample plans on pages 15 to 22 for more information on how you can use the two frameworks together. See the document, *Audit of Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework and Síolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* on the NCCA website for more detailed information on the connections between *Aistear* and *Síolta*.

Does *Aistear* connect with the revised *Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations (2006)*?

Yes, *Aistear* will help you to meet the revised pre-school regulations. For example, Regulation 5 emphasises facilitating each child's learning, development and well-being by providing appropriate learning opportunities, experiences, activities, and interactions. *Aistear* will help you to provide children with these.

How can *Aistear* connect with the *Workforce Development Plan*?

The Workforce Development Plan for the early childhood sector is currently under development by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. This plan will focus on access to education and training programmes for practitioners. *Aistear* highlights the importance of the skilled adult working with children from birth to six years. In this way, the Workforce Development Plan will be an important support for you in your work with *Aistear*.



Table 1: Principles of Aistear, the Primary School Curriculum and Síolta

Aistear	Primary School Curriculum	Síolta
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equality and diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking account of individual difference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equality Diversity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationships Role of the adult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning through guided activity and discovery Collaborative learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationships Role of the Adult Teamwork
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents, family and community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking account of individual difference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The child’s uniqueness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uniqueness of the child The child’s sense of wonder and natural curiosity The child’s knowledge and experience as a base for learning Taking account of individual difference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Value of Early Childhood
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children as citizens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking account of individual difference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children First
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Play and hands-on experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning through guided activity and discovery Environment-based learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Play
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The learning environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environment-based learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication and language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning through language 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holistic learning and development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of the child’s full potential The integration of learning The transfer of learning The aesthetic dimension The social and emotional dimensions of learning The developmental nature of learning Higher-order thinking and problem-solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welfare Children First Pedagogy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The child as an active agent in his or her learning Collaborative learning Higher-order thinking and problem-solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children First Pedagogy Play
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevant and meaningful experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning. The child’s existing knowledge and experience as a base for learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pedagogy

(Some principles in the *Primary School Curriculum* and *Síolta* are presented a number of times as they link with more than one principle in *Aistear*.)

Using *Aistear* in different types of settings

Below are some questions and answers to show how you can use *Aistear* in the range of early childhood settings in Ireland, and with children of different ages.

As a parent where can I find ideas in *Aistear* for fun things to do with my six-month-old baby girl that will help her learning and development?

You will find a list of sample learning opportunities for babies from birth to eighteen months in each of *Aistear's* four themes. You can adapt these to suit your own baby, and this might help you to come up with more ideas of your own. After all, you know your baby better than anyone else. You will also find some useful ideas in the guidelines on play. As your baby grows older, you can move on to the toddler and young children sections.

I have a lively toddler and I would like to find some activities that we can do together that will help him to become more independent. I also want to help him develop his speech. Is there anything in *Aistear* that will help me?

You will find useful information in the themes *Well-being* and *Communicating*. The sample learning opportunities provide plenty of ideas to help you encourage him to do things for himself. The communicating theme gives lots of information about developing his language skills. Have a look in the play section too for information on play resources and using different types of play to support learning and development. Don't forget to talk to your child's childminder, the staff in the crèche, or your public health nurse if you have concerns.

I work in a crèche with a group of two-year-olds. How can *Aistear* help me in my work?

Aistear can help you in several ways. First, have a look at the four themes and see how you can use them to plan activities for the toddlers. You can use *Aistear's* guidelines to extend your work with parents and to develop the range of interaction strategies that you use. The section on assessment will help you to see how the toddlers' learning is progressing and this will help you to plan for future learning. Don't forget to share your ideas with parents and tell them about *Aistear* so that they can use it too.

I am a childminder and I look after three children aged from nine months to five years. What has *Aistear* to offer me?

You will find the themes, the guidelines on play, and the guidelines on developing partnerships between parents and practitioners especially useful. If some of the children you look after are attending pre-school or primary school as well, their practitioners may also be using *Aistear*. Talk to the parents and see if you can support and build on what the children are doing at home and in the other out-of-home settings they attend.

I am a junior infant class teacher and have 28 children in my class. I know *Aistear* prioritises play as a medium for learning. Given my pupil to teacher ratio and the lack of space and equipment how can I incorporate play in my classroom?

As you know, play is one of the key ways young children learn and develop. As a teacher, you can be creative in how you incorporate it in your classroom. Below are some ideas that might help you.

First, look at your classroom layout. Could you do with a few less tables or could you rearrange them into a smaller space? Instead of having presses and bookshelves flat against the wall, could you turn them into dividers to create small, child-sized spaces for floor play? Even freeing up a small bit of space can make a difference to the play opportunities that you can provide. Have you thought about moving some activities into the playground? Pretend play and construction activities are even more fun when done outside.

Resources for play can be expensive, so build them up over a number of years. In the meantime, there are alternatives: Shoe-boxes make great building blocks; creative junk art using recyclable materials collected from parents is hugely popular with children; could a parent donate an old baby bath to use as a sand tray?; pretend play could be included in the corner with donations from parents. *Aistear* has a list of play resources in the guidelines, *Learning and developing through play* to give you ideas.

A daily rota of play activities involving, for example, pretend, small-world, construction, and messy play (sand, water and play-dough) is useful in organising play in your classroom. Consider dividing the children into five groups. The groups move from one activity to the next with each new day. Remember to give the groups a few minutes each day to plan together before they start to play; this promotes social skills and learning dispositions. When play is over, it is useful to invite the children to work in pairs and/or groups of three to review their play. Using the rota as a way of organising your play activities will also help you to plan the play environment to match your aims and learning goals, and your work with strands and strand units.

Play is a way of ‘doing things’ and learning. You can use play throughout the day to implement the curriculum. For example, you could use role-play for *Well-being* and *SPHE*, or dramatise a story for *Communicating*, *Drama*, *History*, *Gaeilge*, and *English* or organise construction activities for *Exploring and Thinking*, *Maths*, *Geography*, and *Science*. Play can take time and effort, but you might be pleasantly surprised at the extent to which it can become a routine way to support learning in your infant classroom. And the children will love it!

I work in a special school for children with moderate to severe and profound general learning disabilities. Is there anything in *Aistear* for the children that I work with?

Aistear is for all children up to six years including those with special educational needs. In addition to the *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities* (NCCA, 2007) there are lots of useful items for you in *Aistear*, especially the guidelines on play and on assessment. A sample Individual Education Plan (IEP) is also included on page 19 which may be of interest to you. The Special Education Support Service (www.sess.ie) may be of assistance too.

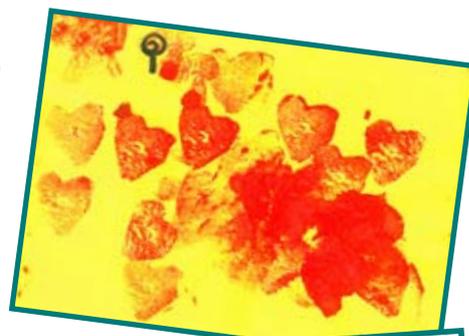
How can planning help me to use *Aistear*?

Good planning can help you implement *Aistear*, *Síolta*, the *Childcare (Pre-School) Regulations*, the *Primary School Curriculum*, and relevant legislation. Planning is important and time needs to be created for the whole staff team to meet together to plan and evaluate. Time for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) also needs to be found.

Planning is an on-going, cyclical process. It involves you in thinking about and being organised about what, why, how, and when things are going to happen. Good planning builds on children’s prior learning and development, and accommodates individual differences. It includes balancing experiences across the four themes of *Aistear* and providing learning opportunities both indoors and outdoors. Planning involves organising people, materials, resources and equipment, and includes organising and timing events such as outings and festivals. Planning helps you to identify what resources are needed and leads to interventions and support programmes where necessary. By reviewing plans regularly you can see how well the curriculum is being organised, what changes and/or extensions need to be made, and how each child’s learning and development is being supported in the overall system. You plan on a regular basis and include elements from previous plans that children liked, or that you feel are important in the new plans.

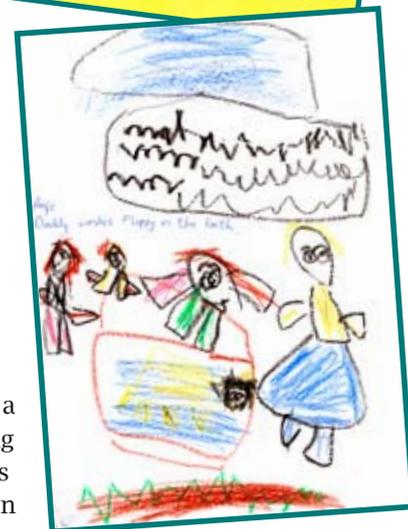
Good plans are flexible, allowing children’s changing interests and responses to learning to be incorporated over time. This type of planning takes time and comes from knowing children well—their interests, needs, cultures, backgrounds, and abilities. Assessment information is, therefore, at the heart of planning. Involving children in the planning process particularly in short-term, daily, and activity plans can make their curriculum experiences more meaningful to them.

Planning is usually organised over three different time scales – long-term, medium-term and short-term – all of which link and follow on from each other. Sometimes a plan might also be drawn up for an activity or a day depending on the setting. Each type of setting develops plans which reflect the setting’s ethos, the ages of the children, available resources, relevant legislation, and policy requirements.



What are long-term plans?

Long-term plans look at the big picture and outline the overall aims and objectives for learning and development over a long period. You usually draw up the long-term plan for a year and this helps ensure that you offer a broad and rich curriculum to children. The long-term plan provides a sense of purpose and direction in the curriculum being offered to children, and shows progression over time.



What are medium-term plans?

Medium-term plans can focus on a term or a month. This plan sets out goals for a fixed period of time and gives a broad outline of activities, at the same time being flexible in order to take account of children’s ideas and interests. Assessments as well as communication and on-going consultation with staff, parents and children guide the development of the medium-term plans.

What are short-term plans?

Short-term plans outline the experiences to be organised for children for a week or fortnight. They are more specific than medium- and long-term plans. Short-term plans can address individual children’s needs and interests. Listening to what children say and incorporating what they want to do involves them actively in the planning process. You can use short-term plans to focus attention on particular children who may require additional support. In preparing short-term plans, you can decide what resources are needed, how to change and adapt the play environment, what time in the day particular activities will take place, who will be there and what his/her role might be, and how the learning will be assessed.

Ideally a Personal Learning Plan (PLP) is drawn up for each child, though this is not always practical, especially where there are high adult to child ratios. It is important, however, to include the interests of individual children in the short-term plan drawn up for the full group.



What is an Individual Education Plan?

When the *Education for People with Special Educational Needs Act* (EPSN) (Department of Education and Science, 2004) is implemented, Individual Education Plans (IEPs) will have to be drawn up for all children with special educational needs. An IEP is a written statement describing the child’s needs and the educational programme designed to meet those needs. The best IEP is person-centred and encourages good relationships between families and professionals. When the child is attending an early childhood setting, practitioners and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) build up a close relationship with the child. Through assessment they document his/her strengths, weaknesses, likes, and dislikes. This information is vital for planning both short-term objectives and annual goals for the child. These can be embedded in the daily activities of the general programme within the setting or through specialised intervention outlined and delivered by the child’s early intervention team. The National Council for Special Education has published guidelines on developing IEPs. These guidelines are available at www.ncse.ie. A sample IEP is included in Sample plan 3b.

What are daily or activity plans?

Daily or activity plans are often drawn up by practitioners to provide a step by step guide to what will happen during the course of a day or a particular activity. The plan sets out the variety of activities that are offered to children inside and outside, and the resources and time given to different activities. The plan helps you to organise resources for yourself and the children, so that the relevant aim(s) and learning goal(s) in *Aistear* can be achieved.

Sample plans

Some sample daily and activity plans are included to help you use *Aistear*. These are not intended to be prescriptive. Their purpose is to support discussion among you and your colleagues about how you might begin to use *Aistear* in organising a day or an activity with the children in your setting.

The sample plans are designed for four types of settings similar to those used in *Síolta* (2006). A sample plan is included for

- childminding settings
- full and part-time daycare settings
- infant classes
- sessional services.

The letters A and LG are used in the sample plans when referring to *Aistear*'s aims (A) and learning goals (LG).



Sample plan 1: Childminder's daily plan

Age group: Babies

Margaret knows the two babies she looks after very well. She has a very flexible routine that she follows daily with Ali (11 months) and Conor (17 months). This routine includes feeding, sleeping, nappy changing, and a range of playful activities indoors and outdoors. Margaret uses caring routines to interact with the children in a playful manner. She knows their interests and needs and she plans particular activities that she knows they will enjoy. She cares for them and supports their learning by providing interesting and challenging activities and experiences for them. She explains things to them and the children accompany, observe and help Margaret as she goes about her every day jobs in the house such as cooking, vacuuming, hanging out the washing, and shopping. Margaret draws up a flexible plan for each day and she fills in a daily diary too to explain to Ali and Conor's parents about what they have been doing. Margaret also takes lots of photographs of the children to help record their experiences. She shares these with the children and their parents. Thursday's daily plan is outlined below.

Date: April 7 th	Daily plan for Ali and Conor	
Time ¹	Activities	Aistear's aims and learning goals
8.30 to 9.00	Arrival, help children settle in.	<i>Well-being</i> - (A 1, LGs 2, 3)
9.00 to 9.30	Breakfast.	<i>Well-being</i> - (A 2, LG 6)
9.30 to 10.00	Play with treasure basket.	<i>Exploring and Thinking</i> (A 1, LGs 1, 2, 4) <i>Communicating</i> (A 1, LG 1)
10.00 to 10.30	Get ready to go to Parent and Toddler group.	
10.30 to 12.30	At Parent and Toddler group, play, meet friends.	<i>Identity and Belonging</i> (A 2, LGs 1, 4, 5)
12.30 to 1.30	Go home, have lunch, get ready for nap.	<i>Well-being</i> - (A 2, LG 6)
1.30 to 3.00	Nap.	
3.00 to 3.30	Read a story or do quiet activities.	<i>Well-being</i> (A 1, LGs 1, 2)
3.30 to 4.30	Go for a walk or do activities outside (playing at the sand tray, going on the push-along toys).	<i>Well-being</i> (A 2, LGs 1, 2)
4.30 to 5.15	Play activities including nursery rhymes and pretend play with tea set.	<i>Communicating</i> (A 3, LGs 1, 2, 3, 4)
5.15 to 5.45	Get ready for going home.	
Resources	Basin of water, items for pouring, treasure basket, cars, tractors, tea set, cardboard box, books	
Assessment	Observe and make notes about Ali at the treasure basket, fill in daily diaries.	
Partnership with parents	Send copy of daily diary home, show both sets of parents photographs from recent trip to the woods before adding to portfolios.	
Links to <i>Síolta</i>	Standards: 3: Parents and families (Components 3.1, 3.2, 3.3), 16: Community Involvement (Components 16.2, 16.3, 16.4)	
Interaction strategies	Engaging, discussing and communicating with children, leading, labelling, describing and explaining learning, modelling, naming and affirming actions and behaviours	
Extension activities	Introduce new nursery rhymes, move more activities outside.	

¹ All times are approximate and flexible and follow children's needs and interests.

Sample plan 2: Activity plan for full daycare setting**Age group: Toddlers**

There are nine children aged 24 to 36 months in the toddler room of Robinhill Crèche. The crèche staff hold monthly planning meetings. They usually do this on the last Thursday of the month. They try to organise it in the afternoon when many of the children are having a nap. All room leaders, some room assistants, and the manager attend. They review the short-term plans for the previous four weeks. The staff in each room draw up short-term plans on a weekly basis. They want to promote the holistic development of the children and they try to ensure that the plans reflect the interests, needs, backgrounds, cultures, and abilities of each of the children in the toddler room. Sometimes they do a plan for a particular activity that they want the children to experience. A couple of weeks ago they bought a new fridge, and one of the activities they did was to paint the empty box from this. The children made it into a tunnel to crawl through; another day they threw a sheet over it and made it into a den. The children really enjoyed this and the staff decided to move it outside as the children love doing activities outdoors. Today it is a musical tunnel, displaying some of the musical instruments that the children made the previous day. Staff plan to spend some one-to-one or one-to-pair time with children in the tunnel.

Date and time: June 8th	Group of children: Toddlers
Practitioners	Alison Quinlan and Rachel Walsh
Activity	Musical tunnel with sound-making items on the floor, on the ceiling, along the sides. Encourage children to explore the tunnel and the sound making instruments and to talk about these.
Time	11.30 to 12.30
Themes, aims and learning goals	<i>Communicating</i> (A 1, LGs 1, 2), <i>Exploring and Thinking</i> (A 1, LGs 1, 4)
Grouping	Work with individual children or pairs.
Resources	Cardboard tunnel, a variety of music and noise making items (rattles, shakers, bells, home-made and bought musical instruments, wind chimes, pretend microphone).
Key vocabulary	Sounds, loud, quiet, ringing, shake, hear, listen, music, piercing.
Assessment	Digitally record the session with Leah. Note children's comments about the sounds.
Partnership with parents	Ask Kevin's dad to come in some day with his guitar.
Links to <i>Síolta</i>	Standards: 2: Environments (Components 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7), 5: Interactions (Components 5.1, 5.2, 5.4)
Interaction strategies	Engaging, discussing and communicating with children, thinking together to build meaning and understanding, supporting participation and learning, structuring the learning environment, assisting children's thinking.
Extension activities	Record children playing the musical instruments alongside recorded music with a strong beat. During quiet times draw children's attention to the sounds they can hear - the ticking of the clock, the beat of their hearts, the sound of traffic passing outside.

Sample plan 3a: Daily plan for primary school

Age group: Young children

In Scoil Phádraig, Miss Sheehan teaches 12 junior infants and 10 senior infants. She helps all the children to reach their full potential, including Brian who has been diagnosed as having Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) and Dyspraxia, as well as speech delays. Brian is in junior infants and an IEP has been drawn up for him (see Sample plan 3b). Miss Sheehan takes note of this in her daily plans.

The instructive play environment is crucial to Miss Sheehan's teaching. She plans using the school plan, the *Primary School Curriculum, Aistear*, and the learning needs and interests of the children in her class. As well as her fortnightly short-term plan, Miss Sheehan sometimes finds it helpful to draw up a daily plan. An example of this is shown below. As she teaches, Miss Sheehan differentiates according to the needs of the junior and senior infant children. The activities are for both classes unless specified differently.

The previous week Miss Sheehan's class visited an open working farm. The infant class tour usually incorporates a trip to the zoo. However, in March one of the children brought in some photographs from a trip to a farm and the class became so excited and raised so many questions about life on a farm that Miss Sheehan spoke to the principal about going to visit a farm instead of the zoo. A class vote saw the trip to the zoo replaced by the visit to the farm. On Friday May 7th the children visited O'Brien's open farm. The local vet also happened to be there visiting a sick sheep. Over the past week many of the activities undertaken have been based around extending what the children learned during the trip.

Date: 15th May		Class: Junior and Senior Infants ²	
Time	Activities	Strands/strand units of the <i>Primary School Curriculum</i> (PSC) linked to the aims/learning goals of <i>Aistear</i> (as detailed already in the short-term plan)	
9.20 to 10.20	<p>Circle of play activities</p> <p>1. vet role play, 2. small-world play, 3. construction area, 4. messy - sand, water, play-dough (J and S).</p>	<p>PSC³ - SPHE. Strand: Myself and the wider world. SU⁴: Developing citizenship. Drama. Strand: Drama to explore feelings, knowledge and ideas, leading to understanding. SUs: Exploring and making drama, Co-operating and communicating in drama, <i>Aistear</i> - <i>Identity and Belonging</i> (A 2, LGs 2, 5, 6), and <i>Exploring and Thinking</i> (A 1, LGs 1, 2, 5, 6)</p>	
10.20 to 11.00	<p>Language: English</p> <p>Read story about vet and prescriptions. Look at and talk about prescriptions for animals (J and S). Model drawing and writing one. Children create their own. Write a word from list discussed on whiteboard (J). Include detail on type of medicine, the animal it is for, and how much to take (S).</p>	<p>PSC - Language: English. Strand: Receptiveness to language. SUs: Reading: developing concepts of language and print, Writing: creating and fostering the impulse to write. (See SPHE earlier). <i>Aistear</i> - <i>Communicating</i> (A 1, LGs 3, 4; A 3, LGs 2, 3, 4) and <i>Exploring and Thinking</i> (A 3, LGs 2, 3)</p>	
11.00 to 11.10	Small break		

² J is for Junior Infants, S is for Senior Infants. Many of the activities which Miss Sheehan plans to use support integration across the *Primary School Curriculum* and *Aistear*.

³ PSC is the Primary School Curriculum.

⁴ SU is for Strand Unit

Date: 15th May		Class: Junior and Senior Infants	
11.10 to 11.45	Mathematical activities Classifying, matching, and creating sets (J); counting animals, compare sizes, weight, colour and features of different animals (S).	PSC – Mathematics. Strand: Early mathematical activities, SUs: Classifying, Comparing, Matching. Strand: Number, SUs: Counting, Comparing and ordering. Strand: Measures, SUs: Length, Weight, <i>Aistear – Exploring and Thinking</i> (A 3, LGs 1, 2, 3, 5) and <i>Communicating</i> (A 1, LG 5)	
11.45 to 12.30	Physical activity Invite children, including Brian, to be horses encouraging them to go over, under, up, down, in, out, in a circle. Ask them to run, canter, gallop, to run in relays (J and S).	PSC – PE. Strand: Athletics, SUs: Running, Jumping. Strand: Gymnastics, SU: Movement, Strand: Games, SU: Sending, receiving and travelling, Strand: Outdoor and adventure activities, SU: Walking, <i>Aistear – Well-being</i> (A 2, LGs 1, 2)	
12.30 to 1.00	Lunch break		
1.00 to 1.30	Language: Gaelige Old McDonald in Irish to teach names of animals, to reinforce names of colours and numbers up to 5, use class puppets who visit the farm (J and S).	PSC – Language: Gaelige. Snáithe: Éisteacht, SU: Ag tuiscint teanga. Snáithe: Labhairt, SU: Ag úsáid teanga. <i>Aistear, Exploring and Thinking</i> (A 3, LGs 2, 3, 5), <i>Communicating</i> (A 3, LGs 3, 6)	
1.30 to 2.00	SESE Use two sets of photos of farm life on interactive whiteboard to compare (photos of children’s visit plus old farm photos of cows milked by hand, horses ploughing etc) (J and S).	PSC – Geography: Strand: Human environments, SUs: Living in the local community, People and places in other areas PSC – History: Strand: Story, SU: Stories (S) PSC – Science: Strand: Living things, SU: Plants and animals <i>Aistear – Identity and Belonging</i> (A 2, LG 5), <i>Exploring and Thinking</i> (A 1, LGs 1, 2, 5).	
Reminders	Pair Brian with Emer during circle of play activities, introduce key vocabulary during role play.		
Resources	‘Usuals’ plus bandages, prescriptions, empty dog/cat food containers, lots of varieties of animals.		
Assessment	Take photographs during role play activity, ask children to discuss what they learned about vets and prescriptions.		
Parents	Display ‘prescriptions’ and some photos of vet play on wall in hall. Invite Yvonne’s dad who is a veterinary nurse to come in.		
Links to <i>Síolta</i>	Standards: 6: Play (Components 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.7), 14: Identity and Belonging (Components 14.2, 14.3)		
Interactions	Engaging, discussing and communicating, thinking together to build meaning and understanding, modelling, supporting participation and learning, grouping children, planning for and reflecting on children’s learning.		
Extension activities	Help the children to do the vet role play in Irish. Look on the internet for more information/pictures of the animals the children are interested in. Concentrate on learning about animals and the outdoors in order to provide Brian with a reason to want to share his thoughts during SPHE time.		

Sample plan 3b: Individual Education Plan

This Education Plan has been developed to support your child’s learning and development. It is for use both at home and at your child’s school. It is a working document which is open to change. The specific goals for your child that are identified here are only a small though focused part of his overall development.

Name: Brian Doyle	D.O.B.: 12/08/03					
Parents: Tom and Josephine Doyle	Current Age: 5					
Address: 22 Old Church Road, Mount St. Andrews, Dublin	Telephone: 01 - 81458899					
School: Scoil Phádraig, National School	Class: Junior infants					
Principal: Patricia O Dowd						
Class Teacher: Miss Sheehan						
Learning Support/Resource Teacher: Jill Grey						
Psychologist: John Kiely, National Educational Psychological Service						
Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO): Joan Boland						
Special Needs Assistant (SNA): Sally Finn						
Speech/language therapist: Jane Byrne						
In attendance: Tom and Josephine Doyle, Patricia O Dowd, Susan Sheehan, Jill Grey, Joan Boland, John Kiely, Sally Finn, and Jane Byrne						
Today’s date: 1 March 2008						
Commencement date: 10 March 2008						
Date of review: June 2008						
Summary of Special Educational Needs: Brian is 5 years old and transferred from pre-school to school in September. He has been diagnosed as having Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), dyspraxia, and has speech difficulties. He is supported by Sally, a special needs assistant (SNA) three hours per day. He is one of six children and is the fourth child in the family.						
Impact of Special Educational Needs on Educational Development: Brian requires that the curriculum be adapted to support his development. He also requires support to develop his communication, play, and his physical and life skills. He is very accident prone and has difficulties with co-ordination. Brian has a particularly short attention span and finds it difficult to stay on task. He rarely gets his work finished.						
Progress to date: Brian has settled in to his new school, although he needs consistent support. He works best on his own or in pair situations and loves being outdoors. He has significant difficulty with writing due to his poor fine motor skills, and his speech delay means that he is taking longer to obtain letter sounds than his peers. He finds PE particularly frustrating due to the focus on skills development in the Athletics, Games and Gymnastics strands although he does enjoy outdoor and adventure activities.						
<table border="1"> <tr> <th>Current abilities, skills and talents</th> </tr> <tr> <td>Brian is cheerful and outgoing.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>He shows a particular interest in the outdoors and animals.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>He enjoys music and art.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>He likes listening to stories in one-to-one situations where he can see pictures and when props are used.</td> </tr> </table>		Current abilities, skills and talents	Brian is cheerful and outgoing.	He shows a particular interest in the outdoors and animals.	He enjoys music and art.	He likes listening to stories in one-to-one situations where he can see pictures and when props are used.
Current abilities, skills and talents						
Brian is cheerful and outgoing.						
He shows a particular interest in the outdoors and animals.						
He enjoys music and art.						
He likes listening to stories in one-to-one situations where he can see pictures and when props are used.						

Priority learning goals and strategies for the period March to end June 2008

Goal Brian will	Strategy	Responsible	Review date	Date achieved/ progress
begin to concentrate for increasingly longer periods of time.	<p>Brian will undertake five minutes of concentration exercises/games each day during his Learning Support (LS)/Resource Teaching (RT) time.</p> <p>Brian will use an egg timer for written activities such as colouring and letter formation in order to help him focus on the task.</p> <p>During tasks which require sustained concentration Brian will be provided with a quiet area in the classroom in which to work, where there is the minimum of distraction.</p>	<p>Ms. Grey</p> <p>Miss Sheehan will provide the egg timer and will set it at the beginning of each task so that Brian can see and hear how much time he has left.</p> <p>Sally will ensure that Brian has moved to this area or will sit next to him at his usual place to help him focus.</p>		
be more organised.	<p>Regular clean-up times will be held during the day to keep areas/tables tidy.</p>	<p>Miss Sheehan will ensure there are regular tidy up times, signalled by singing the tidy up song. Sally or a peer will help Brian organise his belongings and to tidy up in general.</p>		
learn to kick a ball.	<p>Brian and Sally will practise kicking a ball outside in the yard regularly.</p> <p>Miss Sheehan will incorporate an element of ball kicking into PE lessons across all strands e.g. kicking motions in dance.</p>	<p>Sally will take a ball out to the yard on little breaks three times a week and kick it about with Brian, and then with Brian and a peer.</p> <p>Miss Sheehan will include this aspect in both her short- and long-term planning.</p>		
practise the opening and closing of different types of fastenings.	<p>Brian will use the 'fastenings frames' to practise opening and closing buttons, zips, laces, hooks/eyes, and Velcro fastenings.</p>	<p>Ms. Grey will provide some time twice a week during Brian's time with her to practise this skill.</p> <p>Sally, Miss Sheehan and Brian's parents will use opportunities that arise during the day to have Brian open and close such fastenings as much as possible (within reason).</p>		

Sample plan 4: Activity plan for sessional setting

Age group: Young children

There are 20 children in Clonmore Pre-school aged between three and five years. The staff hold fortnightly planning meetings, every second Thursday between the morning and afternoon session. They have a long-term plan which covers the year and they also have termly plans mostly based around the seasons. They use the aims and goals of *Aistear* to draw these up. They also use assessment information and informal chats with parents and children to draw up short-term plans. They often draw up plans for particular activities that they want to do with the children based on their interests, and a plan is outlined below for an 'All about me' book. During the month of September staff have worked hard on helping children settle in, and an important part of this has been making children feel they belong to the setting. The 'All about me' book is an important part of this.

Date and time: Oct 1st – 4th Time: 30 – 40 mins daily	Activity: 'All about me' book
Practitioner	Diane Murphy
Activity	Introduce children to the activity and explain what is involved. Invite children to make 'All about me' books.
Time	10.30 to 11.10
Themes, aims and learning goals	<i>Identity and Belonging</i> (A1, LGs 4, 5, 6), <i>Well-being</i> (A 1, LGs 1, 6)
Grouping	Small groups of three/four children will work at each table.
Resources	Photos of individual children, their families, pets and friends, cut-outs from magazines of toys, vehicles, activities, different places and types of homes and food, examples of own art work and mark making, photos of children doing activities in the different areas of the room, glue, pencils, paper, copy or scrap books, skin coloured crayons and paint.
Assessment	Add to portfolios after parents have returned them.
Partnership with parents	Send books home for parents to look at.
Links to <i>Síolta</i>	Standards 1: Rights of the child (Components 1.1, 1.2, 1.3), 14: Identity and Belonging (Components 14.1, 14.2, 14.3)
Interaction strategies	Accepting and valuing children and their families and communities, supporting participation and learning, structuring the learning environment.
Extension activities	Discuss the books at circle time over the coming days, talking about different skin and hair colours, about likes and dislikes, and about everyone having his/her own special family.

Conclusion

Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework has the potential to make a significant contribution to children's early learning and development. The NCCA website www.ncca.ie/earlylearning is a point of ongoing information on *Aistear* so check it out regularly. Also, you can email earlylearning@ncca.ie if you have queries on *Aistear*.

Appendix 1

Important policy developments in early childhood care and education

- Ireland's ratification of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* in 1992 (United Nations, 1989)
- *The Report of the National Forum for Early Education* (Forum Secretariat, 1998)
- *Ready to Learn*, the White Paper on Early Childhood Education (Department of Education and Science, 1999)
- *Primary School Curriculum* (Department of Education and Science, 1999)
- *Children First* (Department of Health and Children, 1999)
- National Children's Strategy, *Our Children - Their Lives* (Department of Health and Children, 2000)
- *Our Duty to Care* (Department of Health and Children, 2002)
- *Ready, steady, play! A National Play Policy* (National Children's Office, 2004)
- *Early Childhood Care and Education Report 31* (National Economic and Social Forum, 2005)
- *Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations* (Department of Health and Children, 2006)
- *Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education, 2006)
- *Announcement of Free Pre-school Year* (Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, 2009), cited July 17, 2009: accessed at <http://www.omc.gov.ie/documents/childcare/ecce-scheme-pack/ECCE-terms&conditions>
- *Developing the workforce in the early childhood care and education sector, Consultation document* (Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, 2009), cited July 28, 2009: accessed at <http://www.omc.gov.ie>



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The NCCA was granted parental permission for the participation of their children in this process.