

Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA)

**Implementation Plan for Phase I of the free Pre-School Year in Early
Childhood**

Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme during January 2010 - September 2012

This Circular (No. 1/2009) has been drawn up by the Childcare Directorate of the OMCYA which is responsible for the regulation of Pre-School services and the implementation of the ECCE scheme. It is directed at all relevant staff and personnel in the HSE Pre-School Inspectorate, Pobal, the City and County Childcare Committees and those involved in the implementation of Siolta as part of the ECCE scheme on behalf of the OMCYA. Its purpose is to provide a clear implementation plan which sets out the general approach to be adopted in implementing recent changes affecting pre-school services.

From January 2010, the OMCYA will be responsible for implementing the ECCE scheme. The introduction of the ECCE scheme is a ground-breaking development for pre-school service provision in the State. The scheme will bring together a number of elements under the responsibility of the OMCYA, including more recent developments such as NCIP funding for the implementation of Siolta (see Appendix 1 attached) in ECCE participating services and the assessment tool for Regulation 5 of the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No. 2) Regulations 2006. It also coincides with the publication of Aistear, the early childhood curricular framework produced by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (see www.ncca.ie).

To assist pre-school services with all of these developments, a measured, incremental approach will be required during the initial implementation phase, Phase I, from January 2010 to August 2012. This will be followed in September 2012 by Phase II when more stringent requirements regarding the level of qualifications held by staff in ECCE services, the standard of implementation of Siolta, and compliance for the purposes of Regulation 5, will be appropriate.

Phase I: January 2010 - September 2012

Phase I from January 2010 to September 2012, will be an introductory period for all new requirements. Pre-School Services Inspectors, the City and County Childcare Committees and those involved in Siolta, are asked to support pre-school service providers in becoming familiar with and competent in the new requirements during this period. An incremental approach accepting the need for a lead-in time is required. Standards for compliance will be increased from September 2012.

The OMCYA will support this process in a number of ways. Information on the interaction of Siolta, Aistear and Regulation 5 will be co-ordinated by the OMCYA, working with the HSE, and disseminated to pre-school services in a cohesive way, through the Pre-School Services Inspectorate, the City and County Childcare Committees and those involved with Siolta.

The Early Education Policy Unit of the Department of Education and Science, which is part of the OMCYA, will play a key role in producing clear information on how early years learning programmes are accommodated within the frameworks of Siolta and Aistear. The Childcare Directorate of the OMCYA will work with the City and County Childcare Committees and the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations involved in implementing Siolta to deliver a series of information and training workshop at county level, over the course of this period.

Pre-School services participating in the ECCE scheme during Phase I will be contracted initially for January to August 2010, followed by a September 2010 to August 2012 contractual period.

HSE Pre-School Inspectorate

In carrying out its advisory and inspection duties in relation to pre-school services, the HSE Pre-School Inspectorate will continue to be guided by the Child Care Regulations 2006, including the new inspection tool for Regulation 5. As outlined above, pre-school services will be expected during this period to meet a minimum standard of compliance in regard to Regulation 5, while they are assisted to improve in competency.

Pobal

Pobal will continue to assist the OMCYA in implementing funding schemes under the NCIP and managing the reporting requirements. They will continue to have a key oversight role in regard to the work of the CCCs and NVCOs, as well as services participating in both the CCSS and ECCE scheme. They will continue to undertake monitoring and compliance visits to both CCSS and ECCE services and will also undertake advisory visits where required.

City and County Childcare Committees

The City and County Childcare Committees will continue to assist the OMCYA in administering the ECCE scheme. This will include processing applications from services, responding to queries, processing documentation in relation to services' fees policies, exemption from rateable charges, etc as well as undertaking monitoring and compliance visits to services as required. They will also help in arranging the proposed information and training workshops and will continue to support training and information dissemination in regard to Siolta.

National Voluntary Childcare Organisations

The NVCOs will continue to assist the OMCYA in relation to the implementation of Siolta in ECCE services. This will involve working closely with the Early Education Policy Unit of the Department of Education and Science, which is part of the OMCYA. They will also, through the OMCYA, liaise with the CCCs in providing information and training on Siolta at the workshops to be organised.

Phase II: September 2012 - September 2014

From September 2012 to September 2014, the level of required competence and familiarity with the new requirements under the ECCE scheme, Regulation 5 and Siolta, will increase. The minimum qualification levels required will be announced with two years notice to facilitate services to adjust to the new requirements. The instructions in this Circular are designed to achieve a coherent implementation by all parties concerned

of the requirements placed on services participating in the ECCE scheme, both regulatory and those particular to the scheme. The overall objective of the above is to ensure that children's experience of early childhood care and education is the best possible.

Sylda Langford
Director General
11 December 2009

Síolta Quality Framework

Síolta

Síolta is an evidence based Quality Framework that is designed to support the development of quality in practice within a wide range of early childhood care and education settings (ECCE) where children aged birth to six years are present. It has achieved a high degree of content validity through a rigorous and extensive programme of consultation with all stakeholders in the ECCE sector in Ireland.

Using Síolta, early childhood care and education settings can evaluate (both formally and informally) the quality of the service they are providing and use this insight to improve and enhance all aspects of practice.

Formal engagement with Síolta

Formal engagement with Síolta is supported by the Síolta Quality Assurance Programme (QAP) (see diagram 1.) Any early childhood care and education settings involved in the formal quality assurance programme will be working with a mentor currently known as a Síolta Co-ordinator who is a highly qualified and experienced ECCE practitioner specially trained to support the implementation of the Síolta QAP.

Informally using Síolta

ECCE settings can also work informally with some or all of the content of Síolta by using the Principles, Standards and Components of quality as a reflection and planning tool without engaging in portfolio building and validation processes.

Síolta Content

Síolta comprises three distinct but interrelated elements, namely Principles, Standards and Components (and their associated Signposts for Reflection) of Quality. The Principles provide the overall vision of the Framework. The Standards, Components and Signposts for Reflection allow for practical application of this vision across all aspect of practice in an ECCE setting.

Diagram 1. The Síolta Quality Assurance Programme



Síolta Implementation Toolkit Overview

Síolta Principles

The Principles contained within *Síolta* span twelve general areas:

The value of early childhood

Children first

Parents as partners

Relationships

Equality

Diversity

Enriching environments

Safety, welfare and well-being

Role of the adult

Teamwork

Pedagogy

Play

Síolta Standards

There are 16 standards covering all areas of everyday practice. For example, Standard 6 within *Síolta* which relates to Play states that;

Promoting play requires that each child has ample time to engage in freely available and accessible, developmentally appropriate and well-resourced opportunities for exploration, creativity and 'meaning making' in the company of other children, with participating and supportive adults and alone, where appropriate.

This is further broken down into a number of components of quality which act as indicators for achieving the Standard, e.g.,

Component 6.1 is *The child spends a significant amount of time in the setting at play/exploration and these and other playful activities are central to the daily routine*

To assist practitioners understanding of what this indicator may look like in their everyday practice, Signposts for Reflection are provided to help the practitioner challenge and reflect upon their current practice, e.g.,

What proportion of the daily routine is given over to play, whether structured activities, adult or child initiated, indoors or outdoors, etc?

And their reflection and subsequent planning is supported by 'think abouts', suggested activities or aspects of practice that might be addressed

Think about (e.g.)

Play with concrete materials

Interactive story-time

Singing and rhyming

Dance and music

Symbolic play

Creative play

Games (e.g., auditory, visual, etc.)

Ensuring that time for play is maximised within your daily routine

Routine activities which could be done in a playful manner (e.g. break times, lunch time, tidy up times, etc.)

A Research Digest has also been developed for each Standard. It summarises the key messages from research and makes practical suggestions for how this new knowledge can be implemented in practice

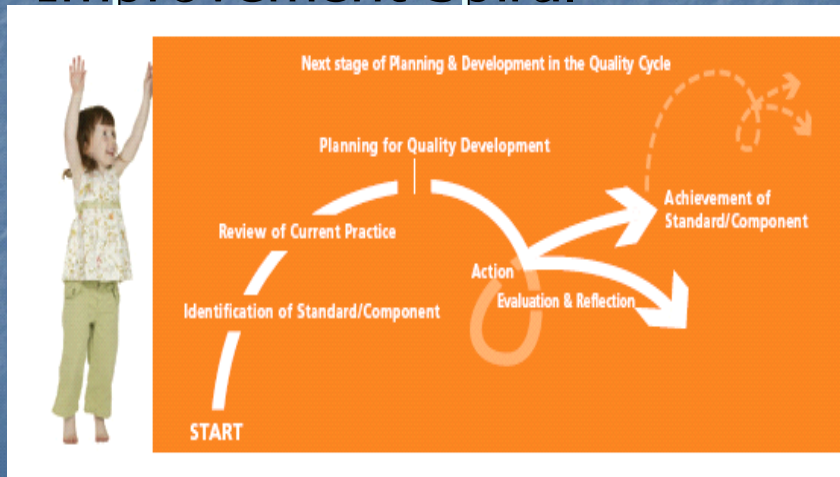
Full details of the Síolta Principles, Standards, Components and the accompanying Research Digests are available on-line on www.siolta.ie

Síolta is not prescriptive – it doesn't spell out what settings should do but instead it encourages reflective practice by asking practitioners to look constructively and critically at their pre-school service and document the positive aspects of practice but also identify the potential for improvement.

Síolta Quality Improvement spiral

Whether an ECCE setting is engaging in a formal or informal way with Síolta, it is anticipated that they will be following a process which is described as the Síolta Quality Improvement Spiral (see diagram 2 below).. This conceptualises the ECCE setting's journey towards achieving the highest level of quality provision and practice as a series of upward reflective spirals that begins from the current situation of the setting and which becomes embedded in the long term activities of everyday service delivery. Síolta models good practice in early childhood care and education and is designed to support all ECCE practitioners, irrespective of their setting, to develop the important skills of reflective practice, assessment for learning and documentation which are central to the delivery of high quality early childhood experiences.

The *Síolta* Quality Improvement Spiral



Síolta and the Child Care Regulations and Aistear

Síolta has been designed to complement the existing regulatory and curricular frameworks relevant to the ECCE sector in Ireland. Síolta can be used by services who are beginning to develop quality in practice and who are endeavouring to comply with minimum standards as represented by the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No 2) Regulations 2006.

Equally, highly developed services can use Síolta to constantly refresh and revitalise their planning and development activities and can also avail of the opportunity to get external validation of their quality practice.

Síolta and Aistear, the Curricular Framework for Early Childhood Education have also been designed as complementary. In simple terms, Síolta provides a wide lens through which to examine all the areas of everyday practice which impact on the delivery of a quality ECCE service and Aistear is a more focused lens through which to examine curriculum and pedagogy. More information on how these two frameworks work together to support the achievement of high quality ECCE services can be found on the NCCA website as can all the Aistear materials ([www.ncca.ie/early childhood](http://www.ncca.ie/early%20childhood))

9 December 2009