



Better Pre-School Access for Children with Disabilities 'Access and Inclusion Model: AIM' unveiled Minister Zappone urges Parents to apply

Children with disabilities will have better access to pre-school under a new programme of supports unveiled today (15th June 2016) by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr Katherine Zappone TD.

Announcing the new Access and Inclusion Model, or AIM, Minister Zappone said

“This is an important step to break-down barriers preventing children with disabilities from taking part in the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme.

Parents and pre-school providers who wish to avail of AIM should make their applications now so that they can plan for enrolments in September.

I am committed to working towards a more vibrant, inclusive and tolerant society which supports all children, equally, to realise their potential – today we have taken another important step to achieve that.”

AIM is a child-centred model, involving seven levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted, depending on the needs of the child and the pre-school. It is being introduced from today to allow parents and pre-school providers to apply for supports and plan ahead for September enrolments. A range of different initiatives are being launched as part of the model as follows:

- In order to foster an inclusive culture, the Minister has published a new **Inclusion Charter** for the Early Years sector, alongside updated and strengthened **Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education**. A programme of training on the guidelines will now be rolled out nationally over the coming months.
- Applications will open this week for a new **higher education programme** for early years practitioners (LINC) which will commence this September. The LINC programme is being delivered by a consortium, led by Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, together with Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University and Early

Childhood Ireland. Development and design of the programme was financed by the Department of Education and Skills from dormant accounts funding, while the Department of Children and Youth Affairs will fund up to 900 places per annum on the programme. Graduates from the programme will be able to take on a new leadership role of Inclusion Co-ordinator within their pre-school setting which will attract an increase of €2 per child per week in the rate of ECCE capitation payable to that setting. This programme is part of a broader package of education and training supports to upskill the early years workforce in relation to inclusion and disability.

- A new **national specialist service** is open for business from today. Through this service, which is based in the Better Start National Early Years Quality Development Service, expert advice, mentoring and support is available to pre-school providers from a team of 50 specialists in early years care and education for children with disabilities.
- A new national scheme is open from Friday, 24th June providing **specialised equipment, appliances and minor alterations** which are necessary to support a child's participation in the ECCE programme.
- A new national scheme is open from this Friday, 17th June providing **additional capitation** to pre-school providers where this is critical to fund extra support in the classroom and enable a child's participation in pre-school. It is estimated that only 1 to 1.5% of children in pre-school will require, and therefore be eligible for, this scheme of additional capitation.
- A new **dedicated website on AIM** is being launched today. This contains comprehensive information on the model and on how to apply for the new schemes and supports. The website also contains the new Inclusion Charter and Guidelines, as well as a range of other resources.

