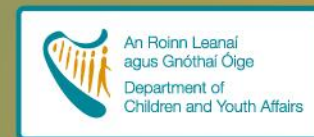


Department of Children and Youth Affairs



NDA Seminar 3 Oct

Pre-School - DCYA Perspective

Mary McLoughlin

Why the early years matter

- 75% of brain development occurs between birth and the age of two.
- Early experiences have a long lasting impact on quality of later life
- Early intervention - positive effect in terms of promoting development, and minimising decline or regression.

Early years and children with disabilities

- Children with special needs benefit disproportionately from early childhood education
- Quality is crucial
- Education and care are inseparable; integrated services are best
- There is evidence that inclusive services are better for most children

Childcare Provision in Ireland

- Primarily parent funded
- 3 State supported schemes
- c 4,700 services
 - 70% private
 - 30% community
- Relatively recent sector – major investment since 2000

Schemes

- Free Preschool year
 - 3hrs/day, 38 weeks – matching primary school year
 - 65-68000 children, aged 3 - 4
- Targeted schemes
 - CCS- childcare for parents on certain DSP benefits
 - C. 27000 children
 - CETS- childcare for parents in education and training
 - c. 8000 children
 - School age – childcare for parents activated off Liver Register
 - Only in pilot phase

Children with disabilities

- Free Preschool year
- Aim to be inclusive
- Can come in over age (although issues re legal age for school)
- Can take one year over two
 - Sometimes availability of SNA
- Pressure to provide 2 years for children with disabilities – but not necessarily ideal

Pre-School year – Staff backgrounds

- Huge variation e.g.
 - Parents who minded other children and developed a service
 - Professionals eg Nurses, social workers who worked with children and started service when had children themselves
 - Montessori trained
 - Degrees in Early Childhood Care and Education

Qualifications

- Evidence that higher quals → higher quality
- Traditionally no qualifications required
- Preschool year (2010) required Level 5 for all team leaders
- Sector has upskilled considerably
- Focus on upskilling will include specific requirements in relation to special needs

Key opportunity

- 94-95% children in preschool year
- Other children 0-3 in childcare settings
- Close relationships with parents
- Identification of developmental delay
- Flexibility of sector

Challenges

- Variation in capacity
- Low level of qualification, training and cpd
- Non recognition by primary teachers of value of EY professionals

Example of Good Practice Donegal

- Donegal CCC – learning from Pictures for Learning programme
 - no linkages between the early childhood service and their local primary schools
 - no assessment process in place to inform an end of year summary to support the transition process
 - end of year summaries not being completed
 - Or completed and given only to parents, who could pass to school
 - one service reported to being involved in developing a transition process with their local schools which proved unsuccessful due to lack of commitment from all parties concerned.

Donegal Transitions Project – principles underpinning Transitions Statement

- statement would be open-ended, not tick box
- content would be framed against Aistear themes
- strength-based approach -highlight each child's individual strengths, interests, & emerging skills and abilities
- enable the sharing of information regarding children with special needs

Donegal Transitions project

- Development team
 - 12 early childhood educators,
 - 7 teachers/school representatives and
 - 3 members of the PPP Team
- Developed a Transitions statement for transition from Preschool to Primary School (finished May/June 2013)

Some key challenges

- **Feedback from Early Childhood Educators**
 - Difficult to complete statement using positive language without diluting the specific learning needs of the child.
 - challenging to complete without having child assessment records
 - difficult to report the information under the four themes of Aistear.
 - difficult to capture a true picture of the child in a concise way.
 - Difficult to ensure Transition Statement passed on to the school.
- **Primary school teachers**
 - too much information.
 - wanted a statement they could assess at a glance with the view to additional supports or resources needed more interested in what the children could not do rather than what they could do.
 - Some teachers had little or no knowledge of Aistear.
 - The information was received too late for children with special educational needs as schools need this in February

Learning

- Need for continuous iterations and consultation
- Importance of involving both EY educators and primary teachers
- Compromise!
- Roll out of Aistear in schools will help – shared language and understanding
- Role of parents key

For a national initiative we need

- For educators:
 - Clear understanding of Aistear, capacity to take a strength based approach in writing, ability to document progress, good communication with parents and other professionals
- For parents
 - Understanding importance of transitions, understanding of Aistear, agreement to collecting and sharing information
- For schools and childcare services
 - Good understanding of Aistear, ongoing liaison (incl re special needs of children), mutual respect, transition policies Roll out of Aistear in schools will help – shared language and understanding

Where next

- Supports as needed rather than on diagnosis
- Supports within services rather than clinics
- Close relationships between services, CCCs, Early Intervention teams and schools
- Build on good practice – we have local models that work, lets use them nationally