

Childcare in Budget 2016: further detail

Budget 2016 has significantly increased the resources provided for childcare measures. Currently, annual expenditure on childcare supports provided through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs is around €260 million. The additional €85 million allocated in Budget 2016 increases this allocation by a third. When full year costs are taken into account, these measures increase Ireland's expenditure on early childhood care and education by approximately 0.1% of GDP, taking Ireland closer to the average OECD investment.

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

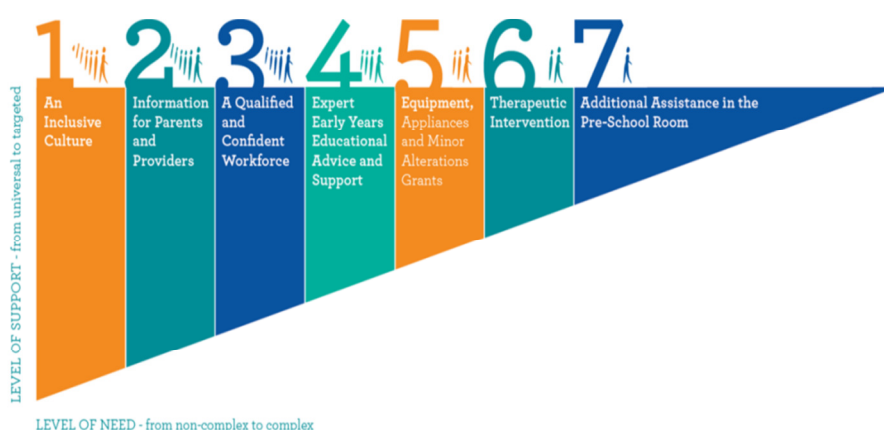
Budget 2016 introduces a new model of support for children with disabilities in pre-school.

What supports will be put in place to support children with disabilities can fully participate in pre-school?

While the current ECCE programme does include provision for children with special needs¹, it is recognised that these are not always sufficient to enable all children to participate.

Budget 2016 provides funding to implement a new model of support for children with special needs. The model comprises seven different levels of support – both universal and targeted – to enable children with disabilities to fully benefit from free pre-school. These are outlined below.

A Model to Support Access to the Free Pre-School Year for Children with a Disability.



- 1. An Inclusive Culture:** includes training dedicated *Inclusion Co-ordinators* in pre-schools, and a small capitation increase for particular childcare services to support fully inclusive practice;
- 2. Information for Parents & Providers:** includes development of a national website and information packs for parents and providers;

¹ Including greater flexibility in accessing free pre-school, ad hoc funding from the HSE towards the cost of pre-school support assistants, elective modules on children with special needs in mandatory courses for early years practitioners, along with initiatives to support providers who need expert advice and guidance by City/County Childcare Committees, HSE/HSE funded services, and by the *Better Start* early years specialist support service.

- 3. A Qualified & Confident Workforce:** resourcing formal and informal training for early years practitioners to support more inclusive provision;
- 4. Expert Educational Advice & Support:** enhancing the *Better Start* Early Years Specialist Service so that practitioners have prompt access to advice and support from experts in early years education for children with disabilities;
- 5. Equipment, Appliances & Minor Alterations:** capital grants to fund specialised equipment, appliances, assistive technology, or minor building alterations so that children with disabilities can participate in pre-school;
- 6. Therapeutic Intervention:** additional resources to enable access to HSE therapeutic services, where these are needed to allow a child enrol, and fully participate in, pre-school.
- 7. Additional Assistance:** where the supports available at levels 1-6 are not sufficient to meet a child's needs, additional capitation can be made available to childcare providers to support the pre-school leader to ensure children's full participation. This could include, for example, buying in additional support, or, in particular circumstances, reducing the staff:child ratio.

FREE PRE-SCHOOL

Free pre-school is provided under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. This programme has been expanded in Budget 2016 to allow children to start pre-school when aged 3, and to continue until they transition to primary school. Further detail on this measure is provided below.

How will the ECCE programme change from September 2016?

Currently, children who are aged between 3 years 2 months and 4 years 7 months are eligible for 38 weeks' of free pre-school when they register for the programme. The ECCE programme is aligned with the school year; children register in September.

This initiative means that, from September 2016, children will be able to register for free pre-school when they are aged 3, and will be able to remain in pre-school until they make the transition to primary school (provided they are not older 5 years 6 months at the end of the pre-school year i.e. the end of June).

Children will also be able to enrol in pre-school at three different points in the year – September, January and April – so that children can begin pre-school shortly after they reach age 3.

How many extra weeks of pre-school does this mean?

Currently, children are entitled to free pre-school for the 38 weeks of an annual ECCE programme, which is aligned with the school year.

This Budget 2016 initiative means that, on average, children will benefit from an extra 23 weeks of free pre-school.

The precise number of weeks a child will benefit from depends on their birth date, and on the age at which they start primary school. For example, a child born in January who starts school aged 4 will benefit from

up to 50 weeks free pre-school, while if they start school aged 5, they can benefit from up to 88 weeks free pre-school.

Average number of pre-school weeks by month of birth and of enrolment in pre-school²

Birth Month	Enrolment Month	Average no. weeks in pre-school	
		Start school age 4	Start school age 5
January–March	April	50	88
April–August	September	38	76
September–December	January	61	61

How many extra children will be able to benefit from free pre-school?

Currently, around 67,000 children – about 95% of eligible children – participate in the ECCE programme each year.

It is estimated that this Budget 2016 initiative will increase the number of children benefiting from free pre-school to over 127,000 in a given year, based on estimates of population, school starting age, and the current rate of participation.

Enrolment	Number of children
September	89,510
January	22,223
April	15,444
Total	127,178

COMMUNITY CHILDCARE SUBVENTION (CCS) PROGRAMME

To support families returning to work, education or training, Budget 2016 includes an additional 8,000 low cost childcare places through the Community Childcare Subvention programme, and begins the process of developing a single Affordable Childcare programme.

What other changes will be implemented on the CCS programme?

To help make childcare more affordable for more families, work will begin immediately on developing a new single Affordable Childcare programme to replace existing targeted subsidies, many of which can only be delivered by community/not-for-profit childcare settings.

In line with this initiative, private childcare providers will– for the first time – be able to provide these CCS childcare places, as well as community/not for profit providers.

² In general, under this measure, children born from January to March can enrol in April and avail of either 50 or 88 weeks in pre-school, depending on the age at which they start primary school. As this initiative begins in September 2016, children born from January to March can enrol in September 2016, and can avail of either 38 or 76 weeks in pre-school, depending on the age at which they start school.

How many extra places are being provided on Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) Programme?

Currently, only community/not-for-profit childcare providers are eligible to participate in the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) programme, which provides low cost childcare to low income and/or disadvantaged working parents. It is an important support to making work pay for families wanting to move from welfare to work. About 25,000 places are provided in almost 900 childcare services.

As a result of the economic crisis, the programme has been closed to expansion over recent years – no new services could enter the programme, and existing providers could not expand their services.

Minister Reilly has recently lifted this restriction, providing for up to 2,000 additional (full-time equivalent) childcare places – or up to 5,000 children based on average uptake – before the end of 2015.

Budget 2016 builds on this initiative by providing for a further 3,200 (full-time equivalent) childcare places on the programme, or about 8,000 children based on average uptake.

It is intended that the 8,000 places to be made available in 2016 will be open to private providers, most particularly in areas where no community/not-for-profit providers are available.