



What?

Why?

How?

Guide to Play and the Learning Environment

Regulation 5 and the Learning Environment

The learning environment is one of the central areas of assessment and is fundamental to compliance under regulation 5 of the preschool regulations. Regulation 5 is concerned with the health welfare and development of the child; this is an essential component of our work with children and is focused on children's learning and development.

Regulation 5 states that

“A person carrying on a preschool service shall ensure that each child's learning, development and wellbeing is facilitated within the daily life of the service through the provision of the appropriate opportunities, experiences, activities, interactions, materials and equipment having regard for the age and stage of development of the child's cultural context”

What this means for the learning environment is that the room should be well resourced and arranged allowing enough space for each child to play and learn:

- The recommended “adequate” space ratio for each child is dependant on the age of the child and is outlined under Regulation 18 Premises and Facilities in the Preschool Regulations 2006. Of course this ratio can be extended to allow for more space for each child. The recommended space is measured as free floor space not including heaters, shelving/presses etc.
- In order to meet the requirement under Regulation 5 a childcare service must have an adequate amount of appropriate materials which are age appropriate and in good condition- Regulation 25.
- The room should be arranged appropriately to support and stimulate learning opportunities, experiences, activities and interactions.
- It is also expected that light and ventilation – Regulation 20 and 21- will be ample for the room.

Regulation 5 also states that providers should ensure that

Each child's learning, development and well-being needs should be met within the daily life of the service through the provision of appropriate opportunities, experiences, activities, interactions and materials. In meeting these needs, service providers should recognise how children affect and, in turn, are affected by the relationships, environment and activities around them.

Regulation 25 and the Learning Environment

All of the equipment and materials must be well maintained and kept clean
Regulation 25 of the Preschool Regulations 2006 states that “a person carrying on a preschool service shall ensure that



“there is sufficient furniture, play and work equipment and materials and that such furniture, equipment and materials are suitable, non-toxic, in a proper state of repair and are maintained in a clean and hygienic condition”,

(i) The provider should ensure that sufficient furniture, play and work equipment and materials are provided, and that these are

appropriate for their purpose and that they help to create an accessible, challenging and stimulating environment. They should be of suitable design and condition, well-maintained and conform to appropriate safety standards. They should be appropriate to the children’s ages and stages of development.

(ii) The service provider shall ensure that there is sufficient child-sized furniture and tables to allow groups of children to play and eat together.

(iii) Furniture and play and work equipment must be in good repair and must be regularly checked for defects and faults and repaired or replaced as necessary. All other materials should be provided and supervised in line with good practice and the philosophy and ethos of the service.

“Play can be fun, challenging and enjoyable for both adults and children. By helping children to take part in different types of play on their own and with others, and by providing a well-resourced play environment inside and outside the adult creates an indoor and outdoor environment that provides a wide range of play possibilities.

Regulation 18 and the Learning Environment

Regulation 18(a) Preschool regulations 2006 states that:

“The design, layout and physical environment of pre-school premises play a definitive role in the provision of a quality childcare service.

“The premises should be conducive to meeting the needs of young children and be organised to ensure their safety - this includes arrangements for the drop-off and pick-up of children at the pre-school facility. The flow of children and adults in the building should be considered, having regard to how access is gained to toilets and outside play areas. Access issues can impact on the service in terms of disruption and may lead to health and safety incidents/accidents.”

He/she: prepares, plans for and organises activities based on assessment information and the aims and learning goals in Aistear’s four themes

- *provides for play experiences that are safe, challenging, inclusive, and enjoyable*
- *structures the indoor and outdoor environment so that it reflects children’s individual strengths, interests, abilities and needs*
- *continually builds on, challenges and extends children’s learning and development*
- *provides children with choices about what to do and when. adults can greatly enrich the learning opportunities that play provides.”*



What is the Learning Environment

The physical learning environment is the area where the children spend their time at a preschool, or crèche it does not include staff rooms, toilets offices or laundry rooms. The learning environment should be a place where children are motivated to grow and develop

“the physical environment, both indoors and outdoors, should stimulate curiosity, inspire creativity, be varied and dynamic, provide a context for activities and play, encourage exploration and support holistic learning and development.” (CECDE 2005.)

Why do we need to consider the room lay out for small children?

The indoor environment is required to provide a safe, secure yet challenging space for children. For some children, the indoor environment is like a second 'home', providing a place for activity, rest, eating and sleeping.

The indoor environment should contain resources which are appropriate, well maintained and accessible for all children.

Indoor spaces need to be planned so that they can be used flexibly and an appropriate range of activities is provided.

When considering the room arrangement it is important to take into account the age range of the children using it. Babies and toddlers have different needs to preschool children.



The Baby, Wobblers and Toddler Room

Indoor Learning Environment

Why is the Learning Environment so important?

A carefully designed and well set up environment helps to promote children's progress in all areas of their development including physical, social, and communication skills.

Aistear The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, Guidelines for good practice Describes how children *"Like having spaces inside and outside, and often enjoy playing with other children and adults. They also need props such as toys, equipment and real objects to play with and manipulate. They love to make choices about when, what, where, how and whom to play with."*

A well designed learning environment does not restrict babies and allows them to wiggle, roll, crawl, balance and toddle. The furnishing and materials should be child orientated and child sized to provide comfort and security for children and caregivers.

How do I design the space?



It is necessary for Baby rooms to be quieter and less open planned than preschool rooms. Baby rooms should leave lots of room for crawling and space for babies who are beginning to walk and opportunities for them to pull themselves up. Equipment in this

room should be placed in corners and against walls allowing the babies and small children to pick up toys, play with them and drop them.

The corners of the room should be cosy and inviting with different types of activities.

Shelving in a baby room should be kept to a minimum with all of the toys and equipment kept at the child's height. Some low level, open shelving may be used as a space saving device or to define areas of interest. This shelving space can be used for books, puppets or play sets of farm animals, trucks and cars. Ensure there is a quiet area of the room with lots of natural light, comfortable seating and carpet or mats and cushions where you can get down on the floor to play alongside the babies.

What type of equipment should be available?

Consider the equipment babies will find interesting and you consider to be safe: Soft toys with easy cleanable surfaces, treasure boxes with a variety of safe interesting materials of different textures e.g. thread spools balls (make sure they are large enough that babies will not be able to get them into their mouths), spoons, pieces, of material and smelling boxes. Think about including some real life materials including pots, spoons, plastic cups, empty tubs, squeeze bottles and various sized boxes, balls and blocks soft and firm. Babies also need toys which stimulate curiosity pop up toys, musical instruments shape sorters and messy play as well as mirrors of various sizes and shapes (make sure they are safety plastic mirrors suitable for babies to put into their mouths or bang with their hands.)

Soft furniture including an armchair or sofa is an important addition to a baby room as it provides an area for feeding, comforting, reading/telling stories or rhymes as well as speaking to parents and providing opportunities for parents to feed their own babies. Messy play in the baby room can include jelly, rice pudding, mashed bananas, non toxic paint, play dough and a variety of other non toxic materials, ensure that none of the babies are allergic to any of these as they are likely to end up in babies' mouths; babies love to feel texture with their mouth



The Outdoor Learning Environment

What is the outdoor learning environment?

The outdoor space should be viewed as more than just a playground area for children to use and develop their large muscles and develop coordination. The outdoor space should be seen as an additional learning space where children can explore and learn in much the same way as the indoor space. *“The environment should be warm and welcoming for children and their families and staff. It should be safe and secure, with well-organised space, used appropriately to promote children’s learning and development.” Regulation 18; Preschool regulations 2006*

Why do we need outdoor play spaces in our learning environment?

Outdoor play spaces are an essential element in the early years setting. This area provides opportunities for children to play more freely, use their large muscles and big voices. Playing outdoors offers children the experiences of designing and building on a larger scale than inside. The outdoor environment is the only place where children can have direct experience of nature, and their environment, appreciate changes in temperature and light and come in contact with plants, insects and other creatures in their own habitat.



“Space is required for the physical need for children to run freely; pedal wheeled toys actively; and the emotional need to have loud voices without disturbing others. Decreased or restricted space in any setting may restrict movement.” Supporting Quality Book 2 Geraldine French 2008

How do we develop outdoor play spaces for children



“Ideally the outdoor play area should be directly connected to the indoor area providing ease of access throughout the day. Most of the things that can be done inside can also be done outside, for example reading stories, taking part in pretend play, doing group art projects, and playing with sand or water. In the outdoors, activities can also be provided on a

larger and more expansive scale. Objects can be transported using wagons, trolleys or wheelbarrows; houses can be constructed using different sized cardboard boxes, old sheets or curtains; marks can be made using large pieces of chalk or buckets of water and large paint-brushes; gardening activities can be undertaken; and roads and dens for mini-beasts can be created.” Aistear Guidelines for good practice

Outdoor play spaces for babies and toddlers should include a variety of textures, surfaces, sound, colour, and smells. When babies aren't mobile beyond crawling or learning to walk, try outdoor toys that can give babies and toddlers the chance to look around and you can talk about what they see, feel, hear and smell.

The outdoor equipment does not have to be expensive and can include a lot of free and found material or almost free and found. Blowing bubbles with a variety of bubble wands small hoops to large home made hoops, is a great outdoor activity for babies and toddlers, babies love to watch bubbles. Big colorful beach balls which will attract the babies' attention and are safe to be thrown rolled and chewed. Musical instruments or biscuit tins with wooden spoons, CD player with music providing opportunities for dance clapping tapping a steady beat or singing are also a great activity for babies and toddlers.



Babies love to touch and explore the way things feel. They also love to crawl through and around things your outdoor baby play area could include tunnels, play tents or even large boxes all of these are good as they can also be a sun protection on very warm days.

If you are considering some ride on toys think about the height they toddlers should be able to easily reach the ground with their feet.

There are many plastic play sets for children between 18 months and 3 years old. Look for a play set that is small enough for easy climbing and safe sliding.



On warm days you could let the babies and toddlers splash with floating toys in a big bowl of water or baby bath or play in a sand box, this should have a lid for closing and sealing when finished or bring it back inside. It is essential that toddlers and babies are well supervised while playing outside and in particular with sand and water so they don't come to any harm. Remember to put the water and sand play in the shade and apply sun protection!

A simple walk around the garden or in the local playground is another healthy and stimulating activity for toddlers and babies. The most important thing is to get the children out into the fresh air. Studies show that exercise and fresh air support children's natural rhythm of sleep and wakefulness, and that, outdoor play provides many opportunities for sensory motor learning as well as putting baby's, toddlers and small children in contact with nature and living things.

The Preschool Room

Why is the learning environment so important?

The preschool room is the place where the children spend most of their time while in preschool, part time or full day care. We want children to feel comfortable and secure in this place. A well organised room with an extensive range of materials provides lots of active and participatory learning opportunities for children in all areas of their development including;

Emotional development; the consistency of the play space and materials gives children a sense of security and consistency, promoting children's self confidence and opportunities for independent problem solving.

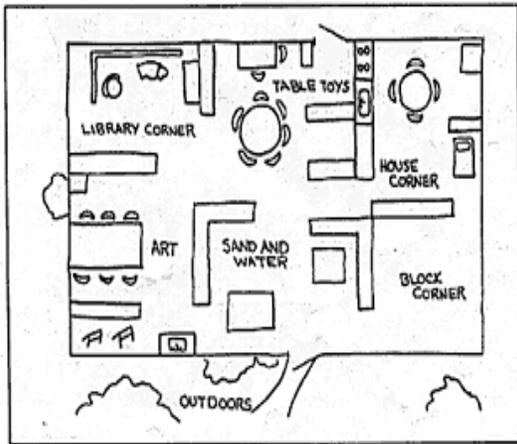
Social development; A well organized room can foster social interactions and encourage parallel and group play.

Physical development; Providing space and materials both indoors and outdoors assists children with the development of their fine and gross motor skills, from the development of small pincer movement skills to the development of their large muscles.



Why do we divide the preschool room into areas of interest?

When the preschool room is divided into special interest areas, each area with their own relevant equipment children begin to understand how the world is organized. Children see how things fit together, for example all of the things you may have in a home area, block area or art area. Children can also begin to understand how some things possess more than one asset and can fit, or be used in more than one area. This is why it is important that children are allowed to bring materials from one area to another to extend their play.



When designing the play space for preschool children you should consider the types of play this age group of children engage in.

Appropriate learning areas or interest areas should be included in room planning. When developing a floor plan for the preschool room it is important to consider the fixed elements of the setting. The establishment of visual boundaries gives children a sense of place, it also helps children to remember where things go at tidy up time the cycle of find, use and return is less complicated. These boundaries can be defined with low shelving, carpeted areas or storage boxes. Move equipment and shelving away from walls as the walls create a natural boundary; instead use these to define areas. Design a plan which will give you an idea about how your space will work best with these distinct areas.



Draw up your plans before moving the equipment and shelving around, as this will give you an idea of how the space will work best. Choose names for the areas which children can understand. You may decide to begin the year with simple names of areas e.g. block area, house area and sand and water area. Later in the year, when children become more familiar with the areas you can introduce other interest areas.

The room should be attractive and inviting to children, yet well organised in order for children to discover and explore toys and equipment, enough space needs to be allocated to allow groups of children to play in the same area at the same time. Avoid areas with little or no equipment or areas with no specific purpose which can become a running track for children.

Plan your interest areas to accommodate many types of play by including a variety of materials and providing different types of spaces for different sorts of play. Include spaces where children have enough room for gross motor development, areas for social play, parallel play, solitary play, role play, constructive play and cooperative play.

Materials and equipment should be kept visible to the children and easily reached. Make sure that the shelving is low level and that dress up equipment, art materials, blocks and house/home area equipment are within easy reach for them.

Choose see-through containers allowing the children to see what is inside without taking it from the shelf, you may also consider using labels on the outside of the boxes, this will help considerably at tidy up time. The labels can be of many types, a sample of the real item glued to the outside of the box, pictures of the items, an outline of the items in the box, and even, for older children the name of the items in the container.

Choose materials which reflect the children's interest, cultural background, human diversity in a non bias way, the local community and are open ended (materials which can be used in a variety of ways).



What areas should be included in the Preschool room.

Aistear states that:

The environment influences how and what children play. Well-resourced, well-planned and predictable indoor and outdoor spaces help children to see the opportunities that are available for play. There are two roles for the adult in preparing this environment: organising it and resourcing it.

And in relation to areas of interest

Interest area – *The adult arranges the space and furniture into child-sized areas rather than in a single large group space. He/she creates well-defined areas of interest that encourage a variety of types of play and helps children see and experience the choices on offer. For example, in out-of-home settings the adult might organise the indoor space into areas such as a messy/art/junk area, a pretend area, a library area, a music and movement area, and a construction area.*

Some of the areas which might be included in preschool rooms;

Messy/Art/junk area;

This area should ideally be located near a sink and toilet and have an easy to clean floor surface. As with the names of the interest areas begin with a small range of appropriate equipment which is reviewed regularly and added to as the year progresses. A successful art area should provide items which can be used in a variety of ways.



What materials should be included?

As well as the usual paint, glue, paper, pencils, sand and water think about using an assortment of items which can be used for painting for example sponges, paint brushes of various sizes, toothbrushes, feathers or straws.

You may also consider including a junk art box which can contain boxes, squeeze bottles, egg cartons, cloth, tubs, newspapers, magazines and anything else you can think of.

How do I arrange the material in this space?

Think about a logical system of storing materials in the art area, place similar items together, things that hold things together, things that stick, paints etc. Select materials which reflect diversity including a variety of skin coloured paints, crayons and pencils.

When choosing materials for the art area consider the developmental levels and physical ability of the children, include equipment which is adaptable for children with development or physical delays or difficulties.

The pretend/Home area

The home corner or House area is a very active area in the preschool room where children engage in a lot of role play. Arrange the room so that the Home corner is near the block area in order for play to be extended between the two areas sharing materials and ideas. Developing the Home corner you need to take the profile of the children attending your service into account.



What materials should be included

Ensure that there are enough materials for large groups of children to play together. Incorporate a wide variety of resources and equipment. Include kitchen equipment and utensils with real materials in so far as possible, for example old telephones and mobile phones, frying pans, saucepans, spatulas, plastic cups and plates, sweeping brushes and dustpans and anything else you can think of which may be appropriate for children to use.

You may wish to ask parents to collect empty cereal boxes, cartons, towels, clocks and magazines. Incorporate materials which reflect the culture or family customs of the children in your group as well as the wider community this may include pizza or Chinese takeaway boxes, chopsticks and a wok. The space should also include a table and chairs, with enough room for many children to play together. If there is enough space this area can be extended to include other “rooms” for example sitting room and bedroom. These rooms can be used to extend children’s play opportunities.



Dress up clothes are an essential part of any role play in the preschool classroom, ideally this should comprise a wide variety of clothes which reflect the occupations of the family members, local customs and people in the community, try not to limit the selection to just the superheroes or stereotyped dress up clothes. The inclusion of hats, scarves, shoes, bags, belts, bracelets, ties etc. can provide openings for children to further develop imaginary play. As with the empty boxes you could use this as an opportunity to include parents by asking them to bring in some of their clothes etc. Offer enough of a selection for children to have choices, but not so much that it becomes overwhelming to choose from and difficult to organize.

Other items which should be included in the home area are dolls, stuffed soft toys, babies rattles, dolls clothes and nappies, ensure that the doll you include reflect the children and community ethnicity with realistic skin tones and facial features.

The Library/Book Area

The same care and attention should be applied when planning and designing the book, reading or quiet area. Choose an area of the room where there will be little to no passing traffic, ie. away from doors and in the corner of a room if possible. Find a quiet space away from places where there tends to be more noisy play.

What type of books should I include

Your choice of books in this area ought to include a variety of story books from around the world, try to be discerning in relation to the story content, illustrations and reflecting non stereotypical characters, roles and situations.

How do I make this area attractive and interesting?



This should be a soft comfortable area which may include soft furnishings and well displayed book stands, you may also wish to comprise some writing materials in this area and make it a reading and writing area.

Some of the writing materials could also be donated by the parents and may consist of old computer key boards, stamps envelopes, pens and paper.

Some providers may also wish to have soft music playing in the book/ reading and writing area.

Table top/quiet area;

As with the other areas this area needs to be well thought out the toy/ table top area needs, as the name suggests, tables and chairs, ideally this would be located near or next to the book area, again a place where there is little to no traffic or doors. Try to include as many **open ended** materials in this area as possible

What are Open Ended Materials

Nancy Vogel from HighScope educational research foundation describes open ended materials as “materials *that can be used in a variety of different ways*” She also suggests that we should *Choose materials which reflect the children’s interest.*

Materials which support different types of play

Materials that reflect children’s family lives

She advises that we should *Plan for ample supplies of materials to allow for children’s play preferences and to choose materials that support learning across different curriculum content areas.*



What do children learn in this area?

The play in this area helps children to develop and practice their fine motor skills. The variety of materials in this area can also help children to develop concentration and imagination.

How do I arrange the learning space?

Arrange the shelving space to accommodate see through containers and group similar materials together, for example, things that fit together, things that stick, pretend materials, plastic/wooden animals and games. Use the shelving to create a defined area which will assist in creating a perceived quietness.

Construction/Block Area



This is generally one of the busiest areas in the preschool room. It also can be a very noisy area where children use the materials to represent roads, buildings, or playground toys. Because of the large structures involved and in order to accommodate the type of play which occurs here this needs to be a large open space. The use of a large mat or piece of carpet can help with reducing the noise level and provide a more comfortable place for children to kneel or sit on the floor while working in this area. The inclusion of a wide variety of block sizes and textures from great big soft blocks to small pieces of wooden or plastic fit together blocks, provides children with the opportunities to extend their

play and imagination.

What do children learn in this area?

The play in this area assists children in the development of their spatial relations as well as cooperative and imaginative play.

As with all of the other areas it is important to include materials which reflect the children's home and community, for example dolls houses with multi cultural dolls. As this area can be a very social and noisy area it would fit very well beside the home area and materials can be crossed over from one area to another.

There are many other areas which can and may be included in the preschool setting, some suggestions are; a music and movement area, a science area, a computer area or a sand and water area separate from the art area.

Further suggestions on what materials to include in these or any other areas are available in Aistear Appendix 1 Resources for play.

The Outdoor Learning Environment for preschool children

How do we develop an appropriate outdoor play space for preschool and school aged children?

When developing an outdoor play space consider it is an additional learning environment not just a place for children to use their large muscles and have an opportunity to run around. This area can be used as an extension to the classroom or preschool room in addition to a place for children to use their large muscles and run about and explore. The outdoor play area should be designed to accommodate lots of different types of play including physical play, quiet play, social play and pretend play. The outdoor play space provides a space for children to experience a wide variety of different types of games including: music and movement games; co-operative/team games; active games and skill games. (Examples of these games and how to play them are available in “Playful World a selection of games from around the world” by Kildare County Childcare Committee.)



Outdoors is an ideal space for children to become involved in a different type of play than they may do inside.

How does the outdoor learning environment help children to develop?



Aistear Guidelines for good practice describes physical play as:

Physical play involves children developing, practising and refining bodily movements and control. It includes whole body and limb movements, co-ordination and balance. These activities involve physical movements for their own sake and enjoyment. Children gain control over their gross motor skills first before refining their fine motor skills.

Exploratory play involves children using physical skills and their senses to find out what things feel like and what can be done with them. Children explore their own bodies and then they explore the things in their environment.

Manipulative play involves practising and refining motor skills. This type of play enhances physical dexterity and

hand-eye co-ordination. Over time children need to experience a range of different levels of manipulation if they are to refine their motor skills. This type of play includes manipulating objects and materials.

The outdoor learning environment allows greater opportunities for children to develop social interactions and engage in co-operative play. It also provides a space for children to explore special relation concepts which in turn assist in the development of mathematical and geometric skills.

What do I need to consider when developing my Outdoor play space?

As with the rest of the learning environment consider the children's homes and community and try to reflect this in the outdoor play space. Design the space and choose the materials and equipment carefully. Try to ensure that the equipment and materials you choose will support children's social, physical and creative learning opportunities.

Materials should be open ended as well as fixed so the variety of materials you choose ought to include toys and equipment which will assist in the development of children's creative, physical and social development.



Geraldine French advises on materials and equipment for the outdoor play area in "Supporting Quality Book 2";

"Things to climb and balance on"

"Things to swing on"

"Things for sand and water play"

"Things to get into and under"

"Things to jump on and over"

"Things to kick, throw and aim for"

"Things to build with"

"Materials for pretending"

"All materials that are located indoors can be used outdoors"

Why is the outdoor play area important?

As well as providing opportunities for children to climb, run around and use big voices, the outdoor area provides lots of space for children to become involved in large scale creative activities.

While the outdoor play space should and may be an extension of the indoor play environment children often use the outdoor play area differently to the indoor space and engage in a diverse variety of play and games. The learning opportunities for children to experience speed, volume and distance are on a much larger scale than indoors.

Outdoors is the ideal place for children to engage in scientific discoveries and observations about nature as well as experiencing sounds smells and weathers.

Children will enjoy playing outside in all types weather from rain, wind and sunshine.

As the Scandinavians say “There is no such thing as bad weather only inappropriate clothing.”

So why is the learning environment so important?



The development of a learning environment which supports children's learning, socialization, interests and needs, is one of the foundation stones to quality early years curriculum and

service. Taking time to develop a good indoor and outdoor learning environment will assist in the development of your curriculum and provide a welcoming and supportive learning atmosphere for the children attending your service.

Child centered environments designed to accommodate many types of play are an essential element to all early years programmes. Consulting with the children in your service/ preschool in relation to the development of the space and materials can be empowering for the children and give them a sense of ownership. Asking for parental contributions towards ideas and resources can also provide opportunities for parents to feel more involved and have a sense of ownership and commitment. Parents also may welcome the involvement with the service in this way which is not overly committed yet provides occasions for you to develop relationships with the parents of the children attending the service.

Síolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education.

Síolta is a voluntary quality assurance programme that has been developed by the CECDE, in consultation with the wider early childhood care and education sector in Ireland. It is applicable to all settings in which children aged from birth to six years of age are present. *Síolta* has been developed in relation to the three strands of defining, assessing and supporting quality.



The main focus of the initial stages of the development process concentrated on the definition of quality, namely identifying and agreeing the core Principles, Standards and Components of Quality. While the Principles, Standards and Components are applicable to all settings in which children aged birth to six years of age are present, the Signposts for Reflection are mediated in two different ways to ensure they are appropriate to the needs of all children. First of all, they are differentiated for four distinct settings, which are:

- Full and Part-time Daycare;
- Sessional Services;
- Infant Classes of Primary Schools; and
- Childminding.

Secondly, where appropriate, they are mediated for three specific age ranges; from birth to eighteen months, one to three years and two-and-a-half to six years.

Síolta is designed to allow early childhood care and education settings to evaluate the quality of the service they are providing. Accordingly, the Framework recognizes elements of practice that are successful within the setting, as well as identifying aspects in need of attention and improvement. In this way, it acts as a tool to promote continuous quality improvement and planning.

Source: *Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education 2009*

Standard 2; Environments states that:

“Enriching environments, both indoor and outdoor (including materials and equipment) are well maintained, safe, available, accessible, adaptable, developmentally appropriate, and offer a variety of challenging and stimulating experiences.”

There are 8 components associated with this standard which outline how this might be achieved. With regard to the room arrangement, Síolta Standard 2 component 2.6 advises that:

“The indoor environment provides a range of developmentally appropriate, challenging, diverse, creative and enriching experiences for all children.”

Síolta also includes some ideas for practice “Think About” which suggests ideas for inclusion in room arrangements.

Aistear; The Early Childhood Curriculum

Framework *Aistear* is the Curriculum framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland. It provides information for adults to help them plan for and provide enjoyable and challenging learning experiences, so that all children can grow and develop as competent and confident learners within loving relationships with others. *Aistear* describes the types of learning (dispositions, values and attitudes, skills, knowledge, and understanding) that are important for children in their early years, and offers ideas and suggestions as to how this learning might be nurtured. The Framework also provides guidelines on supporting children's learning through partnerships with parents, interactions, play, and assessment. In supporting children's early learning and development *Aistear*



- identifies what and how children should learn, and describes the types of experiences that can support this
- makes connections in children's learning throughout the early childhood years and as they move from one setting to another
- supports parents as their children's primary educators during early childhood, and promotes effective partnerships between parents and practitioners
- complements and extends existing curriculums and materials
- informs practice across a range of settings, disciplines and professions, and encourages interdisciplinary

Aistear presents children's learning and development using four themes. These are:

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

The themes describe what children learn—the dispositions, attitudes and values, skills, knowledge, and understanding. Each theme begins with a short overview of its importance for children as young learners. The theme is then presented using four aims. Each aim is divided into six learning goals. Some of these goals may be more suited to children as they get older.

Each theme offers some ideas and suggestions for the types of learning experiences that adults might provide for children in working towards *Aistear's* aims and goals. These ideas and suggestions are known as sample learning opportunities. They are presented in three overlapping age groups:

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

Aistear provides us with lots of insights into the learning environment in the “Guidelines for good practice” “Learning and Developing through Play”

The framework emphasises the importance of the learning environment and its relationship with the development and extension of children’s play. Aistear outlines five broad types of play (Solitary play, spectacular play, parallel play, associative play and cooperative play).

References & Recommended Reading

Supporting Quality: Guidelines for Professional Practice in Early Childhood Services Book 1 & 2, Geraldine French, Barnardos 2008

www.barnardos.ie

Regulation 5: Assessing the Early Childhood Services, ECI 2011

www.ipppa.ie

Child Care (Pre-school Services) (No.2) Regulations 2006

HSE Standardised Inspection Tool –Child Care (Pre-school Services) (No.2) Regulations 2006

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