

Early Start Policy

Scoil Aiséirí Chríost: December 2021

Early Start Intervention Programme Pilot Scheme

Definition of Initiative

The Early Start Intervention Programme Pilot Scheme for pre-school was launched in 1994 and is in place in selected schools in designated areas of disadvantage.

Personnel

Two trained teachers, two trained childcare workers and parent volunteers staff a full Early Start unit. The teachers are fully qualified staff members of the school with relevant levels of expertise in infant teaching. The minimum qualification for childcare workers who are recruited with effect from Sept 1st 2012 is a Major Award in Childcare/Early Education at Level 5 on the NFQ or its equivalent. The Board of Management of the school where the Early Start is established appoints the Childcare workers and the Principal of the school assigns the teachers to work in Early Start.

Parental Involvement

Parental Involvement is a key element in the Early Start Project. Parents are encouraged to become involved in the planning, organization and implementation of the work in each centre. This is intended to build their own capacity to influence and become involved in the children's education.

Post Primary students from local schools may also spend part of their time working in the centres as part of their work experience during Transition Year. This will allow them to acquire practical skills in childcare and will also establish role models in retention and achievement in education in the local community.

Aims

The aims of Early Start are: -

- To expose young children to an educational programme which will enhance their overall development and prevent school failure.
- To offset the effects of social disadvantage.

Specific Objectives of the Project

- To enhance the children's language, cognitive, social-emotional and physical development by engaging them in structured play activities which are characterized by high quality adult-child interaction.
- To assess the strengths and needs of each child in relation to language, cognition, social-emotional development and to plan and deliver a programme of learning to meet the identified needs in these key areas of learning.
- To devise strategies which actively engage parents in the education of their children.
- The smooth transition into the formal education system.

The structure of the Unit

- Four trained qualified staff members.
- Sixty children from disadvantaged background and must be between the ages of three years and four years and 7 months on the first of September of the year they are enrolled i.e. they must be eligible for enrolment into Junior Infants on the first of September following their year in Early Start.

- There are two sessions of Early Start each day which caters for fifteen children between 8:50am and 11:20am and a different fifteen from 12pm until 2:30pm.
- Early Start caters for both boys and girls and children are expected to attend for the full five days every week.

Methodologies

The curriculum includes structured play activities aimed at enhancing the children's language, intellectual, social, emotional and physical development. The learning activities have very specific objectives and are organized in an atmosphere of play, exploration and freedom. Examples of adult directed activities include sand, water, music, movement, story, song, rhyme, early science, art and craft and table top activities.

Assessment

The children in Early Start are evaluated through an informal profiling system and daily observations based on skills acquired through the Early Start programme. Some of these skills include fine and gross motor, language and construction skills. This informal profiling process may require onwards referrals for additional supports to the relevant agencies.

Resources

Yearly, each full unit receives €2,539.48 or half unit receives €1,523.69 for the purchase of materials and equipment. There is €1,904.60 per full unit or €952.30 per half unit for the development of parental involvement and €95.23 per pupil annual capitation grant to the schools Board of Management, to be used as funding support for day to day running costs of the centre.

Parental Involvement

Parents are involved in Early Start through parental activities such as stories, cooking, art/crafts etc. in the classroom. Parents are met regularly in the morning and afternoons at drop off and formally through parent/teacher meetings. Class Dojo is used as a two-way communication system. Newsletters are distributed monthly. Parents accompany children on out of school activities.

Parents can avail of the huge support of experts coming to the school in conjunction with the HSCL teacher for a variety of courses e.g. parenting, leisure and courses of parental choice. They also build great links with and become very familiar with the HSCL teachers of the schools in our parish i.e. the local boys, girls and secondary schools. Parents are afforded the opportunity to be involved in activities as field trips, Santa visit, fun days, sports days, school concert and graduation day. The transition into Junior Infants is made easier through being familiar with the teachers and experiencing the school as a positive, friendly, supportive environment.

Relationship between Early Start and the main school.

The successful transition to Junior Infants is facilitated by the following:

- The relationship between Early Start staff and Junior Infant staff within the main school.
- The sharing of resources.
- Mainstream teachers regularly visiting the Early Start classrooms.

- The Early Start and Junior Infant Teachers liaising to create class groupings that will ensure positive group dynamics in the infant classes.

Planning

In a full unit the staff of the two classrooms work together in collaboration with the curriculum in devising plans, learning objectives and integrated learning activities. Staff keep updated accounts which are audited yearly.

Desired outcomes of Project

- That the children will develop confidence in themselves as learners.
- That the children will develop learning styles which will enable them to become autonomous learners.
- That the children's development in the key areas of language, cognition, social-personal development will allow them to adapt easily to school life and will prepare them for the learning demands of the school system.
- That each child's experience of learning through play will be positive, enriching and enjoyable.
- That the parents of the children in Early Start become actively involved at an early stage in the children's education.

Policy for enrolment to Early Start in Scoil Aiséirí Chríost.

- Children must be aged 3 years and less than 4 years and 7 months on the 1st of September of the year in which they are enrolled.
- Priority will be given to children on basis of **disadvantage** i.e. children who are most at risk of not reaching their potential in the educational system due to the effect of social/economic disadvantage.
- The **age** requirement and the **disadvantage** requirement are the first factors that will be considered in the allocation of places. In the event of over subscription to the Early Start (60 places available), preference will be given to children from the Parish who satisfy the above 2 factors (age and disadvantage). A waiting list of successful applicants will then be compiled based on the level of disadvantage.
- Applicants from other areas served by Early Start units will not be given priority when allocating places unfilled under the criteria outlined above. Such applicants will be advised to apply to Early Start units in their own areas.
- The school through the services of HSCL coordinators, local agencies, social workers, public health nurses etc. will **actively seek** to identify and invite disadvantaged children to enroll in Early Start. In addition, the Early Start project will be **advertised** e.g. Credit Union, Bank, Post Office, social media, announcements at mass, word of mouth etc.

- All applicants must be fully toilet trained before admission to the Early Start unit.
- Children with additional needs may be enrolled in Early Start providing they meet the criteria outlined above.
- A meeting between parents and school staff to discuss any additional needs must take place prior to enrollment.
- The school must be furnished with all available reports relevant to the child's needs prior to enrolment.
- AIMS worker/SNA provision is not available in Early Start as per DES Guidelines.
- If the unit is not at capacity and if it is the opinion of a professional working in the additional needs sector, the Early Start teachers or the principal that a particular child would, on an exceptional basis, benefit from either (i) from a waiver of the upper age limit or (ii) from a second year of Early Start prior to joining Junior Infants, the Department of Education and Skills' sanction must be sought in writing by the school prior to the child's enrolment. Paperwork from a professional such as GP, SLT, OT should accompany this application. The child should not be enrolled in the Early Start until formal Department sanction is obtained.
- **Application forms** will be available from, and returned to the office in Scoil Aiséirí Chríost and online on the school website.
- The following items must accompany each application:
 - ✓ Birth certificate to verify date of birth to satisfy age criteria.

- ✓ Utility to verify address of child.
- ✓ It is a requirement for admission to the Early Start that parents provide their child's PPSN to facilitate capitation grant.
- Persons submitting application forms are informed that completion and submission of **application forms does not automatically qualify for placement.**
- **Closing date** for application forms is **31st January** – this is necessary for staffing purposes and numbers for retention of Early Start units.
- Date of returned application forms is not a factor in deciding places once applications are returned by 31st January. Application forms received after this date will be placed on a waiting list.

Early Start Policy ratified by the Board of Management

on _____

Chairperson's Signature:

Date:

Policy document for Early Start-

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