

# Curricular Guidance for **Pre-School Education**





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# Introduction

This document provides curricular guidance for those working with children in a range of pre-school settings. All settings that receive funding from the Department of Education as part of the Pre-School Education Programme should adhere to this guidance.

It is important that there are seamless transitions for all young children across the continuum of care and education. The Pre-School Education Programme provides one year of non-compulsory pre-school education, delivered in line with a curriculum that builds on the learning that children experience at home and/or in other settings. The Foundation Stage, in Years 1 and 2 of the primary school, builds on all of these play-based learning experiences by providing a curriculum that develops children's dispositions to learn and gives them the skills and competencies they will need to succeed in school and in future life. The Foundation Stage acknowledges that learning through play is fundamental to children's social, emotional and educational development. It is essential that information gained in pre-school is shared with the Foundation Stage teacher.

There is a need for a continuum from pre-school into Foundation Stage to show progression in the skills across the areas of learning; for example, around exploration and investigation.

Children develop at different rates and their achievements vary; however, all children should have the opportunity to follow a curriculum that enables

them to make appropriate progress in learning and to achieve their full potential. This guidance outlines the breadth and range of learning opportunities that pre-school children should have through play and other relevant experiences. It also outlines the anticipated progress of children's learning by the end of the pre-school year for each of the six pre-school Areas of Learning:

- Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- Physical Development and Movement
- Language Development
- Early Mathematical Experiences
- The Arts
- The World Around Us.

The guidance should be used to support staff in reviewing, developing and improving current practice. The development planning process and associated action plans need to set out clearly the priorities for improvement. The Board of Governors and/or management committee also need to monitor and evaluate the cycles of development planning and provide appropriate support and challenge for improvement.

This document can be used together with the Education and Training Inspectorate publication *The Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework (ISEF): Effective Practice and Self-Evaluation Questions for Pre-School*, available at [www.etini.gov.uk](http://www.etini.gov.uk)





# The Pre-School Child

Most young children come to pre-school as active, experienced and enthusiastic learners. To build on the learning that has taken place in the home and its immediate environment, pre-school staff should provide children with a rich variety of challenging play activities and other experiences in a stimulating environment. The focus should be on enabling children to learn at their own pace, to have a breadth of learning experiences and gain a positive image of themselves as resilient learners able to cope with uncertainty, and to learn through trial and error. Learning may also have taken place in other settings such as childcare, parent and toddler groups and/or programmes for two-year-olds.

## The Aims of Pre-School Education

As all children are different and develop at different rates, pre-school education aims to develop the whole child by:

- promoting emotional, social, physical, creative and intellectual development;
- developing self-esteem, self-control and positive attitudes towards others;
- developing language and communication skills to encourage the sharing of thoughts and feelings; and
- creating confident, eager, enthusiastic, independent, curious learners with a positive and problem-solving attitude to learning.

## The Principles Underpinning Pre-School Education

Young children learn best when:

- they feel happy and secure in a safe and stimulating environment that supports their well-being;
- adults are sensitive and understanding in their interactions with the children while extending their learning and development;
- the curriculum is broad and balanced, builds on their needs, and provides time for sustained involvement in play;
- they have opportunities to investigate and engage in a wide range of activities that are enjoyable, motivating and challenging;
- the activities are based on previous learning and are carefully planned, with some flexibility;
- they have the opportunity to develop concentration and skills such as observing, making decisions and problem-solving; and
- parents/guardians/carers and other professionals work together in partnership.





# Promoting Good Practice

Before children start pre-school, staff should gather information about the children from parents/guardians/carers and other professionals who know the children well. Staff should then take this information into account when drawing up plans to promote the children's learning.

## Planning

The planning process allows all staff to think about **what**, **how** and **why** children should learn and enables them to create a successful learning environment. All staff working with children should be involved in the planning process and have a clear idea of how they can promote learning through activities that are child-centred, varied and progressive. As time goes on, staff will have a picture of how individual children are responding and developing. This can inform the plans for future learning.

Plans should:

- use information from the children's prior experiences to ensure a smooth transition;
- ensure the learning experiences for each child are broad and balanced and promote continuity and steady progression in the child's overall development;
- be evolving, working documents that build on the children's natural interests and previous experiences;
- involve all staff in a planning and observation cycle to help everyone reflect on how they can create a stimulating, challenging environment and plan for progression;
- be flexible, taking account of the children's responses and the outcomes of play; and
- help to inform parents/guardians/carers of the learning that is taking place.

Staff in many settings develop long-term, medium-term and short-term plans. Other approaches to planning may be equally useful in providing the basis for a broad, balanced and progressive programme. Whatever form of planning is used, it should be meaningful and helpful to staff in their day-to-day work with the children and reflect their aims and preferred ways of working.

## Long-Term Plans

Long-term plans set out the learning for a whole group of children in broad terms, usually over a year. These plans should:

- take account of the age range of the children and their previous experience;
- ensure that children experience a broad, balanced and motivating curriculum which gives appropriate emphasis to all six Areas of Learning;
- give a brief outline of knowledge, skills, concepts and progression as they relate to the Areas of Learning;
- include a range of relevant events, for example seasonal, festive or other planned events, that occur during the year; and
- inform medium-term planning.





### Medium-Term Plans

Medium-term plans usually bridge the gap between the broad outline of the long-term plan and the day-to-day detail of the short-term plan. Medium-term plans may cover a shorter, more specific period of time such as a month or half term. They should:

- relate to the long-term plan;
- take account of the children's needs, interests, stages of development and previous learning;
- identify progression in experiences and/or learning;
- take a cross-curricular approach to learning, highlighting relevant topics or themes;
- outline the planned activities and resources needed;
- identify the potential learning that the staff intend to promote in each area;
- be evaluated and inform future planning; and
- ensure that children who remain in a setting for longer than a year make progress in learning and have their experiences broadened.

### Short-Term Plans

Short-term plans should take account of the children's individual needs and respond to their ideas and spontaneous play. They should be detailed enough to inform the staff's work on a daily basis and ensure the smooth running of the setting, making the best use of time, space and resources. An evaluation of the short-term plan and the children's responses to the activities and experiences should form the basis of the next set of plans. Short-term plans should:

- be based on evidence from recent observations, assessment and evaluation, and interactions with the children;
- transfer the medium-term plan into manageable steps that:
  - include a range of activities and experiences; and
  - introduce specific resources to promote new learning or reinforce previous learning;

- clarify the roles of the adults in promoting learning through play and other activities;
- identify appropriate support to meet the needs and interests of individual children;
- be flexible enough to allow for unplanned activities and the children's own thinking and spontaneity;
- ensure challenge and progression as staff revisit the plans in light of the children's responses; and
- be evaluated regularly to inform future planning.

### Observing Children and Making Assessments

Assessment of children's learning is based on day-to-day observations and interactions with the children in a range of situations. Observations allow staff to gain a better insight into the children's needs, experiences, interests, thinking, strengths and areas for development. This information is essential when deciding how to support and enhance the children's learning, both individually and collectively. The children's efforts and achievements should be recognised, shared with them and recorded.

Regular, skilful observations are the key to effective planning and assessment for learning. It is essential to take time to plan them well. Staff should:

- observe children over a period of time and in a variety of contexts;
- adopt a flexible approach to observations that allows for the unpredictable reactions of children to the activities offered (this provides some of the most detailed insights into each child as an individual);
- record both planned and spontaneous observations;
- observe the children's play and use of language so that a holistic and accurate picture emerges of each child's progress across each of the six Areas of Learning;



- record this information regularly and systematically, including details on each child's strengths, interests and areas for development;
- reflect together on their observations to inform future planning; and
- share information with parents/guardians/carers so they have a clear understanding of their child's progress.

## What to Observe

Planned observations should be a part of short-term planning. The six Areas of Learning or planned activities may be the starting point. However, children's levels of well-being and involvement are highest when they are engaged in activities they have chosen themselves, so including observations of these will lead to a more accurate picture of the child. For example, child-centred observations **may** focus on their:

- levels of well-being and involvement;
- ability to recognise and begin to manage emotions and feelings;
- natural interests or current passions;
- ability to play indoors and outdoors;
- interaction with peers and other adults;
- verbal and non-verbal communication with peers and adults;
- potential for development;
- ability to concentrate, persevere, use initiative and reflect; and
- use of resources and care for equipment.

## Recording Observations

Staff need to develop a method for ensuring that:

- significant observations are recorded as soon as possible;
- the information is recorded in a concise, systematic and manageable way, either paper-based or electronic;

- samples of children's artwork or experimental mark-making, and/or photographs or videos of the outcomes of their play, are used to assess their learning and development (the children can be involved in selecting these);
- this informs planning for the next steps in learning;
- if a child is aware that information about her/him is being recorded, it is shared with the child; and
- parents/guardians/carers are encouraged to contribute to observations through formal or informal comments.

## Sharing Information

Informal reporting may take place on a day-to-day basis as staff talk to parents/guardians/carers while the children are arriving or leaving the setting, or when parents/guardians/carers have opportunities to see examples of a child's work. Admissions arrangements should also offer opportunities for parents/guardians/carers to talk to staff about their children.

Formal reporting should include individual meetings with parents/guardians/carers, and the information shared should reflect the child's progress and development. It should also identify any areas where they might need further support. Staff should reflect on parents'/guardians'/carers' comments or views and suggest ways that parents/guardians/carers can support learning. They should also provide information for parents/guardians/carers on the transition to primary school at the end of the year.

Before children move into Year 1, relevant information about their progress in learning should be shared with the primary school, with parental consent. This enables Year 1 teachers to begin to plan appropriately for each child, building on and taking account of previous learning.



## Reflecting and Evaluating

Reflecting on and evaluating practice is at the heart of making improvements to learning and teaching. Regular discussions should address making progress and taking decisions that will improve children's learning. See *The Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework (ISEF): Effective Practice and Self-Evaluation Questions for Pre-School*, available at [www.etini.gov.uk](http://www.etini.gov.uk)

Staff should reflect on activities and topics that the children have experienced throughout the year and the progress they have made. It may also be useful to ask parents/guardians/carers for feedback on the setting using a short questionnaire. The results should be used when planning for the following year.

## The Role of the Staff

Staff working in a pre-school setting are interested in and concerned about the overall development of each child. The staff need to:

- have a clear understanding of how young children learn and develop in order to extend and enhance their learning;
- try to understand each child's background and needs and put these before any other aspect of their work in the setting; and
- be flexible and nurture the children's well-being and self-esteem.

### Settling In

Adults have a vital role in supporting children's learning. Arrangements for settling in should be flexible to give children the time they need. Staff should:

- consider their age and stage of development;
- respond to the changing needs of all children throughout the year; and

- pay particular attention to those children who are less confident than others in the setting, helping them to become familiar with daily routines and fostering a sense of belonging.

The principal/leader should lead by example, acting as a role model for other staff working in the setting. They should also liaise with parents/guardians/carers to promote the best interests of the children.

### Induction and Transition

Each child brings unique personal experiences to a new setting, including a home environment, neighbourhood and level of 'readiness'. These experiences will be both positive and negative and must be fully embraced and considered.

To ensure a smooth transition for the child, the pre-school should engage with parents/guardians/carers and other care and education providers and professionals supporting the child. This enables the pre-school setting to understand the child's needs and previous experiences, which helps them to plan an appropriate programme of learning.

From the beginning of September each year, children should be settled into pre-school settings as soon as possible, taking account of their individual needs. By the end of September, all children should be attending daily for the full session.

The Department of Education's *Guidance on Induction and Transition in Pre-School Education and Year One*, available at [www.education-ni.gov.uk](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk) is for all statutory and non-statutory pre-school education providers and primary schools.

### Working Together

It is important that staff work together to plan and organise children's learning in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. Although the roles of the staff in the setting will vary during the time with the children, they should work as a team, supporting and extending the children's learning.



Staff should:

- agree approaches to learning and teaching;
- be consistent and realistic in their expectations of the children, developing warm and supportive relationships with them;
- create a climate where children feel confident to try out new ideas or to take on new challenges, not afraid to make a mistake; and
- be flexible during large and small group activities to allow for the individual needs of children.

### Adult Participation and Interaction

Sensitive support and timely involvement by staff in children's play is necessary to stimulate learning and deepen play experiences. There should be agreed strategies in place to promote positive behaviour, and these should be shared with parents/guardians/carers. A variety of approaches and strategies may be necessary to meet the needs of individual children.

Skilful adult participation can extend children's play and thinking by:

- introducing new vocabulary and modelling language appropriately;
- using open-ended questions to challenge their thinking;
- listening to the children and giving them time to respond;
- observing them and building on their ideas; and
- giving them praise and encouragement for their efforts.

Successful adult involvement stems from careful observation of play and sensitivity to the needs of the children. It is also important to choose the appropriate time to become involved in the play. The adult may decide to become involved by:

- interacting naturally with the children;
- responding to an invitation from them;
- commenting on the children's play;
- playing alongside a child in order to establish a secure relationship;

- joining in to help a child examine an experience more closely or reflect more carefully on what they are doing;
- joining in to extend the play by taking up a child's imaginative ideas and developing them further;
- taking a problem-solving approach to settle a dispute;
- intervening to suggest possible solutions to a problem before a child reaches frustration level;
- providing advice or assistance;
- providing an extra piece of equipment; and/or
- intervening if children are in danger.

### The Learning Environment

Staff should provide a rich and stimulating environment that promotes effective learning.

This means:

- creating learning environments, both indoors and outdoors, that are motivating and inviting to the children and which allow them to choose from a range of activities in safe and secure defined areas;
- presenting children with opportunities to explore, experiment, plan and make decisions for themselves, thereby enabling them to progress in their learning and development;
- ensuring that children's work is displayed where they have access to it; and
- encouraging them to display their own work by providing space, at an appropriate height, where they can place their pictures and models.

Outdoor learning is about more than duplicating indoor activities outside. Rather, it is an integral part of the overall educational programme and should contribute to children's learning across the entire curriculum. Staff should:

- plan carefully to exploit the unique opportunities their outdoor areas can provide;



- plan to make the best possible use of space, equipment and time so that children can make full use of the resources available;
- provide children with a balanced programme that ensures progression in their learning and offers activities to strengthen their whole bodies;
- ensure that outdoor learning happens frequently and is safe, varied and stimulating;
- give children opportunities to be physical, quiet or loud and to explore the natural environment;
- give children opportunities to look at books, listen to stories and write in different environments;
- give children opportunities to build with construction materials; and
- ensure that learning is challenged as children explore their own ideas and use open-ended resources.

### Physical Space

Staff should consider the space required for safe play, for example:

- creating extra space by rearranging the furniture, removing unnecessary equipment, using small portable equipment or rotating imaginative play activities;
- rearranging the playroom to stimulate interest in the play activities;
- planning outdoor space or space in large halls that can be used for different activities at different times;
- clearly defining space so that energetic play does not interfere with simultaneous quieter activities;
- dividing very large areas into more appropriate, intimate spaces;
- rotating the areas of play over a period of time if the space is restricted;
- encouraging children to suggest how the space might be used and where particular activities might be sited; and
- giving them opportunities to help carry and place appropriate equipment in these areas.

### Materials and Equipment

Staff should ensure:

- children have access to a wide range of well-presented materials throughout the day that can be added to;
- materials are safe, clean, fresh, attractive and accessible to the children; and
- where appropriate, natural and authentic materials are used to enhance learning.

### Time

Throughout a well-organised day, time is used effectively when children are purposefully involved in activities and there is a seamless transition from one to the next. Each day it is important that the children have access to a long period of uninterrupted play and appropriate time is given to:

- indoor and outdoor play, with children having time to make choices and to settle into and develop their play;
- activities such as story time and music time;
- routines such as those associated with informal snack time, tidy-up time and moving from indoors to outdoors; and
- arrival and departure from the setting, to allow for conversations with individual children and informal parent–staff contact.

### ICT

ICT can enhance educational opportunities when it is integrated and embedded in an age-appropriate way. It is important that pre-school children find out about and identify the uses of technology in their everyday lives so that it becomes integrated into their play. Children need to see ICT used in meaningful contexts and for real purposes, with a firm emphasis on exploration. They should be encouraged to observe and talk about the use of ICT in their environment, for example when on local walks or educational visits.



ICT resources have the potential to extend children's learning. They provide opportunities to come up with ideas, try things out and problem solve in a play-centred, responsive environment. Adults should:

- match the use of ICT to each child's needs, interests and individual preferences;
- scaffold and support child-initiated interaction through exploration; and
- act as positive role models by regularly modelling the value they place on their own use of ICT in relevant ways.

The children should have opportunities to:

- use digital resources, for example a camera, to enhance their own learning, deepen and consolidate observational skills and creativity; and
- explore and investigate a range of ICT resources safely, naturally and at their own pace.

Staff should gain an awareness of internet safety and share this with parents/guardians/carers. The Department of Education *Circular 2016/27 Online Safety* sets out the characteristics of good practice. This is intended to help schools develop or review their own practices and procedures and is available at [www.education-ni.gov.uk](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk)

## Health and Safety

Ensuring health and safety is the responsibility of the Board of Governors or management committee. To do this successfully, an effective health and safety management system needs to be in place and agreed with all staff.

All staff should be aware of health and safety issues as children explore the environment. They should:

- explain how to use equipment safely and where it is safe to engage in physical play;
- be familiar with and follow good practice guidelines on risk assessment received from the

Education Authority, Health and Social Care Trusts and other relevant agencies;

- implement child protection procedures to meet legal requirements;
- promote good habits for life such as healthy eating, dental care and physical activity; and
- be aware of and foster their own positive mental health and that of the children and their parents/guardians/carers.

## Ensuring Equality of Opportunity

It is important to help young children understand that we see the world in many different ways depending on our cultural, social and religious viewpoints. Staff in a setting should:

- acknowledge and respect the culture, beliefs and lifestyles of the families and children in the setting;
- include activities and resources that encourage respect for diversity; and
- talk about cultural and religious festivals, discuss foods in different countries, read stories or listen to music from different cultures, and display photographs of cultural traditions, as appropriate.

See the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity NI website at [www.credni.org](http://www.credni.org) for more information and resources, including resources on the need to promote equality of opportunity to all.

Children should have opportunities to explore situations and express feelings in a way that is not gender specific and to challenge stereotypes. Staff in a setting should:

- promote positive role models of the sexes;
- encourage both sexes to take on leadership roles and to talk with adults about traditional and non-traditional roles;
- encourage all children to play with the full range of toys and equipment available to them in the setting;



- encourage all children to take part in all types of role-play; and
- organise routines so that they are not gender specific.

## Looked After Children

A child becomes 'looked after', by a Health and Social Care Trust, either under a court-made care order or through a voluntary agreement with the child's parent(s). It can be due to a number of reasons such as illness, family breakdown, or neglect and abuse.

Looked after children can have a number of very complex issues that have developed or come about because of their life experiences and trauma.

Many have faced neglect from birth (and in some cases before, such as with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder); others have had a very significant traumatic event in their lives. Some simply have no-one to nurture and care for them or give them a foundation of love and support. These issues can and have manifested themselves in many different ways such as:

- attachment and development issues;
- developmental gaps; and
- overstimulation or understimulation of executive functions (neurologically based skills such as mental control and self-regulation), depending on the trauma experienced.

The information booklet *Putting Care Into Education* aims to give all staff in educational settings an insight into:

- how early relational trauma affects child development;
- why pre-school can be challenging for care-experienced children; and
- how we can help to improve the education of all children by paying attention to the needs of the most vulnerable.

You can find more information about meeting the educational needs of looked after children by searching for *Looked After Children* on [www.education-ni.gov.uk](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk)

## Newcomer Children

There has been steady growth in the number of newcomer families to Northern Ireland, and, as a result, there are children from many diverse backgrounds who speak many different languages enrolled in our education settings. Children whose first language is not English or Irish have the same right to all Areas of Learning so that they can fully develop their capabilities.

All children should be supported to recognise and value the diversity that newcomer children bring to the setting.

The Department of Education's *Supporting Newcomer Pupils* policy provides information and guidance on meeting the needs of newcomer children. It's available on the Department of Education website [www.education-ni.gov.uk](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk)

The Education Authority's Intercultural Education Service (IES) offers *support and advice* to statutory nursery providers. Non-statutory providers can also use some of their resources. You can find more information on the IES on the Education Authority's website [www.eani.org.uk](http://www.eani.org.uk)

## Providing for Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

A child with special educational needs has a learning difficulty that calls for special educational provision to be made. Some of the difficulties that young children experience are temporary and will be resolved as they develop, while some children



will have learning difficulties that require additional provision to ensure that they make progress. Where this is the case, staff should refer to the:

- *Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs*, which addresses all types of learning difficulties ranging from children with short-term problems to those with more complex needs; and
- *Supplement to the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs*.

Both documents are available at [www.education-ni.gov.uk](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk)

Staff can also access the SEN Early Years supplement at [www.education-ni.gov.uk](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk) This is for practitioners working in the early years sector with children who have been identified as having special educational needs and/or disability.

The admission and integration of children with long-term special educational needs requires careful and detailed planning, both before and after admission.

If staff and parents/guardians/carers have any concerns regarding SEN, they should seek advice from appropriate professionals such as the Education Authority and their Health and Social Care Trust so that staff can provide for the child's particular needs.

Staff should also:

- be aware of each child's particular needs and meet regularly to discuss progress;
- complete careful observations of each child, recording their responses to activities, identifying any learning difficulties as soon as possible and consulting with parents/guardians/carers; and
- source the appropriate training and information to address these individual needs.

It is important that staff have the support of the Board of Governors or the management committee and access to appropriate professional development.

It may be necessary to draw up individual education plans to meet a child's needs or to identify appropriate support during play and other planned activities. The child's progress should also be reviewed frequently. Where a member of staff has the responsibility for supporting an individual child, this staff member should ensure that:

- there can be flexibility in the settling-in arrangements, and/or in the length of the session attended, to meet a child's special needs; and
- the child develops as much independence as possible, is supported when making choices and is encouraged to become part of the group.

At times, this member of staff may withdraw from the group to work with the individual child, work with the whole group, or allow other staff to work with the child.

You can find additional information and guidance on meeting the needs of children with SEN on the Department of Education website [www.education-ni.gov.uk](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk)

### **Gifted Children**

When planning, staff should also take account of any gifted children. Through the play-based pre-school curriculum, these children should be provided with the appropriate challenge and progression to meet their needs.

### **Children in Irish-medium Settings**

The generic factors that contribute to the development of good practice in an early years setting hold true whatever the language context. However, Irish language immersion also involves a





knowledge both of the language and of language immersion pedagogy. Staff need to use the Irish language themselves, focus on the Irish language in planning, and integrate this planning across all Areas of Learning.

It is important that staff:

- are familiar with the stages of second language acquisition, from understanding to usage, and plan activities that reflect and promote children's progress;
- use a planning format that facilitates focused language planning and integrates language across all Areas of Learning;
- plan activities that allow Irish to be used naturally and often;
- speak Irish with children and each other;
- model an acceptable quality of Irish in their verbal interactions;
- ensure a high level of verbal interaction;
- use a simplified language register with a range of contextual and visual clues to support children's understanding, including body language, facial expression and tone of voice;
- understand the importance of stories, songs, rhymes, games and puppets in promoting language acquisition;
- recognise the language potential of the daily routine, with regularly occurring events and activities;
- build upon children's levels of developing language competence systematically;
- monitor children's emerging Irish language competence; and
- help families participate in and support their children's language learning experiences.

Support material for this pre-school curricular guidance is available online and as a hard copy from [Altram](#), the Irish-medium early years support organisation.

Staff can also find the *Irish-medium Education Early Years Handbook – Special Educational Needs* on the Department of Education website: [www.education-ni.gov.uk](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk). This resource was written by staff currently working in Irish-medium early years settings to support access to learning for all children. It adopts an inclusive approach to early identification of special educational needs and effective interventions. Staff should use this resource together with other publications that support children with special educational needs.

### Involving Parents/Guardians/Carers as Partners

Links between home and school are important at all stages of education, but particularly during the pre-school year. Parents/guardians/carers are the child's first and continuing educator and as such have a central role to play in pre-school life. Parents/guardians/carers and staff should regard each other as partners in the children's education.

Effective two-way communication with parents/guardians/carers about children's welfare and education requires trust and confidence. It can be achieved through:

- having background information about home and previous experiences;
- sharing policies that outline professional practice;
- sharing information on the curriculum, forthcoming events, health and parenting issues;
- regular sharing of the planned learning;
- displays of the children's work that reflect the learning that has taken place;
- regular updates on each child's progression and suggestions about how parents/guardians/carers can support their child's learning at home;
- organised sessions with parents/guardians/carers to increase their understanding of the pre-school curriculum and to help them to create and sustain



positive home learning environments, including the importance of:

- parent–child relationships for the child’s development and behaviour;
- childhood education and learning; and
- healthy lifestyles and diet.

Parents/guardians/carers should be made to feel welcome and comfortable and always see the staff as caring, supportive, approachable and well informed.

## Transition to the Primary School

Good liaison between pre-schools and primary schools is essential to help ensure continuity and progression in children’s learning experiences. The children’s families can also play an important part in the transition process. Families should be empowered and supported through good communication between home and setting.

To help provide children with a smooth transition from pre-school to primary education, it is important where possible:

- for Year 1 teachers to visit the pre-school setting, to appreciate the learning environment and curriculum the children have experienced and see them in familiar surroundings; and
- for the children to visit the primary school as a group activity, for example to see a concert or listen to a story.

Towards the end of the children’s pre-school education, pre-school staff should:

- discuss the move to primary school with the children;
- share with the primary school any information that is to be passed on concerning the child’s progress, including any SEN or individual requirements, and liaise with Year 1 teachers; and

- involve parents/guardians/carers in the transition process by explaining how they can help familiarise their child with it.

It is also useful, where possible, for the pre-school setting to display photographs of the Year 1 teachers. This allows the children to become familiar with their teacher.

Department of Education guidance on *Induction and Transition* is available at [www.education-ni.gov.uk](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk)

## Contact with the Community and Other Agencies

It is important that good relationships and communication are developed between education, health and social services. This allows children and their families to have broadly based, co-ordinated support that meets their needs and ensures every child feels included.

Each setting has a named health visitor. Before admission and while a child is in the pre-school setting, staff should seek their help and advice, and those of other professionals, in an atmosphere of mutual trust, respect and openness. This, with parents’/guardians’/carers’ co-operation, should ensure that valuable information is exchanged which will assist in the planning for children’s well-being and learning. Professionals from other agencies may also be invited to contribute to meetings and events organised for parents/guardians/carers.





# The Curriculum

## Personal, Social and Emotional Development

This Area of Learning is of the utmost importance for young children in all aspects of their lives. It is about children's emotional well-being, understanding of who they are, and respect for others and their environment. It is also about forming and sustaining relationships, beginning to understand emotions, learning how to self-regulate, and developing positive dispositions to learn. Good personal, social and emotional development gives children the best opportunity for success in other Areas of Learning.

As they begin their pre-school education, children bring with them a variety of personal and social skills, values and attitudes. They acquire experiences and relationships within the home and their immediate surroundings, and it is important that these are recognised.

Young children learn and develop through:

- following simple routines such as participating in tidying up, being independent at snack time and putting on their own coats;
- making choices and organising their own play;
- playing with and helping each other;
- being treated as individuals in their own right with their own personalities, likes and dislikes; and
- having time and opportunities to identify and understand their own feelings and the needs and feelings of others.

Adults promote learning by:

- establishing positive relationships both with the children and with their parents/guardians/carers;
- giving children the time they need to settle into their new surroundings;
- helping children gain confidence in what they do;
- fostering self-esteem in children to help them feel valued as individuals and develop independence;
- helping children progress by nurturing their motivation, perseverance, curiosity and creativity;
- encouraging children to problem solve and giving them time for reflection;
- helping children learn to cope with people and activities outside the family and encouraging them to form positive relationships with adults and other children;
- encouraging children to talk about how they feel at different times;
- encouraging children to discuss how their actions can affect others and why we need rules;
- modelling and nurturing respect for others and appreciating the differences between people;
- recognising that challenging behaviour may be a consequence of the child's previous experiences; and
- having effective behaviour management strategies in place (positive reinforcement and positive language) which the whole staff and parents implement consistently, if appropriate for the child.



Staff can help children understand respect for difference by having them take part in role-play and listen to stories, and by introducing them to different emotions using puppets or pictures. Through activities like these, and as friendships between particular children develop, they will become aware of both their needs and feelings and those of others.

The staff's actions and words should consistently reflect a sense of caring, valuing and inclusion, giving children encouragement as well as positive reinforcement as they play and interact with others in appropriate ways.

### **Fostering Personal, Social and Emotional Development**

Staff in a setting need to work together to create an ethos where the children:

- feel secure and have a sense of well-being;
- are encouraged to express their emotions appropriately and be independent;
- receive consistent encouragement and positive reinforcement to behave appropriately and to respect their own and others' play; and
- feel supported and cared for.

To create this ethos adults should:

- take time to listen, talk and engage with the children;
- be enthusiastic about the children's learning;
- respect the children's views and ideas; and
- actively model the types of appropriate behaviour that they wish the children to display.

Throughout the day children should have opportunities to develop personal and social skills, dispositions, values and attitudes, including in the following areas.

### **Routines**

During daily routines, children should be encouraged to:

- develop independence and take responsibility, for example as they dress, look after their own belongings or self-register;
- help to prepare food for snack time, pour their own drink and choose what and when to eat;
- help others during snack time or tidy the playroom; and
- become aware of and follow the sequence of the day.

### **Play Experiences**

In these experiences, children should be encouraged and supported as they:

- take the initiative and make decisions about what they are going to do and how they are going to do it;
- organise their own play and become independent of adults in everyday activities such as mopping up spills, putting on aprons and displaying work;
- learn to co-operate, take turns and share;
- persevere with activities, including activities that may present some difficulty;
- experience the exhilaration of exuberant play;
- work with materials such as clay, dough, paint, sand and water to explore their therapeutic value;
- resolve conflicts; and
- explore their emotions, for example in role-play or in responding to stories.

### **Stories, Rhymes, Music, Pictures and Drama**

In these activities, children should have opportunities to express emotion and develop self-confidence and an awareness of others as they:

- listen to stories about people and places;
- extend their imagination through creating stories, adopting character roles and using puppets;



- listen to music that suggests a variety of moods, such as happy, sad and scary, and respond for example by clapping, moving, dancing and creeping; and
- identify emotions including happiness, fear, sadness and anger when discussing pictures, talking about characters in stories or helping one another.

### **The Environment**

Children are naturally interested in and curious about their environment. They can further develop their awareness of the environment by:

- observing aspects of nature such as rainbows, sunlight, day and night, shadows and newborn animals, developing a sense of wonder;
- helping to care for plants and animals;
- taking some responsibility for caring for their environment, for example by respecting play equipment and keeping the playroom tidy;
- talking about environmental issues such as litter, recycling bottles, and paper banks;
- participating in their own cultures and learning about the diversity of others; and
- being encouraged to consider the needs of others in the environment.

### **Health, Hygiene and Safety**

The pre-school setting is an ideal place to establish positive attitudes towards health, hygiene (including dental care) and safety. For example, snack time provides staff with opportunities to talk naturally and informally with children about healthy foods and healthy eating habits. During cooking and food preparation activities, staff can talk about foods that are good for us, the importance of hygiene, and safety issues. Daily routines can help children to develop acceptable standards of hygiene when they are encouraged to wash their hands after messy play, before eating and after using the toilet independently. Energetic physical activity should also form part of each daily session.

As they engage in various types of play and other activities, children should:

- become aware of their own safety and that of others as they attempt to adhere to safety rules and use tools and equipment appropriately;
- understand the importance of wearing appropriate clothing and taking care in the sun;
- understand the importance of eating good food, taking part in physical activity and having enough sleep to keep healthy;
- talk about how medicines and other substances (beneficial or dangerous) can affect them; and
- talk about their own personal safety, keeping safe in the home and community, safe places to play, the dangers of traffic, and dangerous features in the environment such as water or farm machinery.

### **Progress in Learning**

*The following is a general description of the characteristics and skills that most children who have experienced appropriate pre-school education will display.*

Children will have the ability to:

- show an awareness of personal worth, displaying increasing self-confidence, self-control and self-discipline;
- enjoy relationships with adults and other children and work both independently and as part of a group;
- share, take turns, follow and lead;
- be increasingly sensitive to the needs and feelings of others;
- demonstrate consideration for others by caring for and helping one another;
- understand rules and routines and engage in acceptable behaviour;
- show some independence in dressing and in personal hygiene;
- eagerly explore new learning;
- show an increasing awareness of the importance of healthy food, hygienic habits, exercise and rest;



- persevere with tasks and seek help when needed;
- take pleasure in their achievements; and
- treat living things and the environment with respect, care and concern.

## Physical Development and Movement

Children enjoy physical play both indoors and outdoors. They revel in freedom of movement and in play that is inventive, adventurous and stimulating. Physical play that develops gross motor skills, for example running, jumping, climbing, skipping, hopping, balancing, kicking, striking, throwing and catching, helps children to develop balance, control, co-ordination and an awareness of size, space and direction. Play opportunities should be maximised indoors and outdoors to help develop fine motor skills such as grasping, screwing, pinching, picking, holding and threading, which are important for the development of eye and hand control. During physical play children can also observe things from different perspectives, for example looking at things from the top of a slide or from under a bench.

Gross motor skills need to be nurtured, not only because they are important for the child's long-term health and well-being but also because they support physical and cognitive development. These skills should be developed informally during planned daily physical play. Physical development helps children to gain confidence and self-esteem as they discover what they can do, and it enables them to feel the benefits of being healthy and active.

Young children learn and develop through:

- taking part in physical play and beginning to develop an understanding of safe practice;
- responding creatively to a range of stimuli including music, songs, action rhymes and stories; and

- having opportunities to develop social skills, such as turn-taking, sharing, co-operating and negotiating, and values such as trust, fairness and respect for others.

Outdoor play can provide space and freedom that would be difficult to find indoors. It has an important role in the emotional development of children, providing them with the freedom to run, shout and play exuberantly within appropriate boundaries. Outside they can experience a wide range of emotions, for example the challenge of climbing high or the joy of running and jumping. They can begin to experience the satisfaction of solving physical challenges and problems that arise when playing with others.

Effective physical play takes place when children have access to:

- well defined, suitable, safe spaces for distinctive types of play and sensory exploration where they can experiment with different ways of moving;
- developmentally appropriate materials that reflect their interests and can be used in a variety of ways to support different types of play; and
- appropriate small and large equipment that meets safety regulations and standards and allows the children to extend their physical skills.

Adults promote learning by ensuring that:

- there is sensitive adult participation and adequate supervision to ensure children's safety;
- children are actively engaged and involved in outdoor play;
- use of space is planned so that it can be used in different ways and for different purposes throughout the year;



- play is planned carefully to sustain interest, offer challenge and balance activities that provide for individual needs and abilities, ensuring that children develop their skills progressively over a period of time;
- play equipment can be altered or rearranged to provide challenge and progression;
- materials reflect the experiences and cultures of the children in the setting and promote diversity in unbiased ways;
- equipment and tools are positioned to be used imaginatively;
- children are involved in the planning of these areas and encouraged to carry appropriate equipment safely;
- children are taught safety rules and encouraged to keep them; and
- appropriate risk assessments have been carried out.

When physical play is offered indoors, consideration should be given to:

- the materials and equipment that can be accommodated safely in the environment;
- the location of the equipment, so that there is minimal disruption to quieter play; and
- the appropriate use of large spaces beyond the playroom, to provide a variety of experiences.

Developing increasing control of the fine movements of their fingers and hands links to children's emergent writing skills. They should have opportunities throughout the day to:

- play with equipment that can improve their fine motor skills such as pouring, building, threading, screwing and unscrewing, weaving, using the computer and working with malleable materials, for example by poking, squeezing, patting, rolling, pinching and twisting them;
- complete simple tasks such as buttering bread, putting on their own coat and pouring milk; and

- use a range of tools, equipment and materials which may include, scissors, pencils, paint brushes, pens, construction materials, jigsaws and books.

### Progress in Learning

*The following is a general description of the characteristics and skills that most children who have experienced appropriate pre-school education will display.*

Children will have the ability to:

- demonstrate gross and fine motor skills;
- show an awareness of space and of others and begin to use space imaginatively;
- move confidently with control and co-ordination;
- use a wide range of large and small equipment with increasing confidence and skill; and
- use tools and equipment appropriately and safely and understand simple rules.

### Language Development

Language development is crucial to living and learning: to communicate with others, to share and express feelings, to give and obtain information, and to understand ideas and develop thoughts. Being able to understand and use language allows children to:

- make their needs, thoughts, feelings and ideas known;
- interact socially as they play together;
- manage their own behaviour and self-regulate their emotions; and
- learn independently and collaboratively.

Children bring to the pre-school setting their own experiences of using language. Some children may arrive clearly demonstrating an age-appropriate level of proficiency, while some may not.





Within any group of children there may be a wide range of knowledge, skills, attitudes and needs. It is crucial to recognise and value each child's starting point in order to provide appropriate support.

As language develops, children need to be supported to:

- focus their attention and listen (attention and listening);
- understand language (receptive language);
- use language to convey their own messages (expressive language);
- become aware of sounds (phonological awareness);
- remember what they hear and see (auditory and visual memory); and
- use language as they socialise (pragmatics).

Adults play a very important role in children's language development. They support children to develop specific language and communication skills as they engage in play. It is particularly important to develop professional knowledge, skill and expertise in this area.

Adults promote learning by:

- listening to children, providing simple descriptions of what the child is doing or experiencing and so enriching their vocabulary;
- encouraging children to focus their attention;
- modelling language, choosing comments and open-ended questions to encourage children to process information;
- understanding how language typically develops;
- valuing children's existing language skills;
- identifying common difficulties;
- recognising individual learning needs;
- knowing and using some simple strategies to support the child;

- ensuring that the learning environment contains exciting, attractive and stimulating resources which provoke discussion and encourage children to use and share language;
- appreciating the link between language and gross and fine motor skills;
- creating scope for the development of language through learning experiences across the curriculum;
- supporting children for whom English is an additional language and those who are being taught through the medium of Irish; and
- working in partnership with parents and other agencies to multiply benefits for each child.

Designing stimulating play-based activities across all the Areas of Learning creates scope for the development of language learning and good communication skills. Through talking and listening with adults and their peers, children learn the value of interaction and can become more adept at communicating their needs, thoughts, feelings and ideas. This facilitates the skills they need for social interaction.

Young children learn and develop through:

- looking and listening effectively and being positioned appropriately to develop attention and listening skills;
- engaging in conversation and knowing how to take turns and respond;
- being assisted to develop thinking skills and build confidence in the use of language;
- actively participating in stories, rhymes and songs, as well as listening and responding to music;
- having opportunities through play and routines to have fun with words, for example exploring rhyming words, using nonsense rhymes and playing word games;



- engaging in imaginative activities, such as dressing up, role-play and drama, which provide freedom for the child to be creative and experiment with words and phrases in character; and
- having opportunities to recall an activity or recent event, with the introduction of new vocabulary as appropriate.

Developing a love of stories and books is important for language development. Children should be helped to understand that books can provide information and help to answer questions. Staff should provide access to a wide range of suitable books and writing materials in various play areas. These should appeal to the diverse needs and interests of the children in the setting. Children should also have opportunities to take books home to share with parents/guardians/carers.

Children should not be introduced to any elements of the formal teaching of reading. However, some children may show an interest in this as they play, for example identifying key words and reading simple stories. With skilful adult participation children can become aware that pictures and words convey meaning that does not change.

Young children learn and develop through:

- having access to a range of books and reading materials throughout the day and across various areas of play;
- listening to and joining in with stories, rhymes and songs in a range of contexts that may include one-to-one situations, as well as large and small groups;
- looking at books individually, with other children or with an adult;
- having opportunities to discuss the story, characters, actions, pictures or details such as printed words or symbols, as their curiosity requires;

- retelling familiar stories and relating their own experience where relevant;
- hearing and using new words and phrases, developing imagination;
- becoming aware of environmental print;
- browsing and making personal choices from a well-stocked and inviting book area with both fiction and non-fiction titles; and
- having access to appropriate ICT resources, for example resources that allow them to listen to and enjoy stories or which enrich vocabulary.

Writing, including scribbling and mark-making, is a way to express and exchange thoughts or ideas. There should be opportunities for the children to observe adults writing. Children should not be introduced to any elements of the formal teaching of writing. However, some children may show an early interest in this as they play, for example beginning to experiment with forming letters. Appropriate materials should be available in play areas to encourage children to experiment with writing as part of play-based learning.

Young children learn and develop through:

- expressing themselves by scribbling, mark-making and drawing, increasingly valuing each of these elements as an important part of the writing process;
- making explicit links between reading and writing by 'reading' their own 'writing';
- experimenting with these processes using a wide variety of media such as paper, pencils, crayons, whiteboards, chalk or paint;
- having their thoughts, feelings and ideas recorded;
- being aware of print in all play areas, including becoming familiar with symbols and key words such as their name card for self-registration or name labels for their paintings; and
- having access to appropriate ICT resources, for example resources that allow them to experiment with drawing and writing.



During their pre-school education, children will become aware of and should be encouraged to use other forms of communication as means of self-expression. These include painting, drawing, music, movement and drama.

Some children may also use assistive technology to support their ability to communicate. Typically this involves using simple devices or machines with speech output.

### **Progress in Learning**

Pre-school language and communication experiences should support each child's ability to interact effectively, express themselves creatively and develop personal confidence. As language and communication skills develop, children will begin to show progress in their learning.

*The following is a general description of the characteristics and skills that most children who have experienced appropriate pre-school education will display.*

Children will have the ability to:

- listen and engage in conversation;
- respond to simple instructions and follow directions;
- make an appropriate response or answer a question;
- express thoughts, ideas and feelings with increasing confidence;
- use a growing vocabulary appropriately;
- interact and participate with increasing confidence;
- engage in role-play, using appropriate language to express their feelings;
- demonstrate increasing phonological awareness, including an awareness of rhyme, syllable and sound;
- share stories with adults and peers or enjoy them independently;

- demonstrate appropriate book handling skills;
- access and use books independently;
- understand that pictures, symbols and words carry meaning; and
- mark-make to convey meaning.

### **Early Mathematical Experiences**

A positive attitude towards and an understanding of mathematical concepts are important in everyday life. These develop slowly in young children, so they need opportunities to revisit activities and to experience mathematical ideas in many different contexts. Staff in the pre-school setting should seek to extend, informally, the mathematical experiences the children have already had in their home environment. This helps to lay the foundations for positive attitudes.

Initially, as the children engage in play, they will use their own everyday language. With the skilful help of staff in the setting, they will begin to understand and later use mathematical language as they develop an awareness of number, shape, space, size, quantity, relationships, pattern, sequencing and time.

All areas of indoor and outdoor play, everyday routines, songs, rhymes, jingles, stories and games provide opportunities to foster children's understanding of mathematical concepts such as sorting, matching, comparing, classifying, counting and making patterns.

Young children learn and develop through:

- experimenting with a wide range of materials;
- exploring and investigating the properties of materials;
- being given time to consolidate their understanding of concepts;
- hearing mathematical language being used as a natural part of conversations with adults; and



- being encouraged to use mathematical language as they talk about their experiences and findings with adults and peers.

When appropriate and through naturally occurring opportunities, children should be enabled to develop their understanding of the following areas.

### **Development of Early Number**

Children should have the opportunity to develop their natural curiosity about the role of numbers and counting in their everyday lives.

Through play and everyday activities, adults promote learning by:

- using stories, rhymes and jingles with an element of number and encouraging the children to join in;
- giving children time to organise themselves to take turns and talk about being first, last and next;
- looking at the numbers on everyday objects in the pre-school setting;
- talking about the number of children who can play at the sand or at the bricks and why; and
- playing simple games with an element of counting.

### **Development of Shape**

Children need to develop an appropriate language in order to describe objects. Adults should encourage them to examine and talk about objects that are a similar shape and observe and discuss objects which are different from each other.

Through play and everyday activities, adults promote learning by:

- talking about the shapes of everyday objects they may encounter in their immediate environment, such as plates, sandwiches and windows;
- encouraging children to examine and choose objects that are the same, for example to find a block that is exactly the same as another;

- talking about the change of shape when cutting up fruit and vegetables with safety knives; and
- using a variety of shapes to make pictures and build models.

### **Development of Space**

Children need an understanding of space in order to consider the relationships between objects. As they play indoors and outdoors, they will begin to develop a good sense of how close objects are to them. They will begin to understand that the position of some objects is fixed; for example, the tree does not move and therefore we have to walk around it. Through play, they will appreciate that other shapes and objects can be moved; for example, a tower of bricks can be taken down and rebuilt.

Through play and everyday activities, adults promote learning by:

- encouraging children to find a space to turn around, dance, assemble a floor puzzle, build with large bricks or ride a bike in the playground;
- encouraging children to explore limited spaces, for example how many children can fit into a large box and what happens if another child climbs in or one climbs out; and
- using prepositions such as in, on and under in different contexts.

Prepositions often have a variety of meanings depending on their context; for example, a child may be asked to 'put their hand in their pocket' or 'ride their bike in the playground'.

### **Development of Size and Quantity**

Initially, children describe objects in terms of big and small. The adult should share the appropriate language relating to length, weight, capacity or height.



Through play and everyday activities, adults promote learning by:

- talking about characters in stories in terms of size, for example in *Jack and the Beanstalk*;
- helping children dress teddy by finding clothes that fit him, then talking about clothes which are too big or small for the children;
- talking about making a long track for the cars or a long fence around the house;
- taking children on a long or short walk around the school;
- discussing the different sizes of balls of clay/ dough or buckets of water/sand when playing with these materials;
- talking about bags, toy boxes or buckets of sand being full and heavy or empty and light;
- talking about the postbox being full of letters or empty and whether parcels are big or small and heavy or light for the post person to carry; and
- asking whether all the large bricks could fit into a small box.

### **Development of Relationships**

The ability to make connections is important in many aspects of mathematics. An early appreciation and understanding of relationships can be developed in everyday routines and activities.

Through play and everyday activities, adults promote learning by:

- demonstrating that toys and equipment are sorted into allocated boxes and places, for example that coats are placed on their coat peg;
- talking about how some toys and equipment must be placed in a box in a particular way or the lid will not close;
- helping the children match lids to the appropriate saucepans or showing that the dustpan and brush fit together;

- exploring the links in stories, for example *The Three Little Pigs* and *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*; and
- talking about what is similar and different in everyday objects, for example selecting two children's coats that are a similar size and colour but are different in that only one has pockets.

### **Development of Pattern**

Early understanding of pattern depends on children's ability to observe and talk about similarities and differences in objects. Music, stories and rhymes also contribute to pattern development.

Through play and everyday activities, adults promote learning by:

- encouraging children to look at footprints in the sand, or snow or at potato, leaf or hand prints when painting;
- talking about pictures of animals with distinct markings, such as a zebra or striped caterpillar;
- encouraging children to explore different textures, for example textured wallpaper, velvet, felt and silky fabrics;
- helping children become familiar with language that describes the decoration of some paper and materials, for example spots, stripes or zigzags; and
- using stories, rhymes, songs and musical instruments to encourage an awareness of sound patterns.

### **Development of Sequencing and Time**

The concept of the passing of time is difficult for children to understand. However, there are activities that should help them begin to develop an awareness of time. These include daily and weekly routines such as home time and snack time, listening to sequenced stories, and talking about festivals or other special occasions, including 'how many sleeps until ...'



Through play and everyday activities, adults promote learning by:

- having a simple cue for tidy-up time or time to go outside;
- talking about what is next in the daily routine;
- sequencing everyday routines such as putting on a coat before going outside;
- sequencing seasonal events or planting seeds and watching them grow;
- using words and phrases such as today, tomorrow, yesterday and a long time ago;
- highlighting day and night in stories, for example that we go for a walk during the day and sleep at night;
- retelling favourite rhymes or stories out of sequence for the children to correct;
- considering using a sand timer for taking turns; and
- talking about how they feel hungry when it is lunchtime.

### **Progress in Learning**

As children play they solve problems, question, predict and experiment. They also sort, match, order, sequence and count. They learn number rhymes and songs and listen to stories that include elements of mathematics.

*The following is a general description of the characteristics and skills that most children who have experienced appropriate pre-school education will display.*

Children will have the ability to:

- listen to and engage in number rhymes, jingles and songs;
- listen to and engage in stories that contain elements of mathematics;
- appreciate that objects are stored in particular boxes or areas;

- use some mathematical language – big, small/ little, full, empty, more, another, long, short, heavy and light;
- talk about the steps involved in completing an activity;
- talk about being first, last and next when taking turns;
- talk about daily routines and seasonal events;
- sort, match, sequence and count in the course of their play;
- understand some prepositional words – in, on, at, above, below and under;
- recognise and talk about shapes in their environment;
- solve problems, question, predict and experiment;
- talk about photos of familiar objects taken from different angles and decide what objects they are;
- observe equipment from a variety of positions, for example talking about what they notice about the play area when observed from the top of the slide; and
- talk about objects in the distance and those that are near, or close to the reader when sharing story books.



## The Arts

Being creative is about making new things, taking risks, experimenting, coming up with new ideas, solving problems and coping with uncertainty. Creative play, both indoors and outdoors, not only helps foster these skills but can also assist with emotional development and social interaction. It can promote aesthetic awareness and be an avenue for self-expression. Partnership with parents is important so they understand the learning and value in the experiences their children engage in, including potentially 'messy' activities.

Young children learn and develop through:

- exploring and experimenting in sensory and play-based activities;
- encouragement and stimulation by adults helping them to express their ideas, extend their creativity and develop originality of thought; and
- opportunities to explore and share those thoughts, ideas and feelings through a variety of art and design, music, movement, dance, dramatic and role-play experiences, with adults' encouragement and support.

As they discover what they can do, children will experience the joy of achievement and develop self-confidence and self-esteem.

Adults promote learning by:

- valuing and encouraging the children's natural curiosity and vivid imaginations;
- providing opportunities to stimulate creativity and ensure progression throughout the year;
- helping children to take risks, to have confidence to try things out, and to accept that their ideas may not necessarily work;
- providing opportunities for children to develop the skill of observation;
- helping children to listen and talk about their experiences using appropriate language;

- encouraging children to explore their own ideas rather than reproduce someone else's; and
- teaching children to appreciate their own work and respect the work of others.

In developing children's creativity in the arts, adults should remember to celebrate the uniqueness of each child's work. They should emphasise the process, the children's enjoyment and the learning that is taking place, rather than the finished product.

### Creative Experiences

Art and design are a natural means of communication and learning for young children. Through the freedom of play, children explore natural and man-made materials and have opportunities to experiment with colour, shape, pattern and texture. This helps them to think through ideas, develop visual, spatial and tactile awareness, and develop investigative and manipulative skills.

Adults promote learning by:

- providing children with opportunities to create in a space that they can return to at different times to complete or alter their work;
- making a wide range of good quality materials, media and tools freely accessible to the children and adding to or changing these over time, for example preparing a paint area for children to mix their own colours, squeeze their own paint and choose different sizes of brushes;
- allowing children to choose their own activities and implement their own ideas;
- valuing the work of the children by displaying it attractively for their peers and parents to appreciate; and
- providing opportunities to work indoors and outdoors, at times creating 'temporary pictures' from materials such as stones, sticks, feathers, glass beads, buttons and card.



This transient art can be changed or moved around and the materials reused. Children can also be encouraged to take photographs to record their creations.

### **Painting and Drawing**

As children take part in play, they should have opportunities to:

- experiment with various media and tools such as paint, crayons, pencils, chalk, charcoal, pastels, brushes, fingers, sponges and combs;
- explore colours and textures, for example by mixing paints and using paint with sand, glitter or glue added;
- paint or draw vertically and horizontally, at different levels, using paper of different colours, shapes, textures and sizes;
- paint on other surfaces such as fabric, card, Perspex and windows;
- paint or draw pictures, from direct observation of objects, for example flowers, fruit or snails; and
- create pictures, for example by printing using everyday objects, blow painting, bubble painting, using wax resist, using marbling ink, or experimenting with shaving foam.

### **Using Paper, Card, Wood, Fabrics and Scrap Materials**

As children take part in play, they should have opportunities to:

- explore materials of different textures, which will offer them sensory experiences;
- make pictures and models using a variety of natural and man-made materials such as paper, card, boxes, fabrics, string, wood, feathers, glitter, sequins and buttons;
- investigate different ways of joining materials, including using different sorts of glue, tape and staples, and temporary methods such as elastic bands and paper clips; and

- experiment with and use tools such as a sticky tape dispenser, scissors and a hole punch.

### **Using Malleable Materials**

As children take part in play, they should have opportunities to:

- work with, and explore the properties of, large amounts of clay, dough and other modelling materials, squeezing, poking, flattening, pinching and modelling;
- make patterns in the materials using a variety of tools and materials such as shells, leaves, cones, scissors, potato mashers, knives and forks; and
- enhance their work with, for example glitter, colour and scent.

### **Music Experiences**

Music provides children with opportunities to explore feelings and express themselves in ways that support or go beyond verbal communication. Music provides a context for developing creativity, self-confidence and self-esteem, and it can give children endless enjoyment. It helps them learn how to listen, distinguish between sounds and respond to beat and rhythm. This contributes to building a strong foundation for early reading and mathematical development.

As children take part in play and other activities, both indoors and outdoors, they should have opportunities to:

- listen to and join in singing rhymes and songs;
- listen to a variety of music (including music that reflects cultural diversity), responding to the beat using appropriate actions such as clapping, marching, swaying or nodding;
- listen to music and respond freely by moving expressively;





- become aware of different kinds of sounds such as loud/quiet, high/low, and sounds made by different instruments;
- become aware of sounds in the environment such as bird songs and traffic;
- explore ways of making sounds using everyday objects like percussion and other musical instruments;
- make and use their own musical instruments; and
- see and hear music performed, either first-hand or using video or ICT.

### **Drama Experiences**

Drama allows children to express their feelings and imagination in both verbal and non-verbal ways. Through role-play, dance and mime they enter different worlds as they recreate and invent situations at home, in pre-school, in the community and in their imaginations. Taking part in these activities both indoors and outdoors helps children to develop self-esteem and confidence. It also contributes to their oral language development and their social and emotional development. Staff should become involved sensitively where they observe that role-play needs support. They can do this by joining in the play, suggesting a new context or adding a resource.

As children take part in play, they should have opportunities to:

- join a group involved in role-play;
- initiate their own role-plays, assuming and sustaining roles;
- access and use a wide range of dressing-up materials and props to enhance their play;
- see adults modelling roles such as the patient in the hospital or the customer in the shop, hairdresser's or café; and
- explore a range of resources including puppets, soft toys and small world toys to create scenarios, retell stories or express their own ideas.

### **Progress in Learning**

*The following is a general description of the characteristics and skills that most children who have experienced appropriate pre-school education will display.*

Children will have the ability to:

- explore a variety of materials, appreciating colour, shape, texture and sound;
- express their ideas, communicate their feelings, use their imagination and use a range of materials to make simple representations, which will become more detailed as their concentration and observational skills increase;
- develop manipulative skills as they handle appropriate tools and instruments;
- begin to value their own and other children's work;
- express ideas and feelings during role-play and begin to assume different roles; and
- learn songs, listen and respond to music, and make their own music by singing, clapping and playing percussion instruments.

### **The World Around Us**

From their earliest days, children try to make sense of their world. They are naturally curious about their environment and the people around them and frequently ask questions. Through a wide variety of activities and experiences in play, children begin to develop a range of skills and concepts such as observation and experimentation.

Young children learn and develop through:

- using their senses to explore their immediate indoor and outdoor environments; and
- freely exploring their immediate surroundings through play-based learning, both indoors and outdoors.



Adults promote learning by:

- planning a wide variety of learning experiences that help to develop a range of skills and concepts, including observation, experimentation and free exploration of the children's surroundings;
- extending children's understanding of themselves and their families, their pre-school setting (both indoors and outdoors) and the wider environment;
- commenting, asking open-ended questions, and encouraging children to experiment and evaluate; and
- providing children with opportunities to learn about the world around them through books, pictures, posters and photographs, and by using appropriate ICT.

To help children develop skills and concepts related to the world around them, they should have opportunities to engage in interesting activities that provide them with first-hand experiences to explore through their senses.

These may include opportunities to:

- observe water, discussing and experimenting with how different objects behave in water, what happens when colour is added to water, the uses of water and importance of not wasting it, and water in the environment such as raindrops on windows and puddles;
- explore the properties of wet, damp and dry sand, using sand to build and make models;
- discuss changes in materials in real contexts such as cooking, freezing and making dough; and
- show respect for living things and discuss the importance of handling them with care and sensitivity, for example by helping to attend to indoor and outdoor plants or look after a wormery or bug box.

Children may also have opportunities to explore:

- planting and growing throughout the year, for example growing seeds and plants or bulbs in soil and water;
- the life cycle of, for example butterflies or frogs;
- a range of natural and man-made materials and sounds, using their senses to explore foliage, fruit and vegetables, foods made in the setting, metal objects, magnets, and environmental sounds such as birds singing or traffic;
- materials in creative play, manipulating malleable materials such as dough and clay, becoming aware of how these materials behave when poked, rolled, squashed and pulled, and observing what happens when colours are mixed;
- creating stimulating areas of interest, which may include photographs, magnets, magnifiers, mirrors, the insides of clocks, light boxes, plants at different stages of development, shells, and representations of seashore, jungle or ice landscapes;
- creating models, for example when they assemble, rearrange and build with a variety of sizes and shapes of blocks and other materials or talk about why some models stand and others collapse; and
- the properties of different materials and their appropriate uses, putting things together in a variety of ways, for example making models with natural and man-made materials, sticking, cutting, folding and, on occasion, taking things apart.

There may be opportunities for children to talk about:

- relevant topics or festivals that are a natural part of their own experiences, for example holidays, celebrations, birthdays or the arrival of a new baby, using photographs, drawing or making models to record events, if appropriate;
- the weather and the seasons at appropriate times during the year;



- themselves and their body parts, for example by talking with adults, engaging in role-play and listening to appropriate stories, rhymes and songs;
- where they live, the members of their extended family and events in their lives (both past and present);
- healthy eating and habits for life;
- issues relating to safety (including the weather) in the pre-school setting and in the wider environment, for example by discussing safe play indoors and outdoors, by playing with simple floor maps and small vehicles and discussing road safety, by keeping safe in the home and community, and by discussing how to keep safe in the sun and the importance of wearing appropriate clothing;
- their pre-school setting (including the name of the setting and the people who work in it), where to find people, materials and equipment in the setting, and the names, function and position of different rooms or areas, the local environment and visitors;
- the work of some people in the local community, such as a fire officer, shop assistant and/or doctor, through role-play or arranging visits to or from the setting; and
- taking some responsibility for caring for their own environment, becoming aware of environmental issues like litter and the use of paper and bottle banks.

### **Progress in Learning**

*The following is a general description of the characteristics and skills that most children who have experienced appropriate pre-school education will display.*

Children will have the ability to:

- show interest in and care for their environment;
- care for and respect living things and handle them sensitively;
- talk about themselves, their families, their pre-school setting and the wider environment;
- recognise the role of some people who work within the setting and the local community;
- show an awareness of time as they talk about seasonal and festive events and take part in daily routines;
- observe, explore, investigate and select materials and equipment in a range of situations;
- ask questions about why things happen and how things work;
- use skills such as cutting, sticking, folding, pouring and building as they work with a variety of materials;
- begin to name parts of the body;
- identify a variety of familiar sounds;
- talk about their observations and make simple predictions about things, for example what would happen if water was added to sand; and
- show an awareness of some environmental and safety issues.



# Appendix

## Useful Links and Resources

### **Department of Education**

[www.education-ni.gov.uk](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk)

Early Years Education

[www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/early-years-education](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/early-years-education)

Guidance on Induction and Transition – Pre-school Education

[www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/guidance-on-induction-and-transition-pre-school-education-and-year-1.pdf](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/guidance-on-induction-and-transition-pre-school-education-and-year-1.pdf)

Guidance for pre-school education providers

[www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/guidance-pre-school-education-providers](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/guidance-pre-school-education-providers)

How to apply for a pre-school place

[www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/how-apply-pre-school-place](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/how-apply-pre-school-place)

Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning

[www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/learning-learn](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/learning-learn)

Looked after children

[www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/looked-after-children-0](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/looked-after-children-0)

Newcomer children

[www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/newcomers](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/newcomers)

Open enrolment Circular 2014/07

[www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/2014-07-open-enrolment-in-nursery-schools-and-nursery-classes-in-primary-schools.pdf](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/2014-07-open-enrolment-in-nursery-schools-and-nursery-classes-in-primary-schools.pdf)

Review of Pre-school admissions arrangements 2012

[www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/review-pre-school-admissions-arrangements](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/review-pre-school-admissions-arrangements)

Special Education Needs resources

[www.education-ni.gov.uk/topics/support-and-development/special-educational-needs](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/topics/support-and-development/special-educational-needs)

[www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/sen-early-years-supplement](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/sen-early-years-supplement)



## **Education Authority**

[www.eani.org.uk](http://www.eani.org.uk)

Intercultural Education Service

[www.eani.org.uk/schools/intercultural-education-service/](http://www.eani.org.uk/schools/intercultural-education-service/)

Pre-school Admissions

[www.eani.org.uk/i-want-to/apply-for-a-school-place-or-transfer-between-schools/pre-school/](http://www.eani.org.uk/i-want-to/apply-for-a-school-place-or-transfer-between-schools/pre-school/)

Pre-school Education Programme

[www.eani.org.uk/schools/pre-school-education-programme/](http://www.eani.org.uk/schools/pre-school-education-programme/)

## **Other Useful Links**

Altram – support and resources for pre-school settings in the Irish-Medium sector

[www.altram.org](http://www.altram.org)

Community Relations, Equality and Diversity NI

[www.credni.org](http://www.credni.org)

Early Years Organisation – support and resources for non-statutory pre-school settings

[www.early-years.org/services](http://www.early-years.org/services)

Education and Training Inspectorate

[www.etini.gov.uk](http://www.etini.gov.uk)

Family Support Hubs

[www.cypsp.org/family-support-hubs/#ffs-tabbed-15](http://www.cypsp.org/family-support-hubs/#ffs-tabbed-15)

Family Support NI

[www.familysupportni.gov.uk](http://www.familysupportni.gov.uk)

Getting Ready to Learn

[www.gettingreadytolearn.co.uk](http://www.gettingreadytolearn.co.uk)

NI Direct – Pre-school education page

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/pre-school-education-nursery](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/pre-school-education-nursery)

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/helping-hand](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/helping-hand)

Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)

– support and resources for the Integrated Education sector

[www.nicie.org](http://www.nicie.org)

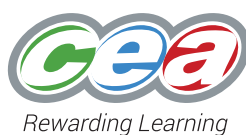
Sure Start

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/sure-start-services](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/sure-start-services)

[www.early-years.org/surestart](http://www.early-years.org/surestart)

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Department of  
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