

Learning to Learn

A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning

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Department of
Education

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Ministerial Foreword

I am pleased to be in a position to set out my revised proposals for the way forward for early years education and learning. I want to progress this work as evidence highlights the vital importance that the early years can have on a child's later educational achievements and outcomes.

The consultation on the draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy generated a wide and interesting debate on the range of issues facing children and their families in the early years. In deciding the way forward, I have considered a range of wider issues as well as the outcome of the consultation, and the current context. The time has come to stop talking about the need for overarching strategies for all services in the 0-6 age range and to start taking action to improve early years education services which contribute to broader objectives for early intervention.

The core objective of my Department is to raise standards in education and, in doing so, to reduce educational underachievement particularly for those young people who face barriers to learning. There are a number of issues that need to be addressed to strengthen the position of early years education and its contribution to improved outcomes. I intend to concentrate on ensuring that the early years education and learning environment is delivering consistently high quality services to young children and their families and can support an integrated approach to improving outcomes.

As Education Minister I want to ensure that every child can fulfil their potential irrespective of the barriers they may face. As the importance of early years education becomes increasingly recognised I need to ensure that my Department's policies and programmes are operating as effectively as possible, that children get a positive and fulfilling experience in pre-school and school and for some children and families earlier more targeted support.

Early years education is not a separate phase of education. These services which range from Sure Start to the Pre-School Programme and on to Foundation Stage are essential age and stage appropriate services which contribute directly to children achieving their full potential.

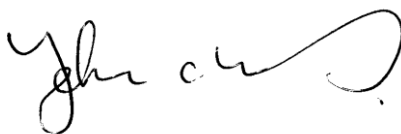
I need to apply the same priorities to this important phase of education as I do to all other aspects of education. The proposed actions in this framework set out the way forward for early years education and learning in line with education priorities, and also incorporate the previous broad objectives set out in the draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy.

The proposed actions are aimed at ensuring that every child can access high quality early learning experiences that equip them to develop improved cognitive, social and emotional skills and which lay important foundations for future learning and development.

I recognise the need for enhanced collaboration across a range of early childhood education, health and care systems. I am convinced that the new Delivering Social Change Framework (DSC), led by Ministers through the Executive Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People and the Sub-Committee on Poverty and Social Inclusion, provides a more appropriate mechanism for achieving enhanced collaboration and integration for early years as part of a wider theme of early intervention. I will work collaboratively with Ministerial colleagues through the DSC framework to build on existing strategies, and enable and enhance partnerships between services and the families they are seeking to support.

The development of this framework has been influenced by the extensive response to the consultation on the draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy, and ongoing engagement with key stakeholders. I am confident that it will deliver improved outcomes for children and families.

The time has come to take action and continue to improve the education and learning experiences of children in their early years. The focused consultation on the actions provides an important opportunity for you to consider if any of the actions proposed need further refinement.



John O'Dowd
Minister for Education

Introduction

Early Years

- 1.1 A child's success in school and life is significantly determined at a very young age, and before they start school. Today we know more than ever about the importance of positive and supportive environments and their impact on brain development, and we understand more than ever how much the first years of a child's life can shape the rest of their life.

- 1.2 The understanding of the wider influences on a child's development, such as family, socio-economic background, and the impact of barriers to learning is increasing. The need to identify and address potential barriers to a child's development as early as possible, lay important foundations for lifelong learning and to provide additional support to families, children and communities is acknowledged by the Executive in the priorities and objectives in the Programme for Government.

- 1.3 The Department of Education seeks to ensure that children get the best start in life through enabling education policies, legislation and funding which provide a range of universal and targeted services to help children achieve, develop and thrive. Early years education provision makes a distinctive contribution to helping achieve the wider aims of improving attainment and reducing underachievement, especially in literacy and numeracy. The services are designed to support children and their families by providing positive early years education and learning experiences in safe, stimulating and supportive environments.

Current Provision

1.4 The current early years education and learning provision for children aged 0-6, and their family is:

- The Sure Start Programme;
- The Pre-School Education Programme;
- Reception
- The Foundation Stage of the Curriculum (Primary Years 1 and 2)

There is also an ongoing campaign to engage with parents to value and get involved in their child's education.

Key Facts

1.5 The Department of Education invests over £200million in early years education and learning services. Funding allocated in 2012/13 is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 - Funding for Early Years Education and Learning Services

Provision	£m
Nursery Schools	18.3
Nursery Classes within Primary Schools [^]	21.7
Voluntary/Private pre-school settings	15.7
Sure Start	23.4
Capital	2.0
Early Years The Organisation for Young Children	
- Core Grant	0.3
- Early Years Fund	3.1
Foundation Stage (which includes reception) (Yr 1 & 2)*	121.6
Total	206.1

[^]Includes AWPU and TSN funding only. Certain funding is not identifiable by year group within the funding share for schools and cannot therefore be disaggregated.

*Includes AWPU and Foundation Stage Factor funding only. Certain funding is not identifiable by year group within the funding share for schools and cannot therefore be disaggregated.

Sure Start Provision

- 1.6 Sure Start is a programme targeted at parents and children under the age of 4 living in the top 20% most disadvantaged wards in the north. It provides services in response to the social, emotional, physical and educational development of children and their families within the designated areas. Sure Start services are delivered through a holistic approach, with health, education and parenting support services provided in a co-ordinated way. The programme has been funded by the Department of Education since 2006 when it transferred from Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). In that time investment in the programme has increased by over £13million, resulting in an annual budget of over £23million in 2012/13
- 1.7 There are currently 35 Sure Start projects in the north of Ireland providing services to approximately 34,000 children aged 0-4 and their families within the designated areas. The Department of Education is currently working with the Health and Social Care Board on an expansion of Sure Start services to the 25% most disadvantaged wards in the north of Ireland.

Sure Start - Developmental Programme for 2-3 Year Olds

- 1.8 Of the £23million invested in Sure Start, £3million supports the Developmental Programme for 2-3 Year Olds. There are currently 142 programmes in place, offering a service for approx 12 children per programme. This programme aims to enhance the child's social and emotional development, build on their communication and language skills, and encourage their imagination through play. It is designed for young children in their penultimate pre-school year, focusing on age appropriate constructive play in group settings. Parental involvement is a key component of the programme. Further details on Sure Start and the Developmental Programme for 2-3 Year Olds is set out at Appendix 1.

Pre-School Education Programme

1.9 Over £55million is invested in the pre-school programme, which is a vital but non compulsory stage of education which provides children with high quality curriculum based educational experiences. In the 'Programme for Government 2011 – 2015', the Department is committed to ensuring that at least one year of pre-school education is available to every family that wants it. In the 2011/12 academic year, there were 23,178 children in DE funded pre-school education: 14,580 in nursery schools or nursery classes in primary schools; and 8,149 in DE funded places in voluntary and private pre-school education centres. There were 449 children in reception classes/groups in primary schools (as of 31 October 2011).

Table 2 - Children in DE funded pre-school places – 2011/12

No of Children per setting and session	Full Time	Part Time AM	Part Time PM	TOTAL
Nursery Schools	3,981	967	963	5,911
Nursery Units in Primary Schools	5,143	2,191	1,335	8,669
Total Statutory	9,124	3,158	2,298	14,580
Voluntary and private pre-school settings	-	7,354	795	8,149
TOTAL (all settings)	9,124	10,512	3,093	22,729
Reception ¹				449
Grand total				23,178

1. *Children in reception are not funded at part of the Pre-school Education programme*

Curricular Guidance for Pre-School Education

1.10 All pre-school settings, both statutory, and voluntary and private settings with funded places, must adhere to the 'Curricular Guidance for Pre-School Education'. The guidance is designed to support and promote good quality pre-school educational provision and outlines the range of learning opportunities which children of this age should have through play and other relevant experiences.

Registration and Inspection

1.11 DHSSPS have devised minimum standards which stipulate the minimum level of service to be provided in order to be registered with a Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) and meet DHSSPS inspection standards. Voluntary and private providers who wish to offer funded pre-school places must be registered with the HSCT. They are also subject to inspection by the HSCT inspectors and the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). Statutory nursery schools and nursery units in primary schools are inspected by the ETI.

Pre-School Education - Funding

1.12 Over £40million funding to the 97 DE grant aided nursery schools and 222 nursery units attached to primary schools is allocated via the Common Funding Formula under the Local Management of Schools (LMS) arrangements. A further £15.7 million is allocated to voluntary and a private pre-school provider outside of the formula arrangements and this is administered by the local Pre-School Education Advisory Groups (PEAGs) in each of the five Education and Library Boards. In the 2011/12 school year there were 381 voluntary and private pre-school centres in the Pre-School Education Programme offering funded places.

Duration of Session Time

1.13 In statutory nursery schools and nursery units within primary schools there are both part-time and full-time funded places available for children. Part-time pre-school education in the statutory sector is defined in legislation as between 2 hours 30 minutes and 4 hours 30 minutes duration per day; full-time provision is of at least 4 hours 30 minutes duration. While not defined in legislation, the Department requires the provision to be normally available 5 days a week for 38 weeks of the academic year. In the voluntary sector all funded places available within the Pre-School Education Programme are part-time, normally at least 2.5 hours per day, 5 days per week for 38 weeks of the academic year.

Staffing and Staff to Child Ratios

1.14 Nursery schools and nursery units within primary schools are grant-aided schools and are staffed by qualified teachers and nursery assistants; the ratio of staff to children is currently 1:13 as set out in the Department's (DE) guidance. In voluntary/private settings in receipt of Department of Education funded pre-school places, at least half the staff must hold a relevant qualification in education or child care, and are expected to work towards ensuring that all staff have relevant qualifications. In addition, all funded voluntary/private pre-school settings are required to access support from a qualified teacher or early years specialist to assist with raising standards of provision. Voluntary/private settings are required under the terms of the registration to maintain a minimum staff: child ratio of 1:8 which is set out in the Children (NI) Order 1995.

Reception

1.15 A reception class is currently defined in legislation as suitable to the requirements of children aged 4. Children who have reached their fourth birthday after the cut off point for compulsory school starting age may be able to join a reception class if available. Reception pupils are taught by qualified teachers and this is often in composite classes with year 1 pupils. An aim of the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme was the replacement of existing reception provision with suitable alternative provision. Reception classes do not always provide an appropriate pre-school environment for children, and the Department has not approved new reception provision since 1998. Numbers in reception provision have fallen from 2,575 children in 1997 to 449 in 2011/12 (as of 31 October 2011).

Foundation Stage

1.16 The Foundation Stage represents the beginning of the compulsory stage of education for children in primary school. Children who have attained the age of 4 on or before 1st July will start primary school at the beginning of the September that year. Foundation Stage applies to children in year 1 and year 2 of primary

school and is delivered by qualified teachers, often supported by classroom assistants. In 2011/12 there were 23,599 children in year 1 and 22,538 children attending year 2 in primary schools.

- 1.17 The Foundation Stage aims to provide a smoother transition from the pre-school phase. It recognises that young children come to school from a variety of different backgrounds, having had a range of diverse learning experiences at home and, for most, some form of pre-school education. It is designed to build on children's earlier learning experiences by providing an appropriate learning programme to develop their dispositions to learn and to provide them with the skills and competencies they will need to succeed in school and in later life.
- 1.18 The Foundation Stage curriculum provides an environment which best suits the needs of young children. It uses play as a context for learning recognising that stimulation through play is an important factor in the social, emotional and educational development of the child. As children progress through the Foundation Stage, they are introduced to more formal learning, particularly the development of literacy and numeracy skills at a pace that takes account of their age and level of development.

Parental Engagement

- 1.19 Parental engagement is a key principle of the Department's School Improvement Policy 'Every School a Good School' (ESaGS). The Department supports a number of programmes to engage with parents through the extended and full service schools and best practice in pre-school, as well as through Sure Start programmes. The Department's initiative 'Get involved, because education works' aims to get more parents involved in their child's education, and provides practical examples to help parents read, count, play and talk to their children.

Current and Future Context

- 2.1 The Department of Education policy 'Investing in Early Learning' dates back to 1998. In 2004 DE consulted on the future of pre-school education as part of its review of pre-school arrangements and reported in 2006 on the outcome. In 2012 the Department published the Review of Pre-School Admission Arrangements which provides a framework to improve the operation of the pre-school programme and supports the Department in its aim of making a place available to every child whose family wants it. A longitudinal study of the effects of preschool education, Effective Pre-school Provision (EPPNI) provides evidence that high quality pre-school education makes a difference to the cognitive and social/behavioural development of children.
- 2.2 There has been no significant revision of the policy context for Sure Start since 2006, although the Developmental Programme for 2-3 Year Olds was developed since then. The policy position for reception was set out in 'Investing in Early Learning' which stated that no new reception provision in primary schools would be funded from September 1999. The 2004 Review of Pre-school and the 2012 Review of Pre-school Admissions Arrangements also recommended that reception should be removed. The Foundation Stage was introduced as part of a wider revision of the curriculum introduced in the 2007/08 school year.

Wider Education Policy

- 2.3 There is a substantial suite of wider education policies that impact on the delivery of early years or to which early years could contribute, including, Every School a Good School, Review of Irish-Medium Education, Count Read Succeed, Literacy and Numeracy, Extended Schools, Area Planning, Community Relations Equality and Diversity and Review of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion.
- 2.4 Our education system is going through a major period of change. The change from the present structures to ESA will offer a changed context to take forward early years education and learning and will present significant opportunities to

improve outcomes for all young people in education and to ensure equality of access to quality early years education provision.

Inspection Findings

2.5 In the 2010-2012 Education and Training Chief Inspector's Report, 76% of the pre-school settings inspected were evaluated as good or better. The strengths reported include:

- most children experience a good or better pre-school education;
- the overall effectiveness of the voluntary and private sector continues to improve;
- achievements and standards are good or better in 80% of the pre-school settings inspected;
- in the good to outstanding settings, staff communicate well with a range of other organisations to support the learning and care of the children and to disseminate better practice; and
- in the best practice, settings involve parents well in their children's learning and development.

2.6 The Chief Inspector reported that in going forward there was a need to:

- further develop the continuity and progression of children's learning across all stages;
- continue to develop staff skills to provide a high quality pre-school programme; and
- improve the quality of leadership and management in 30% of the settings inspected.

2.7 More detail on inspection findings is set out in Appendix 2. Overall the findings from inspection are positive, but there is still progress to be made in leadership and management and in ensuring continuity in children's early education and learning experiences. The ETI have also carried out one evaluation of the Development Programme for 2 to 3 Year Olds in Sure Start settings.

Wider Executive Policy

2.8 The education service is being shaped by a number of wider Executive policies and early years education and learning services assist in the delivery of a range of outcomes for children and families such as those set out in the Programme for Government 2011- 2015, Children and Young People's 10 Year Plan, Play and Leisure Policy, Child Poverty, Cohesion Sharing and Integration, and emerging themes and outcomes in the forthcoming child care policy as well as the new Delivering Social Change Framework.

Consultation and Engagement

2.9 On 25 June 2010 the former Education Minister Caitríona Ruane, launched the consultation process of the draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy. The draft strategy proposed a vision, aims and objectives that would link the range of education and health early years' services for children with the new Foundation Stage in the first years of primary school.

2.10 The proposed actions in the draft strategy were not well received by the majority of respondents. A number of fundamental issues were raised which led to the conclusion that there was a pressing need to set out a clear way forward for early years education and learning.

2.11 On 2 July 2012 the Minister for Education John O'Dowd launched the summary report of responses to the consultation on the Early Years (0-6) Strategy. The summary is available at:
http://www.deni.gov.uk/response_to_early_years_consultation.pdf.

2.12 The Department established an Early Years Stakeholder Group; the membership of this Group is set out in Appendix 3. The group has met on ten occasions from October 2010 to November 2012.

Rationale for New Approach

- 3.1 There is no one government department with overall responsibility for every early years service that children and their families need. The Department of Education is responsible and accountable for the early years education and learning services provided to children and their families across a range of programmes. Health services required by children and families in early years, as well as social services and welfare are the responsibility of other departments such as DHSSPS and DSD. OFMDFM is developing proposals for a child care strategy and coordinating work on child poverty.
- 3.2 Aspects of early years policy have been realigned between DE and DHSSPS. Childminding and day care policy reverted back to DHSSPS in 2011, and DHSSPS lead on 'Families Matter - the Regional Family and Parenting Strategy'. The starting position for revisiting the draft strategy is therefore very different. In recognition of the need to work more collaboratively in the interests of children and families the new approach will be outward looking. The need for health, parenting, education and social services to work together is clear, and this will be reflected in the drive for a more coherent government approach through the Delivering Social Change framework.
- 3.3 The sustained economic downturn since 2008 has had a significant impact on the resources available to the Executive and has resulted in a reduction in a number of departmental budgets including education. After a period of growth in investment in public services, the difficult economic climate has resulted in constrained public expenditure forecasts for the years ahead, in both capital and resource budgets. Education, as a result of the cuts to the Block Grant by the British Government, faces unprecedented financial challenges over the next three years in terms of a gap of around £215million in resource funding between the anticipated spending requirements and the available budget for 2014-15.
- 3.4 The Minister's priorities for education are focused on raising standards and narrowing the gap in achievement levels. A suite of education policies, which reflect these priorities, are in place and this revised framework will set early years

education and learning services within that overall approach, where the importance of delivering high quality education services for children before and in the first years of compulsory education is recognised.

- 3.5 Alongside the decrease in available resources, increasing expectations, an increasing birth rate and changes in demography are placing significant additional demands on early years education and learning services. Parents increasingly expect to be able to access early years education and learning services at times and in ways that suit them. Where possible the Department aims to meet parental and societal expectations for early years education through policy, legislation and funding which enables a range of providers to deliver programmes aimed at delivering improved outcomes for children. Early years education is an important phase of education and for many children, and their families, the first experience of the education environment. It is not, however, day care.
- 3.6 There are a number of challenges across the range of early years education services which need to be addressed to strengthen the position of early years education and its contribution to improved outcomes.
- 3.7 The Department also aims to deliver on the Programme for Government Commitment for pre-school places, but there continues to be challenges in terms of admission processes, demand and supply and capacity. Pre-school provision is an important educational opportunity. There needs to be a sustained approach to raising standards in provision to ensure that the educational offer is of a consistently high quality. There is also a need to respond to the increasing number of pre-school children presenting with special educational needs and other additional needs.
- 3.8 The Programme for Government identifies as a priority the delivery of high quality public services and gives a clear commitment to the establishment of a new Education and Skills Authority (ESA) in 2013. Through the creation of ESA the work of teachers and school leaders and those working in early years and youth settings will be supported by a modern, efficient and professional education body focused on the quality of education and the needs of our young people. Early years education and learning will be a key priority for ESA.

Revised Proposals

- 4.1 In a statement to the Assembly in July 2012 the Minister for Education set out the results of the consultation on the draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy and indicated the approach he intended to adopt to progress work on early years. While the Minister acknowledged widespread agreement around the need for increased early years intervention and support, he recognised the lack of consensus around how this might be achieved.
- 4.2 The Minister announced that he would proceed with a two strand approach to early years. The first strand would be the development of a revised strategy with a clear focus on early years education and learning, focused on what the Department of Education can do to ensure young children are prepared, supported and encouraged to learn. This will complete a suite of educational policies which will drive educational reform, raise standards overall and close the gap between the highest and lowest achievers. In parallel with the development of an early years education and learning strategy, the Minister announced that he would be engaging with Ministerial colleagues to explore the potential for enhanced co-operation around early intervention, and that the new Delivering Social Change (DSC) framework could offer a vehicle to target additional support to those who need it most.
- 4.3 The revised framework will provide a clear policy focus for the Department and ESA, where the investment in early years is directly linked to supporting high quality services, across a range of providers, to deliver better outcomes.

Vision and Goals

4.4 In support of the DE vision ***“every young person achieving to his or her full potential at each stage of his or her development”*** the revised framework will reflect the two overarching goals for education:

- Raising standards for all
- Closing the performance gap, increasing access and equality

There are three enabling goals to achieve the overarching goals. They are:

- Developing the education workforce
- Improving the learning environment
- Transforming the governance and management of education

Overall Policy Aim for Early Years Education and Learning

4.5 Setting an overarching policy for early years education and learning, aligned to the overall education priorities will provide a clear framework for all early years education and learning provision. It also clarifies the scope of early years education and learning services which are under the remit of the Department of Education and makes the necessary links with the services under the remit of other departments and agencies, particularly DHSSPS. The overall policy aim for Learning to Learn – A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning is:

All children have opportunities to achieve their potential through high quality early years education and learning experiences.

Policy Objectives

4.6 In support of the policy aim, the policy objectives are to:

- ***provide equitable access to high quality early years education and learning services;***

- *support personal, social and emotional development, promote positive learning dispositions and enhance language, cognitive and physical development in young children ;*
- *provide a positive and nurturing early learning experience, as well as a foundation for improved educational attainment and life-long learning;*
- *identify and help address barriers to learning, and reduce the risk and impact of social exclusion and the need for later interventions; and*
- *encourage and support parents in their role as first and ongoing educators.*

Early Years Education and Learning Principles

4.7 The following principles will underpin the planning and delivery of early years education and learning services, and enhance collaborative working across a range of services and sectors outside the remit of the Department of Education.

- ***The early years education and learning needs of all children is the key focus of provision*** - *The individual characteristics and needs of each child are recognised and respected and early years education and learning provision helps them develop cognitively, emotionally, physically and socially.*
- ***Education and learning begins at birth*** - *the importance of the home learning environment, and children's overall experiences from birth, in improving educational outcomes is recognised and supported through working in partnership with parents and carers as the child's first and ongoing educators.*
- ***Children and their families are entitled to high quality, age appropriate early years education and learning services and opportunities*** - *delivered in safe and inclusive environments, led by a*

skilled workforce, and evaluated against quality standards where the importance of play in its own right, and as a pedagogical tool is recognised.

- ***The rights of children and their families are respected*** - *Early childhood is a significant and distinct time in life and as such it should be nurtured, respected, valued and supported in its own right and for the significant foundation it provides for future and lifelong learning.*
- ***Equity and inclusion are essential characteristics of quality early years education and learning*** - *All children, regardless of their special educational needs, disabilities, gender, cultural, religious, socio economic, or linguistic backgrounds are provided with practical, challenging activities in a stimulating environment which help them achieve their potential.*
- ***Collaborative working among the statutory, voluntary, and other relevant sectors and professional bodies will play an important part in securing improved outcomes for young children in their early years*** - *recognising that children are provided with other opportunities to learn and develop outside funded and formal education provision (such as child- minding and day-care).*

4.8 The principles on the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities have been taken into consideration when developing these proposals. This framework should promote children's rights and reflects the main guiding principles of the UNCRC and UNCRPD.

What is needed?

4.9 The aim, objectives and underpinning principles provide a framework for action. In order to deliver improved outcomes there are issues that need to be addressed across the range of early years education and learning services and the Department is therefore proposing the following actions.

Over-arching Goal	Raising Standards
Outcome	All children benefit from a high quality early years education and learning experience and acquire a positive disposition for further learning.
Rationale for Change	
<p>The Pre-School Education Programme should be focused on children in their pre-school year. Current legislation (Education (NI) Order 1998) requires every Education and Library Board (ELB) to make arrangements for the parent of a child resident in the area of the board to express (in order of preference) his preferences as to the school at which he wishes pre-school education to be provided for his child; this includes two year olds. As highlighted in the Review of Pre-School Admission Arrangements this requires the ELBs to process a significant number of applications for two year olds who do not secure a place because of the priority given to target age children. The current arrangements may result in some target age children not being able to access a pre-school place in statutory provision.</p> <p>Inspection findings highlight that while the overall quality of pre-school provision is very good, there continues to be variation across providers, with issues around: leadership and management, collaboration with parents, the appropriateness of reception and the transitions from pre-school to foundation.</p> <p>There is a need for stronger curricular links at all transition points, for example, Sure Start Developmental Programme for 2-3 year olds/Pre-School Education Programme/Foundation Stage, in order to ensure progression in children’s learning experiences.</p> <p>The ETI inspection process currently focuses on the Pre-school Education Programme and does not cover Sure Start or other DE funded early years support services.</p> <p>Reception and two year olds in the pre-school programme may not be educationally appropriate and removing the provision will provide clarity for area planning in the future.</p> <p>Every School a Good School (ESaGS) applies to schools only; there is no equivalent formal intervention system for non statutory settings.</p> <p>The Review of Irish-Medium Education indicated that research on the educational outcomes of different types of Irish-medium</p>	

pre-school experience should be taken forward, and that the Department must ensure that Irish-medium is considered systemically throughout policy development.

Key Action:	Timing
1.1 The Department will redefine the pre-school programme to focus on children in their pre-school year by:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Legislating to define the age range for the pre-school education programme to children aged over 3 years and 2 months b) Retaining a power for nursery schools and units to provide services for two year olds, if needed, outside of the pre-school education programme c) Legislating to prevent schools establishing new or maintaining existing reception classes
1.2 The Department will ensure that experiences in primary school build more effectively on the child's previous education and learning experiences by:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Extending the Foundation Stage to include a non compulsory year (pre-school) and two compulsory years (primary), with one foundation curriculum to incorporate pre-school. b) Developing guidance, information and support materials for parents and practitioners on preparing for and managing transitions to Foundation Stage and on to Key Stage 1. c) Commissioning research on the outcomes of pre-school Irish-medium Education as outlined in the Review of Irish-Medium Education
1.3 The Department will apply the principles of Every School a Good School to all DE funded early years provision by:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Ensuring all DE funded services in the 0-6 age range are subject to a thorough area based inspection process , including the Sure Start Developmental Programme for 2-3 Year Olds, all relevant support services for pre-school, and Foundation Stage, whilst not separating foundation from the overall primary stage b) Developing protocols for support and intervention, outside of ESaGS, where the quality of provision is below standard.

Over-arching Goal	Closing the performance gap, increasing access and equality
Outcome	All children progress and develop equitably, with appropriate support for children who face barriers to learning.
Rationale for Change	
<p>Inspection findings and feedback from early years practitioners highlight the prevalence of underdeveloped social, emotional and communication skills of young children compared to expected development.</p> <p>The proposals for the Review of SEN and Inclusion focus on early identification, assessment and intervention. All funded pre-school settings will be expected to meet, within the setting, the needs of children with SEN and or disability at Level 1 of the new SEN framework, and by the setting with support or guidance from the ELB at level 2. A statement in the form of a coordinated support plan will be put in place for those children who need it at level 3. The early years settings pilot, initiated by the review, aims to improve the capacity of the early years settings to be able to identify, assess and meet the needs of children with SEN and, where the needs are not able to be met by the setting alone to request ELB/ESA support. The evaluation of the pilot will be used to inform a future model of SEN best practice for early identification, assessment and provision across early years settings.</p> <p>The targeted Sure Start Programme is area based; the needs of children and families are not. The Sure Start Programme for 2-3 Year Olds targets approx 12 children per programme. There has not been an overall evaluation of how Sure Start operates in the North of Ireland, including a review of how it is strategically and operationally aligned with key objectives for DE or the wider Executive priorities.</p> <p>The funding for Extended Schools, aimed at providing additional services for children experiencing barriers to learning because of disadvantage, is available to statutory nursery schools and units, but not to voluntary or private providers with funded places who would also meet similar criteria.</p> <p>There is a need for a more co-ordinated approach to the planning and provision of early intervention services for children and families which are funded, managed and delivered by a range of departments, agencies and non statutory providers, to maximise available resources.</p>	

Key Action		Timing
1.4 The Department will review how early years education and learning services are effectively targeted to address barriers to learning and enhance access and equity by:	a) Refocusing the use of extended schools (ES) funding for nursery schools and units to help identify and address underdeveloped social, emotional and communication skills of young children.	To begin 2013
	b) Establishing criteria, similar to that used for ES, for voluntary and private settings in the Pre-School Programme to access additional resources proportionate to the amount they receive per place.	
	c) Commissioning a review of the Sure Start Programme, with cooperation from DHSSPS, to assess the extent to which the investment is helping to secure improved well being and development outcomes for children and families in the most disadvantaged areas, and the need for admissions criteria to be developed to ensure that those who need these services most can avail of them.	
	d) Developing potential options for the expansion of a two year old programme.	Following review
	e) Monitoring the uptake and completion of early years education and learning opportunities by children at risk of exclusion, including children with special education needs and/or disability, looked after children and traveller children and newcomer families.	2013/14
	f) Subject to recommendations emerging from the evaluation, extending the pilots in early years settings initiated by the Review of SEN and Inclusion, to help improve access to specialist support and build capacity across pre-school settings.	Following evaluation

Key Action	Timing	
1.5 The Department will collaborate with other departments to work towards a common goal of improving outcomes for children, by:	a) Identifying opportunities for investing jointly with DHSSPS, DSD, DoJ and OFMDFM under the DSC framework in evidence based family intervention/parenting programmes planned, commissioned and evaluated through the Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership (CYPSP).	To begin early 2013
	b) Improving the coordination of service delivery to individual families by ensuring that early years education and learning services/workforce are integrated into the DHSSPS Family Support Hubs and into the Health and Social Care Trust Early Years teams’ family support structures.	To begin early 2013

Over-arching Goal	Developing the Education Workforce
Outcome	The workforce is appropriately skilled, competent and supported to deliver effective early years education and learning services to all children, their parents and families.
Rationale for Change	
<p>Findings from inspection raise issues about leadership and management and the quality of provision, standards and overall effectiveness across a range of early years settings.</p> <p>Inspections findings also highlight that the quality of the external support provided to voluntary and private settings by early years specialists remains variable. There is a need for all settings within statutory and voluntary sectors to work more collaboratively, disseminate existing good practice, maximise the expertise and experience of qualified teachers, and build capacity and further develop competencies across the workforce.</p> <p>Issues have been raised about continuous professional development and the exceptional closure days for non statutory settings which are currently three days less than statutory settings; this can impact on the capacity of those settings to undertake further training.</p> <p>DHSSPS have recently introduced new minimum standards for childminding and day care. These apply to all registered childcare settings, including all funded settings in the pre-school programme and relevant Sure Start services.</p> <p>Children's needs cross organisational boundaries particularly between health, education and social services. The importance of multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working, together with good communication and information sharing are essential to the common goal of improving outcomes for all children and their families.</p>	

Key Action		Timing
1.6 The Department will establish appropriate support mechanisms to drive up standards in pre-school provision and disseminate best practice by:	a) Creating 11 pilot Early Years Education Support Clusters, 2 in each board area and one other which may be Irish-medium specific, to raise standards by making greater use of the teaching expertise in nursery schools and units along with expertise in playgroups across other relevant providers and early years specialists.	To be in place for 2013/14 academic year
	b) Developing an 'Excellence in Early Education Fund' to provide seed/additional funding to the clusters to incentivise greater collaboration, and support the additional requirements on the lead cluster which must have an 'outstanding' inspection report.	To be in place for 2013/14 academic year
	c) Liaising with DHSSPS around the current qualifications relevant to early years education and learning particularly around literacy and numeracy.	To be in place for 2014/15 academic year
	d) Developing a programme of continuous professional development for staff and management committees in funded settings with a focus on leadership and management.	
	e) Standardising the closure days for pre-school settings to maximise available time for staff development.	To be in place for 2013/14 academic year
1.7 The Department will work with DHSSPS to develop protocols for delivery bodies to enhance information sharing, early identification and intervention services for children and families at risk, and review joint training requirements across disciplines as well as improving inter-professional communication.		To begin early 2013

Over-arching Goal	Improving the Child's Learning Environment
Outcome	High quality education and learning services delivered in safe, nurturing and accessible environments in partnership with parents and carers as their child's first and ongoing educators.
Rationale for Change	
<p>The pattern of provision for pre-school and the duration of session time can range from 2.5 hours to below 4.5 hours (part-time, with no meal) and 4.5 hours or over (full-time, with a meal) per day. Available evidence from the Effective Pre-School Provision in NI (EPPNI) found no discernable difference in children's cognitive development at the start of primary school between those who attended full-time and those with part-time attendance, yet the Department is regularly asked to approve development proposals for new full time provision or conversion from part-time to full-time. There is a need to review the position on full-time provision.</p> <p>Under the Local Management of Schools arrangements, it is a matter for school Boards of Governors and Principals to plan and use resources to maximum effect in accordance with their own needs and priorities, including setting staffing levels. The current ratio for statutory nursery schools and units is 1:13, normally one teacher and a nursery assistant to every 26 pupils; children are presenting with special educational needs and other additional needs, and under the existing and proposed Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of SEN settings are required to identify, assess and make provision necessary to meet the needs. There is a need to review the suitability of this ratio in recognition of the increasing prevalence of children with special educational needs and/or disability in the preschool sector.</p> <p>The maximum enrolment number for classes in statutory nursery settings is currently set at 26, the Review of Pre-School Admission Arrangements in 2012 recommended that this should be reviewed.</p> <p>A range of statutory agencies, voluntary, charitable and community organisations are active and effective in working with parents, and DHSSPS lead on parenting, the Department's role in terms of parenting is to ensure that parents understand the value of education and are supported to be their child's first and ongoing educator. There is an ongoing need to offer programmes of support for parents, particularly for those at risk or hard to reach families, to provide a positive and supportive home learning environment and encourage parents to become more active partners in their child's education.</p> <p>Practitioners may need support to improve how they work more with parents, and to learn from others about best practice in</p>	

parental engagement.

The Building Handbook for nursery schools determines the size, shape and layout of nursery provision only and does not provide scope for wider use of the premises. C2k is not provided for nursery schools whilst it is for nursery units within primary schools.

Although settling in times are at each school and pre-school's discretion, this varies across and between settings and some parents complain that it is unnecessarily lengthy, in some cases up to 8 weeks, ETI would comment if settling in times are at the latter end of the scale and when the procedures do not differentiate between children. More cognisance should be taken of the other pre-school experiences that children may have for example attendance at a playgroup/crèche/the Sure Start Developmental Programme for 2-3 Year Olds. The needs of the child are central but guidance is required on this issue for both pre-school and Year 1 of Foundation Stage.

Key Action		Timing
1.8 The Department will revise the pre-school programme to ensure that all target age children benefit from an equitable pre-school experience by:	a) Introducing flexibility in overall enrolment for nursery schools and nursery units up to a maximum class size of 30 (in line with current arrangements for Foundation) where the school is over subscribed with target age children, the additional children are all target age, and the Board of Governors and ELB/ESA are satisfied that the premises and staffing structure can support the increase.	To begin work on this in 2013
	b) Piloting the deployment of additional assistants in nursery schools and nursery units to increase the staff to child ratios across statutory pre-school settings. In taking this forward the Department will work directly with nursery school and primary school principals to develop this pilot.	
	c) Issuing guidance on reducing the length of settling in time for pre-school and Year 1 (Foundation) to take account of the child's previous experience.	

Key Action		Timing
1.9 The Department will over time standardise patterns of attendance as part of the pre-school programme by:	a) Placing a moratorium on any new or additional full-time provision or conversion from part-time to full-time (defined as over 4.5 hours) in advance of reviewing the current levels of full-time provision and the needs of children being served by it.	To begin early 2013
	b) Considering potential options for standardised patterns of attendance as part of wider considerations of area based planning for pre-school provision.	
1.10 The Department will adopt an area based approach to managing the early years estate and consider the optimum use of premises by:	a) Reviewing the Building Handbook for Nursery Schools to reflect the additional need for parental and community engagement.	To begin work 2013
	b) Assessing the ICT infrastructure requirements of nursery schools and any associated needs of DE funded pre-school settings.	

Over-arching Goal	Transforming the Governance and Management of Education	
Outcome	Early years education and learning services are modern, accountable, and child-centred and delivered efficiently and effectively in line with DE policy.	
Rationale for Change		
<p>There are different Pre-School Advisory Groups (PEAG) in each of the 5 ELBs, and their remit is focused on the Pre-School Education Programme. There is a need to review the role of the PEAG and the role of ELBs/ESA in relation to the Child Care Partnerships who manage Sure Start.</p> <p>There is no overall system for collecting, collating and managing information on funded early years education and learning services for children up to compulsory school age.</p> <p>Close cooperation is required between the ELBs/ESA and the Department to ensure that the actions recommended in the Review of Pre-School Admission Arrangements are taken forward.</p> <p>Funding is currently provided to a range of organisations delivering early years services on behalf of DE, and accountability arrangements vary depending on the sector and across settings.</p>		
Key Action		Timing
1.11 The Department will ensure the effective planning, management and co-ordinated delivery of early years education and learning services by:	a) Clarifying and communicating early years policy and priorities to enable ESA to deliver the pre-school admissions system and provide advice on future development proposals in line with DE policy.	To begin 2013 for PEAGS and immediately following establishment of ESA
	b) Reviewing the adequacy of current governance and accountability arrangements in place across the range of existing programmes.	To begin 2013

	c) Requiring ESA to review current arrangements for the delivery of all funded pre-school services to achieve maximum benefit from a single managing authority, including reviewing the role of PEAG generally and in relation to the Child Care Partnerships.	To begin immediately following establishment of ESA
	d) Requiring ESA to create a comprehensive Management Information System for pre-school admissions, and early years education services funded by DE for children up to compulsory school age.	To begin immediately following establishment of ESA
Key Action		Timing
1.12 The Department and ESA will implement all remaining actions in the Review of Pre-School Admission Arrangements aimed at streamlining and simplifying the system for accessing pre-school places.		Some actions are dependent on legislative changes, others are in progress.

Next Steps

- 5.1 The Department is keen to start implementing the actions in this framework as soon as possible and to start focusing on the legislative changes required, undertaking the necessary reviews and putting in place the support systems required to drive up standards in early years education and learning settings.
- 5.2 The time has come to focus on what can be realistically achieved, what the focus of the Department of Education should be and how to deliver better services to children and families through enhanced collaboration.
- 5.3 The Department will conduct a focused consultation on the actions, from the date of publication which will conclude on 31st January 2013, to assess the need for any further refinement to be identified.

Timing, Resources and Transition

- 5.4 It is hoped that full implementation will be achieved by 2014/15. In implementing the actions existing early years budgets, outside of LMS, will be reviewed with a view to redistributing funding which is no longer consistent with the framework aims and objectives. Additional resources will be allocated to ensure the actions are implemented in full. The new arrangements will be implemented by the Department and ESA.

Delivery Partners

- 5.5 Having a single body responsible and accountable for all the early years education and learning services funded by DE will enable integrated planning and commissioning of the range of early years education and learning services.

Arrangements for Focused Consultation

- 6.1 This focused consultation provides an important opportunity to consider if any of the proposed actions for early years education and learning require further refinement.
- 6.2 The Department has prepared an EQIA to assess any potential detrimental impact of the proposed actions, and this can be accessed at www.deni.gov.uk.

How to Respond

- 6.3 Responses can be made by email to de.earlyyearsteam@deni.gov.uk, or in writing, using the enclosed response form, to:

Early Years Education and Learning
Early Years Strategy Team
Room 109
Department of Education
Rathgael House
BANGOR
BT19 7PR

To enable responses to be analysed effectively it would be helpful if respondents used the form provided.

- 6.4 The focused consultation period lasts from the date of publication and concludes on the 31st January 2013.

Further Copies

- 6.5 This document and response booklet are available electronically at www.deni.gov.uk.

Further Details – Sure Start, Pre-School and the Foundation Stage 2011/12

Number of pre-school settings	
Statutory Nursery Schools	97
Statutory Nursery Units	222
Voluntary/private settings (funded pre-school places)	381
Number of Primary Schools offering Foundation Stage	838

Pre-School sector - Pupils and classes broken down by ELB and attendance type - 2011/12

School type	Type	ELB					Total
		BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	
Voluntary and Private	Total Funded Pupils PT	650	1,338	2,140	1,781	2,240	8,149
	Total no. Groups PT	43	84	168	137	127	559
Nursery schools	Full-Time Pupils	1,515	471	312	812	871	3,981
	Part-Time Pupils	0	313	1,094	210	313	1,930
	Total no. Pupils	1,515	784	1,406	1,022	1,184	5,911
	Full-Time Classes	58	18	12	31	33	152
	Part-Time Classes	0	12	42	8	12	74
	Total no. Classes	58	30	54	39	45	226
Nursery units	Full-Time Pupils	1,289	1,020	575	597	1,662	5,143
	Part-Time Pupils	128	791	1,092	1,357	158	3,526
	Total no. Pupils	1,417	1,811	1,667	1,954	1,820	8,669
	Full-Time Classes	50	39	22	23	63	197
	Part-Time Classes	5	31	44	52	6	138
	Total no. Classes	55	70	66	75	69	335

Source: NI school census

Information on: total children, children entitled to free school meals (FSME), children with special educational needs (SEN), children aged 2 years and newcomer children by pre-school setting 2011/12

	Total	FSME (inc JSA/IS)²	SEN Stage 1-5	Aged 2 years³	Newcomers⁴
Voluntary and private pre-schools¹	8,149	826	630	0	256
Nursery schools	5,911 (FT 3,981) (PT 1,930)	1,875	1,251	147	242
Nursery units in primary schools	8,669 (FT 5,143) (PT 3,526)	2,216	312	334	466
Reception classes in primary schools	449	58	9	0	17
Total	23,178	4,975	2,202	481	981
<i>Percentage of total children in pre-school settings</i>		22%	10%	2%	4%

Note:

Source: NI school census.

1. Age is not collected for children in funded places in voluntary and private pre-schools. It is assumed all children in funded places will be at least three years old.
2. Figures for free school meals entitlement include those children who have a parent in receipt of JSA or Income Support.
3. Age is at 1 July 2012.
4. A newcomer pupil is one who has enrolled in a school but who does not have the satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum, and the wider environment, and does not have a language in common with the teacher, whether that is English or Irish. This has previously been referred to as English as an Additional Language. It does not refer to indigenous pupils who choose to attend an Irish-medium school.

Information on: total children, children entitled to free schools meals (FSME), children with special educational needs (SEN), children aged 2 years and newcomers in the Foundation Stage in primary schools 2011/12

	Total	FSME	SEN Stage 1-5	Newcomers
Year 1	23,599	6,735	1,717	1,039
Year 2	22,538	6,400	3,597	959
Total	46,137	13,135	5,314	1,998
<i>Percentage of total children in Foundation Stage</i>		28%	12%	4%

Source: NI school census

Note:

1. A newcomer pupil is one who has enrolled in a school but who does not have the satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum, and the wider environment, and does not have a language in common with the teacher, whether that is English or Irish. This has previously been referred to as English an Additional Language. It does not refer to indigenous pupils who choose to attend an Irish-medium school.

Sure Start Projects

Childcare Partnership Area	No of Sure Start Projects	No. of Children Registered
Eastern CCP (BHSCT)	9	3960
Eastern CCP (SEHSCT)	3	2692
Northern CCP	6	5082
Southern CCP	8	7389
Western CCP	9	10087
Total	35	29210

Northern Childcare Partnership	Southern Childcare Partnership	Western Childcare Partnership	Eastern Childcare Partnership
<p>Ballymena Sure Start Ballymena</p> <p>Coleraine Sure Start Coleraine</p> <p>Dalriada Rural Sure Start Bushmills</p> <p>G-Old Community Sure Start Cookstown</p> <p>Horizon Sure Start Carrickfergus</p> <p>A.B.B.E.Y. Sure Start Newtownabbey</p>	<p>Blossom Sure Start Portadown</p> <p>Clogher Valley Sure Start Augher</p> <p>Dungannon Sure Start Dungannon</p> <p>Newry City Sure Start Newry</p> <p>South Armagh Sure Start Camlough</p> <p>Splash Sure Start Craigavon</p> <p>ARKE Sure Start Armagh</p> <p>Kilkeel Sure Start Support Kilkeel</p>	<p>Cherish Sure Start Irvinestown</p> <p>Dungiven Sure Start Dungiven</p> <p>Sure Start Edenballymore Creggan Estate, Londonderry</p> <p>L.A.S.T. Sure Start Omagh</p> <p>Little Hands Sure Start Hazelbank, Londonderry</p> <p>Rainbow Sure Start Castleberg</p> <p>Shantallow Sure Start Shantallow, Londonderry</p> <p>Strabane Sure Start Strabane</p> <p>Waterside Sure Start Londonderry</p>	<p>Beechmount Sure Start Beechmount Pass, Belfast</p> <p>Clan More Sure Start Albert Street, Belfast</p> <p>Colin Sure Start Dunmurry</p> <p>Downpatrick Sure Start Downpatrick</p> <p>East Belfast Sure Start Albertbridge Road, Belfast</p> <p>Glenbrook Sure Start Legoneil Road, Belfast</p> <p>Sure Start Ards Kircubbin</p> <p>Outer West Belfast Sure Start Stewartstown Road, Belfast</p> <p>Shankill Sure Start Shankill Road, Belfast</p> <p>S.M.I.L.E. Sure Start Duncairn Gardens, Belfast</p> <p>South Belfast Sure Start Lower Crescent, Belfast</p> <p>Saol Ur Sure Start Springfield Road, Belfast</p>

Evidence from the Education and Training Inspectorate

The Chief Inspector's report launched on 17 October 2012 and covering the reporting period from 1 April 2010 to 30 June 2012 indicated that:

- The overall effectiveness of approximately three-quarters (76%) of the pre-school settings inspected was evaluated as good or better;
- A small number of settings were evaluated as inadequate.
- The percentage of voluntary and private settings evaluated as good or better has increased from 70% to 73% since the last reporting period; however, in the statutory sector there has been a slight drop from 85% to 81%.
- Achievements and standards are good or better in 80% of the pre-school settings inspected. In nursery schools, achievements and standards were evaluated as good or better in 88% of settings, a reduction from 94% while in voluntary and private pre-school settings they improved by 5% to 78%.

Key Messages from the ETI Inspection of Pre-school Provision

Quality

- Most children attending pre-school settings, regardless of the sector, experience a good or better pre-school education which is crucial to their future education and well-being;
- In the good to outstanding settings, the staff communicate with a range of other organisations and professionals and in the best practice, these settings have also begun to work more collaboratively with other pre-school providers to share their knowledge and skills.
- The quality of provision for children who transfer mid-term, especially those children transferring into a pre-school class, including reception, as they reach the appropriate age, remains variable especially when they are enrolled in a composite class with children from at least one other year group.
- The quality of planning to meet the children's differing needs and the assessment of their progress remain the most frequently identified areas for improvement across all sectors.

Leadership

- There is a strong correlation between leadership and management which is good or better and the quality of provision, standards and the overall effectiveness of the pre-school setting across sectors.
- A range of factors continue to impact on the leadership and management in the voluntary and private sector including the inexperience of staff in leadership roles; the annual change in the membership of the management group; and frequent turnover of staff.
- The most effective leaders are proactive in accessing continuing professional development and training for staff through a range of methods, including collaborating with other practitioners and professionals.
- The majority of leaders need to increase the opportunities for ongoing professional development for all staff.
- There remains variation in the overall effectiveness of the Irish-medium pre-school settings with leadership and Irish language proficiency identified as key issues;

Transitions and Support

- There remains a variation in the practice and effectiveness regarding the sharing of information on the children's progress and achievements between pre-school settings and primary schools.
- The quality of the external support provided by the early years specialists to voluntary and private settings remains varied and a more detailed evaluation of this work is required
- In the best practice, the settings promote greater involvement of parents by encouraging them to help their child to achieve his or her full potential;
- Potential barriers to learning can also be reduced by the setting's development of active partnerships with local community groups and external agencies.

Membership of the Early Years Strategy Stakeholder Advisory Group

Paula Barr	Shantallow Sure Start
Sharon Beattie	General Teaching Council for NI (GTCNI)
Jenny Boyd	Enniskillen Nursery School
Marie Cavanagh	Gingerbread
Dr Marleen Collins	Education and Training Inspectorate
Gerry Conway	Health and Social Care Board
Louise Coyle	NI Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)
Gerardine Cunningham	Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC)
Elaine Conway/Ellen Finlay/ Robyn McCready	Children in NI
Siobhan Fitzpatrick	Early Years the Organisation for Young Children
Sean Holland	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Pauline Leeson	Children in NI
Alice Lennon/ Dawn Crosby	Representative of ELBs
Alasdair MacInnes/ Richard Duffin	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Patricia McAlister	Altram
Barbara McConnell	Stranmillis University College
Majella McDowell	Galliagh Nursery School
Celine McStravick	National Children's Bureau
Maurice Meehan/ Mary Black	Public Health Agency
Paula Murray	Christ the Redeemer Primary School
Kyra Pauley	Women's Centres Regional Partnership (WCRP)
Heino Schonfeld/ Michelle Harris	Centre for Effective Services
Carolyn Stewart	MENCAP