



NCCA An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment

Aistear
Creatchuraclam na Luath-Óige
The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

Draft Updated *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* For consultation

September 2023

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Readers Information – an updated *Aistear*

This document sets out the proposed updates to *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2009). It is presented as follows:

- ***Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework***, which outlines the proposed Vision, Purpose, Principles and Themes for an updated *Aistear*
- **Supporting *Aistear***, which presents proposals for supporting educators¹ in using the updated Framework.

Aistear celebrates early childhood as a time of being, of enjoying and learning from experiences as they unfold, laying important foundations for later learning. As early childhood marks the beginning of children’s lifelong learning journeys, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework is called *Aistear*, the Irish word for journey. *Aistear* promotes a view of babies, toddlers and young children as competent and confident learners within loving and respectful relationships. It includes Principles and Themes with *Guidelines for Good Practice* and a *User Guide*.

In order to recognise and reflect societal changes, an increasingly qualified professional workforce, shifts in policy, and developments in research, as well as changes in the lived experiences of babies, toddlers and young children that have occurred over the years, [Aistear is being updated](#). The draft updated *Aistear*, contained in this document, is now being shared with the early childhood sector and other stakeholders, including parents, for consultation. Like the original Framework, the proposed update has been developed in consultation with stakeholders including babies, toddlers and young children, parents, and early childhood educators. The update is also informed by a [literature review](#) (French and McKenna, 2022) and is guided by a [Consultation with babies, toddlers and young children](#) (O’Toole, Walsh, Kerrins, Doherty, Forde, Kelleher, McCartney, Stafford, Stokes, Matson and Mooney, 2023) and [NCCA’s Phase 1 Consultation Report](#) (2022). Following consultation, the updated *Aistear* will be finalised in 2024.

¹ In this document, the term 'educator' is used to refer to all those who work with *Aistear* to support babies’, toddlers’ and young children’s learning and development. This includes early years educators who work in professional roles, parents, childminders, and other adults.

Overview of changes

Changes made in this version build on and update the original Framework to support the learning and development of babies, toddlers and young children. These changes are informed by an awareness of age, gender, family status, disability, ethnicity, religion, worldview, or membership of the Traveller community. All are situated in an everchanging and globally inter-connected and inter-reliant world. The Principles and Themes remain and have been revised and updated. The document also includes considerations in supporting *Aistear*. These are intended to inform the development of guidance materials to support educators as they engage with the Principles and Themes. The Framework will be accompanied by a Parents' Guide to *Aistear* to support their understanding of how their baby, toddler or young child might experience *Aistear*. The updated Framework takes account of policy changes since the introduction of *Aistear* in 2009. These include curriculum and assessment developments for primary and special schools that support continuity and progression in learning and development.

The main changes to the Framework include:

- The Principles have been reduced from 12 to 9 with merging of elements of the original Principles, changes to text, along with the addition of a new Principle on transitions. These changes reflect key messages from the Phase 1 consultation regarding rights, pedagogy, inclusion, outdoor learning, wellbeing and sustainability
- The Themes similarly have been updated to incorporate the important messages from the consultation and to ensure meaningful participation for all babies, toddlers and young children. The number of Learning Goals has been reduced. They remain intentionally broad, yet observable, statements to support flexibility of interpretation that contributes to holistic learning and development
- **Supporting *Aistear*** presents proposals for supporting educators in using the updated Framework. It builds on the *Guidelines for Good Practice* and presents a set of big ideas, focused on *Aistear*'s Principles and aspects of the Themes to support their enhancement in the coming years
- The key messages and ideas in the Principles, Themes and considerations for supporting *Aistear* are interwoven within and throughout the Framework.
- Terminology has been adapted to reflect policy and sectoral change with the terms 'practitioner' and 'adult' changed to 'educator'; 'he/she' to 'they'; 'equality' to 'equity'; 'needs' to 'rights'
- The term 'children' has been replaced by 'babies, toddlers and young children' to ensure that all three age groups are clearly visible in the framework
- There is a focus on acknowledging our cultural and linguistic history and story, and as part of this words, phrases and proverbs as *Gaeilge* (Irish) have been embedded throughout the Framework. These have been included to promote their use in the everyday language of educators (e.g. comhrá, grá, spraoi) and for terms for which the English translation does not fully capture their meaning (e.g. meitheal)
- To support continuity of experience and progression for children, there is a focus on alignment with the *Primary Curriculum Framework (PCF)* (DoE, 2023) in the updating of *Aistear*.



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Introduction

From the moment they are conceived until they take that first step into primary or special school, babies, toddlers and young children are learning and developing at a pace that exceeds that of any other stage in the life cycle. This period, especially the first three years, sets the foundation for learning, health, and the formation of important connections in the brain. It is during this time that babies, toddlers and young children develop positive dispositions towards learning and skills.

Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework acknowledges that these early experiences have a formative impact on babies, toddlers and young children that can last throughout their whole lives.

Aistear celebrates early childhood as a time of being, and of enjoying and learning from experiences as they unfold, laying important foundations for later learning. Because early childhood marks the beginning of babies', toddlers' and young children's lifelong learning journeys, this Framework is called *Aistear*, the Irish word for journey. Early childhood is a time of great opportunity for learning and development. In these early years, babies, toddlers and young children learn through loving, trusting and respectful relationships, and through play, *spraioi* (fun), exploration and *comhrá* (conversation). *Aistear* emphasises the centrality of family, languages, *meitheal* (community spirit of coming together) and cultures in babies', toddlers' and young children's lives. It aims to consolidate, extend and enrich early learning and development for all babies, toddlers and young children informed by an awareness of gender, family status, disability, ethnicity, religion, worldview, or membership of the Traveller community. The Framework can be used by all those who support babies, toddlers and young children and is particularly useful to those educators who work in professional roles in supporting early learning and development. *Aistear* is the curriculum Framework for all children from birth to six years in all settings other than primary and special schools. It aligns with the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (DoE, 2023) which is for children in primary and special schools.

Aistear views early childhood through three overlapping age ranges to reflect the differences in how babies, toddlers and young children progress as their learning and development is unique, complex and holistic. These three overlapping age groupings respond to the individuality of each baby, toddler and young child and gives them the time, freedom and space to develop at an unhurried pace within a slow, nurturing pedagogy. *Aistear* recognises the importance of each distinct stage in its own right.

The overlapping age groupings are:

- Babies (aged from birth to 18 months)
- Toddlers (12 months to 3 years)
- Young children (2.5 – 6 years).

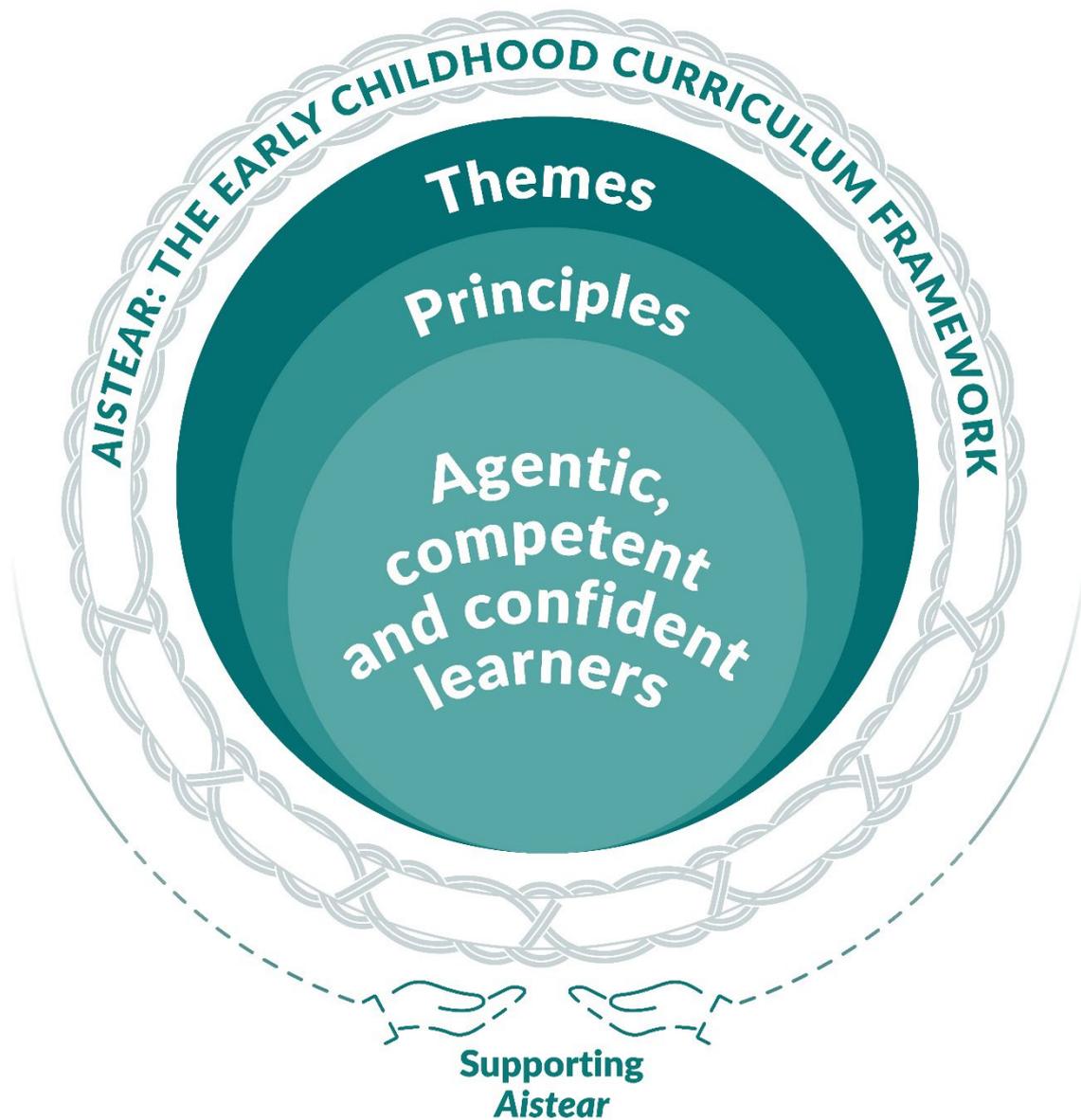


Figure 1: Aistear's structure

Vision

Aistear empowers educators to develop a curriculum to support the learning and development of babies, toddlers and young children. It promotes *meas* (respect) for babies, toddlers and young children as a basis for an emergent and inquiry-based curriculum in which play is foundational. Educators use *Aistear* to work in partnership with babies, toddlers, young children, families, communities and significant others so that every baby, toddler and young child can thrive and flourish.

The image of the baby, toddler and young child

Aistear views babies, toddlers and young children as agentic², competent and confident. They learn and develop within loving relationships where their individual life stories are acknowledged with kindness and consideration.

Each individual baby, toddler and young child learns and develops in their own time and in their own unique way. *Aistear* takes a strengths-based approach and sees the potential in every baby, toddler and young child.

The image of the educator

Aistear views the educator as competent, confident, agentic³ and reflective. They support learning by building on the unique life experiences of each baby, toddler and young child, and by facilitating, empowering and enriching their holistic learning and development. The educator acknowledges the importance of the family, culture, language(s), values, beliefs, traditions, experiences and interests that babies, toddlers and young children bring from their home and community.

² Agentic refers to babies, toddlers and young children having voice and influence over their own learning.

³ An agentic educator makes professional and informed decisions in response to the children's learning needs.

Purpose

The purpose of *Aistear* is to support babies', toddlers' and young children's learning and development. In doing this, *Aistear*:

- Supports parents as their baby's, toddler's or young child's primary educators during early childhood
- Promotes partnerships, collaborations and connections with babies', toddlers' and young children's families and communities
- Makes connections and supports continuity and progression in babies', toddlers' and young children's learning throughout early childhood and as they move from one setting to another
- Guides, enhances and extends existing curriculum approaches
- Informs practice across a range of settings, disciplines and professions, and encourages interdisciplinary work and dialogue through a shared image of the baby, toddler and young child
- Appreciates our cultural and linguistic history and story and introduces terms as *Gaeilge* (in Irish) as part of this.

Principles of Early Learning and Development

Aistear's Principles are the foundation of the Framework. They embody key messages of equity, citizenship, inclusion, *meas* (respect) and responsibility while recognising the role of educators in enacting and advocating for these Principles in practice.

There are nine overarching Principles that need to be considered in pursuing the curriculum vision (see Figure 2). Each Principle is presented using a short paragraph. This is followed by an illustration of the Principle from the perspective of babies, toddlers and young children, highlighting the educator's role in facilitating voice and influence in early learning and development. The Principles are embedded in the Theme descriptors, and the Aims and Learning Goals of the Framework.



Figure 2: Aistear's Principles for Early Learning and Development

Agentic Global Citizens

Babies, toddlers and young children are competent, confident and agentic global citizens with rights. As unique individuals, they communicate their opinions, choices and needs in many different ways. They have a right to be heard and to be empowered to experience democracy. From their experiences as citizens, they learn that as well as having rights they also have emerging responsibilities, for themselves, for others and for the environment.

- *I am an agentic citizen and use my 'voice' to show you what is important to me – notice, listen and respond to me and show me how to be a good citizen by modelling equity, fairness, justice and respect.*
- *I have the right to be protected from harm and to know that you will help me when I need it.*
- *I have emerging responsibilities to care for myself, others and for the environment. Provide meaningful opportunities for me to live sustainably.*
- *I live in Ireland so the languages, histories and cultures of Ireland are important to me. Also help me to understand and respect views, opinions, cultures, languages and experiences that are different from mine.*

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

All babies, toddlers and young children have a right to access and participate meaningfully in experiences to fulfil their potential as unique individuals. Meaningful participation is informed by an awareness of age, gender, family status, ethnicity, religion, worldview, and membership of the Traveller community. Diversity of family, home and community are respected and celebrated while also noticing and valuing our similarities and connectedness. Diversity, equity and inclusion are about creating a fair society where barriers are identified, and addressed within empowering and inclusive environments.

- *Recognise my abilities, identities, needs and potential and respect my right to belong. Put supports in place so that I am empowered to participate and contribute in a meaningful way.*
- *Recognise and celebrate my achievements at every age and stage of development.*
- *My family, culture, home-language (s) and ethnicity are what make me Me! Celebrate and value me, my family and community.*
- *Help me to learn to recognise and challenge injustice and to stand up for myself and others.*

Relationships and Interactions

Babies', toddlers' and young children's fundamental need to be with others is embedded in caring connections and pedagogical practice where loving and responsive relationships and interactions are nurtured with key people in their lives. Early friendships with other babies, toddlers and young children are noticed and celebrated. Great care and time are taken to foster and support connections within and between the child's social worlds which are central to wellbeing, learning and development.

- *I benefit from time and space to be with others – family, friends, peers and educators as well as coming to know others in my local community.*
- *I have strong, secure attachments with the important people in my life who take time to know me and be with me. They and I recognise the value of a slow, relational and respectful pedagogy.*
- *You support me to co-regulate and self-regulate my emotions and help me to learn to be with others, to handle conflicts and to solve problems.*
- *I enjoy it when my friendships are noticed, supported and celebrated.*

Family and Community

The lives of babies, toddlers and young children are enriched by those who nurture and care for them: parents, extended family, educators and community members. In turn, babies, toddlers and young children bring joy, hope and happiness to enrich the lives of others. Children's experiences from home, from family and community connections impact on and inform babies', toddlers' and young children's learning experiences, influencing understandings of diversity of place, routines, family, culture, and language(s)

- *My parents are the most important people in my life.*
- *It helps me to reach my potential when my educator(s) work in partnership with my family, respecting and valuing their opinions and expertise. They want the best for me and know about me and what I like and don't like.*
- *I want to share my family culture and celebrations with you and my friends. We can teach each other about languages, song, music, dance and story.*
- *My extended family and my community are really important to me. Recognise these connections as part of my identity and belonging.*

Agentic Educators

Educators are agentic and support and facilitate learning through a respectful regard for each baby's, toddler's and young child's uniqueness and rights, guided by a slow, relational pedagogy. This respectful relationship between the baby, toddler, young child and important people in their lives creates a circle of security and trust within and between learning environments. Through reflection and *comhrá* (conversation), educators can consolidate and extend children's learning and development through a rights-based, inclusive, informed and intentional pedagogy guided by professional knowledge and skills.

- *I know you respect me as a unique global citizen with my own life story and I feel happy and secure in your company.*
- *I learn more and better when you recognise and build on my abilities, interests, identities and experiences. You know the different ways I learn and develop and provide meaningful experiences to help me reach my potential.*
- *I trust that you will find appropriate resources and to help me to get access to professional support and services when I need it.*
- *It helps me when you are aware of your biases and those of others and that you protect me if I am being hurt or discriminated against.*

Transitions

Babies, toddlers and young children participate in transitions within and between the daily routines, from one room to another, from one educational setting to another, and between home and other places where they spend time. All transitions are important and are recognised as a process that takes time rather than a once-off event. Ensuring progression in learning and development and continuity of experiences requires consistent relationships with a shared responsibility between families, childminders⁴, educators, settings and schools in the best interests of the baby, toddler and young child. Child-led play and playful pedagogies ensure that relevant and meaningful experiences, reflecting the diversity of culture, ethnicities, language, abilities, religions, worldviews, identities and interests, make transitions and progression of learning more enjoyable, positive and effective.

- *I experience lots of transitions: from home to the early childhood setting; moving within and between the routines of the day; progressing from room to room; and starting primary or special school. Change is easier when I feel safe and have people around who care about and know me.*
- *Learn about me and know what I want and need to make my transitions as positive and effective as they can be. Talk with my family and significant others who care for me – they know me best.*
- *I am an agentic, confident and competent learner – notice and respond to how I am developing dispositions, attitudes and values, skills, knowledge and understanding.*
- *When everyone talks with me, and to each other, this makes change and transition a lot better.*

Holistic Learning and Development

Early learning and development is holistic, and babies, toddlers and young children learn many different things at the same time. What they learn is connected to where, how and with whom they learn. On-going assessment of what children do, say and make, and reflection on these experiences helps educators to plan for a rich variety of experiences. Through such experiences, babies, toddlers and young children develop a strong sense of wellbeing; of *bród* (pride) in self, family and community; are competent and confident communicators; and develop as curious and resilient explorers and thinkers.

⁴ The [National Action Plan for Childminding 2021 – 20218](#) (DCEDIY, 2021, p.22) defines childminding 'to mean paid, non-relative care of children aged from birth to 14 (including both early learning and care and school-age childcare) in which children are cared for singlehandedly within the childminder's family setting. Childminding is also described as 'home-based' care, as distinguished from 'centrebased' care'.

- *When supporting my learning and development, remember that what and how I learn is shaped by me and by my previous learning and experiences with my family, my community and as part of wider society.*
- *It helps me when you notice what I am doing and when we have time to be together. Through being with me and understanding my 'voice' you can see my potential as a learner and identify what I am interested in and am good at and things that I might need extra help with.*
- *I have my own creative thoughts, ideas and imaginings- notice, listen and respond to these.*
- *Through different types of play and hands-on learning experiences, I start to understand and express my feelings; to develop as an explorer, thinker and communicator; to develop socially and creatively; to be well and to have a strong sense of belonging.*

Play and Hands-on Experiences

Babies, toddlers and young children learn best in play, active, hands-on and inquiry-based experiences through which they learn about the world around them and develop holistically. These experiences help them to regulate and co-regulate their feelings, develop as thinkers and language users, develop socially, be happy, creative and imaginative, and lay the foundations for becoming effective communicators and explorers.

- *I want to play, and I have a right to play.*
- *It is important for my learning and development to have the time, space and resources to play.*
- *I learn by being active and using my senses to explore and learn about the world. I need access to open-ended and natural materials to help me explore, be creative and use my imagination.*
- *I benefit from enjoyable, challenging, adventurous play indoors and outdoors and it helps me to learn to risk assess which is a valuable skill for me throughout life.*

Learning Environments

The environment, both indoors and outdoors, influences how and what children learn. In consultation and collaboration, babies, toddlers, young children and educators plan and create aesthetically pleasing, challenging and inclusive spaces. They also embrace possibilities in the local environment. There is an emphasis on natural spaces and resources, a commitment to sustainability and to active, adventurous play. These environments support babies', toddlers' and young children's meaningful participation, holistic development and learning about place.

- *Involve me in making an environment that is familiar, facilitates me to express myself, to make choices and interact with others.*
- *My environment needs to be well-kept, accessible, inclusive, safe yet challenging, empowering and connected. I like being in spaces that allow me freedom of movement between the indoors and outdoors. I benefit from being outside in all kinds of weather!*
- *I have a right to see my family, community and culture represented in the play resources, music resources, books and mark-making materials provided. Through the learning environment, I develop an understanding of myself and of others as it affirms diverse backgrounds. These*

include different cultural, linguistic, ethnic, socio-economic and ability groups and challenges stereotypes.

- *I benefit from learning in my locality. Being in and learning about nature is also important as I have a responsibility to care for myself and my environment so help me to live sustainably.*

Themes

Aistear's presents children's learning and development using four interconnected Themes, underpinned by the Vision and Principles:

- Wellbeing
- Identity and Belonging
- Communicating
- Exploring and Thinking.

Each Theme describes aspirations for what babies, toddlers and young children will learn. The Theme description is followed by four Aims, each of which has three Learning Goals. These are broad yet observable statements that bring positive dispositions, attitudes and values along with skills, knowledge and understanding to life. They are there to inform planning for babies', toddlers' and young children's learning and to support the documenting and assessing of their progress. By interpreting the Aims and Learning Goals, educators enable babies, toddlers and young children to learn and develop to their full potential by participating in an emergent and inquiry-based curriculum in meaningful and enjoyable ways.



Figure 3: The Themes of Aistear

Wellbeing

The Theme of Wellbeing is about babies, toddlers and young children being confident, happy and healthy.

Relationships and interactions contribute significantly to the wellbeing of babies, toddlers and young children. Family, educators, friends and community members all play a role in enhancing babies' toddlers' and young children's sense of wellbeing, attachment and *meitheal* (community spirit of coming-together). Knowing the value of a slow, nurturing pedagogy and taking the time to value moments throughout the routines of the day creates space for these interactions and enhances wellbeing. Life can also include challenges and struggles. Being flexible and having a positive outlook on learning and on life contributes to wellbeing. These experiences can empower babies, toddlers and young children to become resilient and resourceful, and to learn to cope with life's ups and downs when supported and loved by significant people in their lives. Babies, toddlers and young children have a right to feel valued, respected, empowered, cared for and included. They have a right to be agentic and to have a say in matters that impact on them. They are also respectful of themselves, others, and their environment. Expressing themselves creatively and experiencing a spiritual dimension in life enhances babies', toddlers' and young children's wellbeing. It provides opportunities for them to enhance their sense of *ionadh* (wonder), awe, ritual, gratitude and *taitneamh a bhaint as an saol* (to get enjoyment from life).

Promoting babies', toddlers' and young children's good overall physical health is important. Learning to make healthy choices about nutrition, routines, rest and sleep, hygiene, exercise, play and digital technologies enables babies, toddlers and young children to self-care. Physical wellbeing enables them to explore, investigate, be adventurous, be agentic, challenge themselves and to risk-assess. It enhances their strength, co-ordination and development of gross and fine motor skills including fundamental movements. They are *misniúil* (brave) and have a right to experience freedom, make mistakes and experiment with risk. Active physical play and outdoor experiences support their holistic wellbeing. All babies, toddlers and young children are empowered to pursue challenges in ways that acknowledge their current abilities and strengths. Such challenges promote a growing awareness of their bodies as they grow and develop, including body autonomy and consent⁵.

⁵ Consent is when we seek permission for something to happen or make an agreement to do something. It requires respect and communication from both parties and is an important concept for babies, toddlers and children to learn about from a young age. Consent includes knowledge about, and respect for, their own and others' boundaries.

Aim 1: Babies, toddlers and young children will be strong psychologically and socially.

Through nurturing relationships within a supportive environment, babies, toddlers and young children will:

- Build secure attachments and experience consistent, reciprocal, nurturing relationships that support confidence and connectedness with family, friends, educators, and community.
- Be confident, independent and develop self-help and self-care skills.
- Learn to predict and handle transitions well and be empowered to communicate their feelings and emotions to make sense of life experiences and to cope with challenges.

Aim 2: Babies, toddlers and young children will be as healthy and as active as they can be.

Through nurturing relationships within a supportive environment, babies, toddlers and young children will:

- Respect and nurture their bodies and promote their health and wellbeing through positive attitudes and choices that value their preferences in relation to nutrition, hygiene, exercise, rest and sleep, digital technologies and routines.
- Use their bodies to move/be active, experience, discover and explore, and extend their physicality through enabling, inclusive environments and fun experiences that encourage practice, challenge, adventure and mastery.
- Evaluate, experience and manage risk and adventure, including body safety, body autonomy and consent, through participation and engagement in the indoor and outdoor learning environment.

Aim 3: Babies, toddlers and young children will be creative, spiritual and compassionate.

Through nurturing relationships within a supportive environment, babies, toddlers and young children will:

- Be kind and curious, reflective thinkers and meaning makers.
- Be creative and take the initiative to explore, try, imagine and express themselves in a variety of ways.
- Enhance their spirituality through nurturing their sense of *ionadh* (wonder), awe and gratitude and by celebrating ethnicity, culture, traditions, festivals, nature and rituals.

Aim 4: Babies, toddlers and young children will be agentic global citizens and have positive outlooks on learning and on life.

Through nurturing, relationships within a supportive environment, babies, toddlers and young children will:

- Demonstrate agency and express choices, preferences and make decisions for themselves and their communities respecting diversity and inclusion.
- Develop holistically and show a sense of mastery and belief in their own abilities, take learning risks, and display learning dispositions such as determination, perseverance, independence, resilience, empathy and resourcefulness.
- Explore and identify their place in the world, and be empowered to live sustainably as agentic, respectful, caring, compassionate global citizens.

Identity and Belonging

The Theme of Identity and Belonging is about babies, toddlers and young children, informed by an awareness of age, gender, family status, disability, ethnicity, religion, worldview, or membership of the Traveller community, having a positive sense of who they are and knowing they are valued and respected as part of their family and community, and feeling supported by a sense of *meitheal* (community spirit of coming together).

From birth babies, toddlers and young children develop a sense of who they are. Relationships with family members, other adults and children, friends, peers and members of their community play a key role in building their identities. Babies, toddlers and young children have multiple identities and their sense of who they are is shaped by their experiences, their environment as well as their understanding of themselves, their family and others. Belonging is about having a secure relationship and a feeling of *aoibhneas croí* (gladness of heart) with people in your life. When babies, toddlers and young children feel a sense of belonging and sense of *bród* (pride) in their families, with friends, peers, and in their communities, they can be emotionally strong, self-assured, and able to deal with challenges and difficulties. This creates an important foundation for their learning and development.

Aistear supports giving babies, toddlers and young children messages of *meas* (respect), *grá* (love), approval, and encouragement to give them a positive sense of who they are and confidence in knowing that their voice is listened and responded to. These messages also give them confidence to express their views and opinions, to make choices, and to help shape their own learning. *Aistear* promotes practice that embraces diversity, reflects on attitudes in relation to equality and diversity. It recognises that such attitudes and values influence babies, toddlers and young children, thereby supporting educators in developing insights, self-awareness and skills to empower babies, toddlers and young children to develop a strong sense of identity and belonging. This helps ensure all babies, toddlers and young children are respected and valued and that they can recognise and respond to discrimination and prejudice.

Aim 1: Babies, toddlers and young children will have strong self-identities and are respected and celebrated as unique individuals with their own life stories.

Through nurturing relationships within a supportive environment, babies, toddlers and young children will:

- Build respectful relationships with others and appreciate the uniqueness and diversity of self and others.
- Feel *bród* (pride) and confidence in coming to know their own story, their history, culture, identities and home language(s).
- Feel valued and see themselves and their interests and identities reflected in the environment, knowing that their ideas, preferences, needs and rights, as well as those of their friends and peers, are noticed and responded to with respect and consistency.

Aim 2: Babies, toddlers and young children will have a sense of group identity with friends, peers, educators and with their family and community

Through nurturing, relationships within a supportive environment, babies, toddlers and young children will:

- Know that they have a place and a right to be part of the group, instinctively recognising that they, and the important people in their lives, are welcomed and celebrated.
- Be able to share personal experiences about their own families and cultures, and come to know, understand and celebrate the diversity of family structure, customs, traditions and festivals.
- See themselves as part of the community by coming to know the features and people of the locality, to know their responsibility to care for and look after the environment, and know the community spirit of *meitheal* (community spirit of coming together) in their lives.

Aim 3: Babies, toddlers and young children will express their rights and are supported to develop an understanding and regard for the identity, rights and views of others.

Through nurturing, relationships within a supportive environment, babies, toddlers and young children will:

- Know there is a space where they are empowered to share their views and feel confident that their voices are heard and responded to regarding all matters affecting them.
- Begin to understand the rules and boundaries of interactions and relationships and learn to interact co-operatively and help others, as well as knowing they are supported in co-regulating and self-regulating their own emotions.
- Develop a sense of social justice and fairness, be aware of and respect others' rights, needs, and feelings while also developing the skills of co-operation, responsibility, negotiation and conflict resolution.

Aim 4: Babies, toddlers and young children see themselves as competent, confident and agentic learners.

Through nurturing, relationships within a supportive environment, babies, toddlers and young children will:

- Develop a broad range of abilities and interests, being motivated to achieve by valuing their own unique strengths and ways of learning.
- Show increasing confidence and self-assurance in directing and assessing their own learning and sharing skills and knowledge with others.
- Demonstrate dispositions like curiosity, persistence, independence and responsibility through engagement with learning experiences inspired by *macnas* (playfulness).

Communicating

The Theme of Communicating is about babies, toddlers and young children sharing their experiences, thoughts, ideas, feelings, interests, needs and rights with others with growing confidence and competence in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes.

Babies, toddlers and young children have an innate drive to communicate and use their ability as agentic learners to give, receive and make sense of information and of the world around them. Each baby, toddler and young child communicates, participates, contributes, connects and interacts with others in their own way using different modes of communicating, with particular regard to their unique lived experiences. They use multiple ways of communicating, including but not limited to: facial expressions; gestures; behaviours; body movements; cooing; babbling; language(s); digital and assistive technologies; and augmentative and alternative communication. They may communicate through Irish Sign Language, Lámh or Braille or express themselves through art, mark-making, dance, drama, music, poetry, pictures, writing and stories. In addition to acknowledging and supporting this myriad of ways of communicating, *Aistear* supports learning about the importance of *Gaeilge* in our cultural heritage.

Babies, toddlers and young children broaden their understanding of the world by making sense of their experiences through language(s) and emergent literacy and numeracy experiences. A strong foundation in oral language(s) is important and babies, toddlers and young children quickly learn about the power and meaning of symbols, through extensive experience with books. They start to comprehend and use a wide vocabulary and make symbols to express thoughts, and ideas. This helps them develop positive learning dispositions about languages, literacies and communicating. Babies, toddlers and young children are increasingly communicating through digital technologies and educators facilitate the use of these in safe and healthy ways. Babies, toddlers and young children also enjoy and benefit from expressing themselves creatively and imaginatively. Experiencing an inclusive and rich communicative environment empowers them to be agentic, competent and confident communicators.

Aim 1: Babies, toddlers and young children will use multiple ways of communicating.

Through nurturing relationships within a supportive environment babies, toddlers and young children will:

- Be agentic communicators who influence and initiate interactions and conversations.
- Recognise, understand and respond to the many ways humans communicate including but not limited to vocalisations, facial expressions, gestures, body language and assistive technologies.
- Combine different communication strategies to express choices, ideas and opinions.

Aim 2: Babies, toddlers and young children will use language(s)

Through nurturing relationships within a supportive environment babies, toddlers and young children will:

- Communicate, including using oral language(s) with confidence and competence for a range of purposes- babbling, chatting, discussing, playing, experimenting, questioning, taking risks, exploring sound/pattern/ rhythm/ rhyme, and repetition.
- Interact with others for giving and receiving information, listening and taking turns in conversations and storytelling, clarifying thinking, ideas and feelings, asking questions, refusing, negotiating, and problem-solving.
- Become confident and positive about our national languages of *Gaeilge*, English, Irish Sign Language, their home language(s) and have an awareness and appreciation of other languages.

Aim 3: Babies, toddlers and young children will broaden their understanding of the world by making sense of their world through emergent literacy and numeracy experiences.

Through nurturing relationships within a supportive environment babies, toddlers and young children will:

- Experience, become familiar with and use a wide vocabulary and come to know a variety of symbols (pictures, print, numbers, visual supports) that can be used to communicate, and realise that these can be understood by others.
- Experience a print-rich environment and learn the value of books and digital technologies for enjoyment and as a source of information to learn about the world.
- Have opportunities for mark-making and use a variety of media in a multitude of ways including, but not limited to, the arts, different types of play and digital technologies as ways to interpret and share experiences, to solve problems, and to clarify thinking, ideas and feelings.

Aim 4: Babies, toddlers and young children will express themselves creatively and imaginatively.

Through nurturing relationships within a supportive environment babies, toddlers and young children will:

- Learn to share feelings, thoughts and ideas through different types of play and through playful, inclusive and creative experiences including, but not limited to, dance, digital technologies, drama, music, song, story, and visual arts.
- Communicate and develop early literacy experiences through creative expression using skills such as mark-making; cutting; drawing; transient art; sticking; painting; building; printing; sculpting; and threading, sewing and weaving, emphasising the process over product.
- Develop and show confidence in trying out new things, taking risks, problem-solving and thinking critically, and expressing themselves in a variety of different ways.

Exploring and Thinking

The Theme of Exploring and Thinking is about babies, toddlers and young children as agentic and competent learners, making sense of the things, places and people in their world by interacting with others; playing; investigating; thinking; questioning; and forming, testing and refining ideas.

Babies, toddlers and young children use their senses, their minds and their bodies to find out about and make sense of what they see, feel and experience in the world around them. When they feel safe, secure and supported they enjoy exploring and finding out about their world. Through such investigation, they build knowledge and understanding, develop new skills and dispositions, explore and think. They enjoy exploring early scientific, technological, engineering and mathematical concepts and ideas and testing these out. They also learn about the past and the influence of history on them and their community. They learn about geography and education for sustainable development. Through such active exploration of their environment and guided by intentional pedagogies, babies, toddlers and young children learn about their world and come to an awareness and understanding of their role in caring for the earth.

Through play and interacting with others in playful inquiry-based learning experiences, babies, toddlers and young children are empowered to be creative, to take risks, and to make discoveries. They learn how to think, developing metacognitive skills. As they play, they are reflecting and assessing on their own learning. They retest their theories and develop learning dispositions, taking on board new discoveries and experiences in an inclusive and accessible learning environment. All babies, toddlers and young children have an innate drive to get to know the workings of their world. Educators can foster learning by preparing the environment and by planning provocations and experiences for babies, toddlers and young children through which they can experience success as learners. This means planning experiences that are suited to their individual needs and that connect with their experiences and interests. At the same time, babies, toddlers and young children are introduced to new interests and experiences and are challenged to extend their knowledge, refine their skills, and work together to solve problems.

Aim 1: Babies, toddlers and young children will learn about and make sense of the world around them.

Through nurturing relationships within a supportive environment, babies, toddlers and young children will:

- Engage, explore and experiment in their environment through play on their own and with others.
- Recognise their connection to and responsibility for the environment and their community and come to know and respect local people, places, flora and fauna.
- Have opportunities to explore their world through integrated artistic, linguistic, geographical, historical, scientific, technological, engineering and mathematical learning experiences through play.

Aim 2: Babies, toddlers and young children will develop and use skills and strategies for observing, questioning, investigating, understanding, negotiating and problem-solving and come to see themselves as explorers and thinkers.

Through nurturing relationships within a supportive environment, babies, toddlers and young children will:

- Make connections and associations between new learning and what they already know, having the time and space to explore and develop theories about how the world works.
- Explore a variety of resources, provocations and materials, including digital technologies, to gather and use information to find out about the world around them.
- Collaborate and play with others to share interests, to learn about the past, the present and the future, to solve problems, be creative and think logically.

Aim 3: Babies, toddlers and young children will have opportunities to connect with nature and spend meaningful time in the outdoors.

Through nurturing relationships within a supportive environment, babies, toddlers and young children will:

- Feel a connection and sense of place with nature, by being in nature and having stories, folklore and play merging with local heritage in coming to know the environment in a deeper way throughout the seasons.
- Develop sensory awareness of colours, shapes, smells, sounds and movement; challenging themselves in adventurous and active play.
- Learn about life on land and life in water through experiencing, discovering, questioning, engaging, investigating and wondering through play and using digital technologies and books to research and extend knowledge about our planet.

Aim 4: Babies, toddlers and young children will have positive attitudes towards learning and develop dispositions like independence, curiosity, playfulness, perseverance, resilience, confidence, resourcefulness and risk-taking.

Through nurturing relationships within a supportive environment, babies, toddlers and young children will:

- Demonstrate growing confidence in being able to do things for themselves, seeing themselves as agentic learners open to new ideas and experiences.
- Develop higher-order thinking skills such as problem-solving, predicting, analysing, questioning and justifying through play and playful explorations.
- Know that their voice is heard and responded to in sharing their ideas, thoughts and questions on their learning journey.

Supporting *Aistear*

For consultation

September 2023

Introduction

Aistear acts as a scaffold in empowering educators to consolidate, support, enhance and enrich the learning and development of babies, toddlers and young children. This section contains proposals on how *Aistear* can be supported through the Guidance for Good Practice, the *Aistear* Toolkit (www.curriculumonline.ie/Early-Childhood), the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* (www.aistearsiolta.ie), and attention to the wider conditions in which *Aistear* is enacted.

The *Aistear* Toolkit will provide a variety of resources, including multi-media materials, for early childhood educators, parents and childminders. It is proposed that the Toolkit will focus specifically on the Framework, will reflect the age range of babies, toddlers and young children and the various contexts in which they spend their time. It may include sample learning opportunities, and will build on and link to the Guidance for Good Practice outlined later in this section. The *Aistear* Toolkit will be added to over time and in response to the needs of those using *Aistear*.

The *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* supports educators in using *Aistear* and *Síolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* (CECDE, 2006) together to develop the quality of their curriculum and in doing so, to better support children's learning and development. The *Practice Guide*, which is part of the [National Síolta Aistear Initiative \(NSAI\)](#), includes a range of resources to help those educators to critically reflect on their curriculum and to identify what works well. Resources on the Practice Guide are developed in partnership with the Department of Education (DoE), Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and Better Start.

The remainder of this section is comprised of two parts:

- Part A – **Guidance for Good Practice** proposes a set of big ideas, focused on *Aistear*'s Principles and Themes. These big ideas are intended as a platform to update and extend the current Guidelines for Good Practice in the *Aistear* Toolkit.
- Part B – **Supporting Educators** draws attention to wider conditions necessary to support *Aistear*'s Vision and Principles.

A. Guidance for Good Practice

The Guidance for Good Practice expands on some of the important ideas introduced in the Principles and Themes. It also reflects other important messages, or big ideas, from Phase 1 of the consultation to update *Aistear*, as well as from [research](#) and wider societal and policy changes. The big ideas are organised here according to *Aistear*'s original *Guidelines for Good Practice*:

- [Partnerships between Parents and Practitioners](#)
- [Learning and Developing through Interactions](#)
- [Learning and Developing through Play](#)
- [Supporting Learning and Development through Assessment.](#)

It is proposed that these will be extended and supplemented through resources developed for the *Aistear* Toolkit. Examples of these resources can be found in Appendix 1. Within the following sections, key terms are underlined to indicate the potential development of future guidance in these areas.

Building partnerships between parents and practitioners

Parents are the most important people in their children's early lives. Children learn about the world and their place in it through their conversations, play activities, and routines with parents and families. By working together, parents and educators can enhance children's learning and development. This guidance outlines what partnership means and describes different ways in which parents and educators can collaborate for the benefit of babies, toddlers and young children.

Partnerships and connections

Tógann sé meitheal chun leanbh a thógáil

(It takes a village to raise a child)

Aistear recognises the role of parents as primary educators of their babies, toddlers and young children. The Framework also recognises the significance of partnerships, connections and collaborations between parents, guardians, grandparents and the other important people, such as childminders and educators, who support their learning and development. *Aistear* values the diversity of each baby's, toddler's and young child's family structure and the knowledge that they bring from their lived experiences.

There is an emphasis on the centrality of building relationships with parents, which are founded on trust. Just as there is acknowledgment of the slow, relational pedagogy guiding interactions with babies, toddlers and young children, there is simultaneously an emphasis on making time and creating space to have meaningful conversations and interactions with parents and families. *Aistear* also recognises the importance of collaborating with the community and others in accessing support to help children reach their potential.

Supporting sustainability

Ní fhaighimid an talamh le hoidhreacht ónár sinsear, tugaimid ar iasacht é ónár bpáistí

(We don't inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children)

Aistear considers how sustainability might be understood through the three pillars of environmental, economic, and socio-cultural. As global citizens, each baby, toddler and young child has emerging responsibility for sustainability. Seeing beyond the gates of their immediate vicinity to the different services, settings, places, people and their roles within the community, creates an awareness of babies', toddlers' and young children's belonging within this space. Nurturing their sense of *ionadh* (wonder) and awe in local history, folklore and storytelling, and awakening an interest in nature and native trees, plants and wildlife, establishes a mindful awareness of place, and their role in that story.

Educating babies, toddlers and young children about sustainability focuses attention on the wonders of our world and creates a cultural gaze of respect and responsibility in not only coming

to know about climate action and biodiversity, but also in learning about issues such as inequity, poverty and discrimination. This can include showing compassion for the planet and the people that live on it, supporting collective wellbeing, and developing a sense of social justice and equity to promote a fairer, healthier and more sustainable world.

Learning and developing through interactions

Relationships are at the heart of early learning and development. Through their early interactions, babies learn to feel secure, to communicate, and to enjoy being with people. As they grow and develop, toddlers and young children love to play, to chat, to watch, and to be with others. Babies, toddlers and young children build relationships, communicate, express love and affection, play together, learn, and have their needs met through contact with others.

This guidance highlights the importance of relationships, interactions, and a slow, nurturing pedagogy in enhancing wellbeing, and holistic learning and development.

Adopting an inclusive, rights-based curriculum framework

Tús grá, síoramharc

(The beginning of love is constant starting)

Babies, toddlers and young children, are part of our interconnected global family and community. It is important that all babies, toddlers and young children experience an inclusive, responsive and democratic model of education and care. Educators are aware of the significance of reflecting on their view of the babies, toddlers and young children they work with. Such reflection enhances how they facilitate and empower each unique individual to reach their full potential and to have high levels of wellbeing and participation.

Babies, toddlers and young children have rights and emerging responsibilities towards themselves, others and the environment, which collectively are treated with *meas* (respect), empathy, kindness and equity. *Aistear* provides guidance in acknowledging that some babies, toddlers and young children may need extra support or resources to empower them to participate and be included. This means removing barriers for those more vulnerable to exclusion and not treating all babies, toddlers, and young children the same.

Being a reflective, agentic educator

Ní neart go cur le chéile

(There is nothing we cannot do together)

Aistear sees educators as competent, confident, agentic and reflective. In modelling positive learning dispositions such as kindness, empathy, inclusion, perseverance, playfulness, curiosity, leadership and enthusiasm, educators use their pedagogical knowledge and understanding of *Aistear's* Principles and Themes to guide, support and facilitate learning and development. They have a duty of care to support safety and wellbeing, to advocate for, and to act in the best interests of the baby, toddler and young child.

Aistear supports the key person approach, which ensures each baby, toddler and young child, is assigned a named person who is primarily responsible of creating a close relationship with them

and their family. In knowing the value and uniqueness of each baby, toddler and young child in their care, the educator also knows the value of their professional role in leading and nurturing the wellbeing and holistic learning and development of babies, toddlers and young children and seeing the interconnection of care and education.

The flexibility and adaptability of the Framework supports the creativity of the educator and values the different lens and interpretations of those who support early learning and development. Engaging with the Framework can guide and extend existing curriculum approaches and provide opportunities for creative interpretations of the Framework to respond to babies, toddlers and young children in their particular context.

Fostering a slow relational pedagogy through an emergent inquiry-based curriculum approach

Tóg go bog é

(Take it easy)

In coming to understand the Aims and Learning Goals of *Aistear*, there is an emphasis on a slow relational pedagogy. This enables educators to know the baby, toddler and young child – to slow things down, to be present, to notice their identities and capabilities, to see their potential. It also helps build a trusting relationship so learning can happen in a positive, inclusive and responsive environment. Relationships and interactions are the centre of early childhood education and care where babies, toddlers and young children thrive in the context of stable, caring and positive relationships with educators who provide security, *grá* (love), time and space.

Aistear supports an emergent and inquiry-based curriculum approach underpinned by play that is guided by observations of babies', toddlers' and young children's interests and identities. Knowing their curiosities supports informed intention in extending learning and creating a world of possibility and *ionadh* (wonder). Play and hands-on experiences mirror the seasons, noticing the changes and happenings in nature, embracing cultural celebrations and traditions as they pass by. Living together, and the wonderful relationships that develop within early childhood environments, are part of the emergent, inquiry-based curriculum approach. The routines (including caring and feeding routines), transitions and flow of the day are embraced in a slow and nurturing way as part of the learning journey. This includes valuing time with educators, siblings, friends, and mixed age groupings in the setting as well as social visits with grandparents and people from the community. These moments need to be acknowledged as opportunities for holistic learning and development and easy conversations and interactions in whatever form they might take.

Learning and developing through play

Babies, toddlers and young children love to play, and play often mirrors what is important in their lives. Play can be quiet or noisy, messy or orderly, funny or serious, strenuous or effortless. It can take place inside or outside, and it develops as babies, toddlers and young children grow and change.

Having fun, being with friends, choosing activities themselves and being outdoors all feature in responses when children are consulted about play. This guidance offers information on how educators can extend and enrich early learning and development through play.

Prioritising play as foundational and fundamental

An áit a bhfuil do chroí is ann a thabharfas do chosa thú

(Your feet will bring you to where your heart is)

Babies, toddlers and young children love to play and make choices about when, what, where, how, and with whom to play. Play can be a way of building or strengthening a relationship, deepening friendships or starting new ones. Babies, toddlers and young children play for different reasons. Sometimes they are exploring or learning new things. At other times they are consolidating existing learning or practising a skill. Each baby, toddler and young child has both a right and a desire to play. Child-led play is freely chosen and can involve risk, challenge, joy, hope and deep engagement. In addition to facilitating and supporting extended periods of child-led play, educators can consider shared play opportunities to engage with babies, toddlers and young children in purposeful and sensitive ways, through joining in play or by planning play-based intentional learning experiences. There are different types of play, including but not limited to sensory play, risky adventurous play, pretend play, creative play; imaginative play; messy play, language play, construction and block play; small world play; and rough and tumble play. A well-resourced play environment reflects the interests, identities, needs and abilities of the babies, toddlers and young children. Provocations and opportunities for play are open-ended, enticing experiences that invoke curiosity and *ionadh* (wonder), encouraging exploration and investigation, creating a space for learning, development, agency, joy and laughter.

Creating inclusive learning environments

Feilleann spallaí do bhallaí chomh maith le clocha móra

(Pebbles and big stones are needed to build walls)

Aistear recognises the centrality of an inclusive and responsive environment in creating a space and an atmosphere that fosters enthusiasm for learning for all babies, toddlers and young children. The learning environment is understood as the physical space and resources both indoors and outdoors; the daily routines and transitions; the relationships and interactions in the setting. Reflection, observation and consultation with babies, toddlers, young children, families and other relevant stakeholders guide the planning of inclusive learning environments and inform the provocations set out and set up for meaningful engagement and exploration. The inclusive environment flows and changes through the seasons as babies, toddlers and young children grow, learn new things, and develop new interests and needs. It includes both active and calm spaces, with an ease of access between the indoors and outdoors, and freedom to make choices with all empowered to participate. The emergent and inquiry-based curriculum guides the adaptation of routines, the topics of interest, the changing of spaces, the jobs to be done, and places to see and experience.

The centrality of communicative spaces where babies, toddlers and young children and educators can be together to talk, to listen, to notice, to observe, to share experiences (including enjoying meals together) and being present supports this reflective and participatory process in the

inclusive learning environment. The Framework can be interpreted in innovative and creative ways to inspire babies, toddlers and young children's meaningful participation and representation in an inclusive learning environment. A renewed emphasis on outdoor learning and nature, as well as a commitment to education for sustainability create further scope for developing children's capabilities, skills and dispositions. They also support babies', toddlers' and young children's overall wellbeing and sense of belonging and connection within and to the community.

Supporting learning and development through assessment

Assessment is a natural part of educators' day-to-day interactions with babies, toddlers and young children. Educators continually make judgements on babies', toddlers' and young children's learning and development, and use the information they gather to plan for progression. Babies, toddlers and young children also make judgements and self-assess about what they are good at, what they enjoy doing, what they can do now with a little help, and what they would like to be able to do in the future. This guidance describes what learning and development through assessment looks like in early childhood.

Documenting, Planning and Assessing

Mol an óige agus tiocfaidh sí (Praise the youth and they will succeed)

Aistear promotes developing the curriculum in practice through a continuous cycle of noticing, observing, documenting, assessing, planning, implementing and reflecting. A play-based, emergent and inquiry-based curriculum is informed by meaningful documentation of babies', toddlers' and young children's interests; dispositions; skills; knowledge; understanding; attitudes and values. Meaningful documentation makes the learning visible for the baby, toddler or young child, and for their family through *Aistear's* Themes. It also serves as a platform for communication with others, for supporting continuity of experiences and progression of learning.

Aistear advocates a slow relational pedagogy to enable the educator to be attentive, attuned and responsive to the voices of babies, toddlers and young children. When the environment has been planned around the interests, identities, wants, needs and rights of the unique individuals within the group, there is an ease and flow to the day where babies, toddlers and young children are purposefully engaged in enjoyable learning experiences. Documenting babies', toddlers' and young children's learning and development is meaningful for them, their parents, families and for the educator, when it is created using a variety of methods to develop a comprehensive, strengths-based portrait of the baby, toddler and young child. Meaningful documentation might include, but is not limited to, learning stories; anecdotal notes; observations; conversations; feedback; photos; videos; artwork; and information from home.

Continuity and Progression between *Aistear* and the *Primary Curriculum Framework*

All transitions are important and are recognised as a process that takes time rather than a once-off event. Moving to primary or special school is a significant transition in young children's lives, and continuity of experience and progression of learning are very important in this context. Relationship building between preschools and primary and special schools can support children and their families during this significant transition. Sharing information about learning and development is especially important at this time of transition, so teachers can plan experiences

that enable children to continue to progress in their learning across the curriculum. This transfer of information may be supported through Mo Scéal resources which provide guidance on the transition process. *Aistear* and the *Primary Curriculum Framework (PCF)* (DoE, 2023) are now aligned. This means while they are for different sectors, there is clear continuity of experiences, and progress of learning for children across the two sectors. This focus on alignment has implications for children's relationships and engagement at the time of transition as well as longer-term learning and wellbeing outcomes. It is important to remember that adjusting to transitions takes time; some children may take longer and need more support to make the transition as positive as possible for all involved.

B. Supporting Educators

Aistear was the first curriculum framework introduced in Ireland. This was later followed by the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) and more recently the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (2023). A framework provides greater flexibility and choice in supporting a responsive curriculum that emerges in collaboration with babies, toddlers, young children and their families. To support educators, sustained support and guidance is necessary.

The development of an updated *Aistear* brings opportunities, new thinking and possibilities. However, it also brings challenges and uncertainty, especially for those who are not familiar with the original Framework (2009). The consultation on an updated *Aistear* provides an opportunity to gather information on the nature of the supports required and the conducive conditions in which the curriculum Framework can be realised.

During the consultation, NCCA will work closely with stakeholders, education partners, educators and parents to identify practical ways in which settings can be supported in a comprehensive manner as they become familiar with and begin to use an updated *Aistear*. Albeit 14 years ago, learning can be taken from the initial introduction of the Framework in 2009. Reflecting on this, and considering the wider policy landscape, can inform the design of a comprehensive approach to supporting and enabling educators to work with an updated *Aistear*.

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Appendix 1

Example 1: Documenting the learning

Title	Documenting the learning
Age group	Babies, toddlers and young children
Principle	Agentic Global Citizens Agentic Educators
Theme	Wellbeing; Identity and Belonging; Communicating; Exploring and Thinking

Purpose: *Aistear* promotes developing the curriculum in practice through the use of a cyclical model of documentation of learning. This model presents a continuous cycle of noticing, observing, documenting, assessing, planning; implementing and reflecting (Figure 1). It is embedded in an understanding of a slow relational pedagogy in creating the space and taking the time to build respectful relationships with babies, toddlers and young children and to create an inclusive and responsive curriculum to support their learning and development.

This resource will provide an example of coming to know a child and where to begin in documenting their learning journey with *Aistear*.

It illustrates this process of documenting the learning with Sammy, who is 15 months old and has been attending the setting for 4 days a week for the past 3 months.

Aistear

Principle 1 states that babies, toddlers and young children are viewed as unique individuals, who communicate their opinions, choices and needs in many different ways. The role of the educator is to listen to, interpret and respond to the multiple 'voices' (utterances, gestures, words, body language, behaviour) of babies, toddlers and young children which may be communicated in these many ways.

Principle 5 notes how the educator supports and facilitates learning by recognising and building on the abilities, interests, identities and experiences of babies, toddlers and young children. Documenting learning begins with coming to know each individual child, recognising the different ways they learn and develop, and providing meaningful experiences to empower them to reach their potential.

Noticing

“It helps me when you notice what I am doing and when we have time to be together. Through being with me and understanding my ‘voice’ you can see my potential as a learner and identify what I am interested in and am good at and things that I might need extra help with”. (Principle 4 Holistic Learning and Development)

I notice that Sammy loves to climb up, on and over things! I can see he is agile and enjoys exploring the room and the garden. He shows real delight in getting up onto chairs and hiding under the table. He demonstrates lovely dispositions of humour, perseverance and curiosity. I want to find out more about his abilities and his interests.

Observing

I am purposefully watching Sammy and observing his actions and engagement with the learning environment. I am attuned to his movements, the areas he is interested in and the resources he is drawn to. I am noticing his interactions with the other children and how he communicates with them. I see his body language, facial gestures and behaviour within the group.

I can observe his:

- **Dispositions:** developing independence in his actions, assessing risk and challenging himself
- **Attitudes and Values:** his sense of adventure and how he encourages his friends to join in his play
- **Knowledge and skills:** knowing how to balance smaller blocks on top of the larger ones to hold his weight; maneuvering carefully to reach things he wants
- **Interests:** outdoor play; action songs and rhymes; building with different objects
- **Setting tasks:** Presenting small planks and logs to see how he recreates obstacle course in the garden
- **Conversations and communication:** Noting how he understands instructions and communicates his ideas in words and gestures
- **Interpretations of interactions:** his cooperation with educator and friends; how he smiles and offers toys and resources.

Documenting

As I watch, I am taking note of these important actions and interactions. I take a photo of his engagement in the spaces and write about what I notice and what I observe. I am building a story of Sammy’s learning journey and getting to know all about his strengths, interests and his personality. By documenting his learning, I am recognising these important things which I can build upon to support and scaffold his learning and development.

Assessing

By noticing and observing I am enabled to see what Sammy *can do*. I can make assessment of his learning by recognising his achievements through identifying his skills, knowledge and dispositions. I can also assess for his learning by using these to plan for experiences to further support his learning and development. I can assess his physical skills of coordination and balance in his climbing. I can acknowledge his emergent language skills as he communicates his feelings and ideas. I can recognise his social skills in the developing friendships with his peers. I can see him develop his cognitive skills in trying things out and exploring the environment.

Planning and implementing

When I plan for Sammy's learning and development I can think about all I have come to know about him. I can use his strengths and interests to plan and implement the curriculum, so he is engaged, motivated and excited to participate.

Exploring and Thinking: I can plan loose part play in the garden to build obstacle courses where he can learn about early scientific and engineering concepts as we build and create.

Communicating: I can guide his language and communication skills by introducing new words and phrases and creating space for him to communicate his ideas.

Identity and Belonging: I can support his understanding of social skills of friendships, turn-taking and sharing by planning small group time with another child where I can model these skills during activities I know he likes and with resources he enjoys.

Wellbeing: I can encourage Sammy to challenge himself in his active play and to know what is safe for him. Noticing begins again as I watch his play and interactions with others and the environment.

Reflecting

Reflecting begins the process again, of noticing, observing, assessing, planning and implementing, all the time considering Sammy's life-world and what is happening for him that might influence his learning and engagement in the setting. Connecting with parents and family supports my work with Sammy so together we can ensure he is empowered to reach his potential and enjoy the journey.

Example 2: Building Relationships through a slow relational pedagogy

Title	Building Relationships through a slow relational pedagogy
Age group	Babies
Principle	Relationships and Interactions
Theme	Wellbeing

Purpose: This resource will highlight the connections between Aistear’s Principle on Relationships and Interactions with the Theme of Wellbeing through focusing on slow relational pedagogy.

Principle: Relationships and interactions

Babies’, toddlers’ and young children’s fundamental need to be with others is embedded in caring connections and pedagogical practice where loving and responsive relationships and interactions are nurtured with key people in their lives. Early friendships with other babies, toddlers and young children are noticed and celebrated. Great care and time are taken to foster and support connections within and between the baby’s social worlds which are central to wellbeing, learning and development.

Understanding slow relational pedagogy

Aistear highlights the centrality of **relationships** and promotes a **slow relational pedagogy** to support babies to be **strong psychologically and socially** (Wellbeing: Aim 1). Babies are wired to connect and love. They come into the world ready for relationships. What happens within these **relationships** is a key foundation for learning and development. When away from their family, babies need the stability of a consistent and personal relationship with an educator who knows them well and whom they trust and can rely on. A slow relational pedagogy supports educators to build the kind of relationships that help babies so that they: *Build secure attachments and experience consistent, reciprocal, nurturing relationships that support confidence and connectedness* (Wellbeing Aim 1). In settings, being supported by a **key person** who understands the importance of a slow relational pedagogy helps the baby build a special bond of belonging with educators who are the links between families and settings and connect the baby’s **social worlds**. Babies are naturally curious and start to understand the world around them through sensory and physical **exploration** and **play**. These experiences are more meaningful when supported by educators who know, love, respect and understand them. These educators make time to be with and **respond** to them in meaningful ways including bodily care routines such as feeding and nappy changing which are opportunities for learning when the baby is given time and space to make the most of them in a way that suits them.

The key features of engaging in a **slow relational pedagogy** include:

- being **attuned** to the baby's feelings and needs
- having consistent, warm, affectionate, **responsive relationships**
- being able to interpret baby's cues and the myriad of ways they **communicate** to ensure their voice is heard
- being emotionally and physically present
- making time throughout the day for observing, listening, for being mindful, for slowing things down and for responding to each baby's uniqueness.
- enabling the building of a curriculum that is individualised and built around each baby's emerging interests, caring routines and **early friendships**.

The benefits of slow relational pedagogy

I have strong, secure attachments with the important people in my life who take time to know me and be with me. They and I recognise the value of a slow relational and respectful pedagogy. (Wellbeing, Aim 1, Learning Goal)

Slow relational pedagogy supports:

- brain development, attachment and helps babies to be strong psychologically and socially. It helps them to build an identity as loveable, respected and valued. Babies cannot learn if they don't feel safe, seen and responded to
- transitions during the day, into and out of the setting and within their daily routines. Responding to transitions through a slow relational pedagogy with individualised support based on the knowledge of and relationship with the baby lowers stress and is good for all involved
- partnership with families which can result in cultural sensitivity to family values and parenting practices which can then be replicated within the setting
- educators to have the time to learn about each baby's interests, abilities, likes and dislikes and for their needs to be responded to with care and sensitivity in a way that suits them
- babies to show they are competent, confident and agentic
- time for being, for daydreaming and for developing a sense of wonder and awe in the world around us.

Slow relational pedagogy in practice

Principle: Relationships and Interactions

Theme: Wellbeing

Aim 1: Babies, toddlers and young children will be strong psychologically and socially.

Age group: Babies

Setting: Full and part-time daycare (crèche)

Diane and Monique work in the baby room. They give attention to building a special bond with every baby through a slow relational pedagogy. Their curriculum is underpinned by Aistear and is individualised being built around each baby's emerging interests, caring routines, friendships and life experiences. Diane and Monique work in partnership with each baby's family and know them well. They show cultural sensitivity to family values and parenting practices and replicate these within the setting. This is especially important for Sadie, a baby from the Traveller community. Diane is Sadie's key person and is developing a stable, warm, responsive relationship with her to promote a secure attachment while she is in their 'baby

nest' room, a home away from home. Diane is working very hard to build trust with Sadie and her family who are understandably nervous of this new adventure for Sadie while her Mammy is undertaking further education. They meet the care, play, and holistic needs of each baby in a consistent, calm, caring, interactive, mindful, responsive and respectful manner and view babies as competent, confident and agentic.

Key take away:

Relationships are vital in supporting early learning and development and are of particular importance to psychological **wellbeing**. In settings, being supported by a **key person** who understands the importance of a **slow relational pedagogy** helps each baby build a special bond of belonging with educators in loco parentis and helps them thrive and reach their full potential as **agentic, competent and confident learners**.

Example 3: Supporting sustainability in early childhood

Title	Supporting sustainability in early childhood
Age group	Babies, toddlers and young children
Principle	Agentic Global Citizens Family and Community
Theme	Wellbeing; Identity and Belonging; Exploring and Thinking

Purpose: This resource provides guidance on how sustainability can be understood in the curriculum for babies, toddlers and young children, aligning with an understanding of their role as global citizens with emerging responsibilities for the planet and the people who live on it. It also recognises the centrality of family and community in working together to create an environment where all can flourish and reach their potential.

Principle 1 Agentic Global Citizens

Babies, toddlers and young children are competent, confident and agentic global citizens with rights. As unique individuals, they communicate their opinions, choices and needs in many different ways. They have a right to be heard and to be empowered to experience democracy. From their experiences as citizens, they learn that as well as having rights they also have emerging responsibilities for themselves, for others and for the environment.

Principle 4 Family and Community

The lives of babies, toddlers and young children are enriched by those who nurture and care for them: parents, extended family, educators and community members. In turn, babies, toddlers and young children bring joy, hope and happiness to enrich the lives of others. Children's experiences from home, from family and community connections impact and inform babies, toddlers and young children's learning experiences, influencing understandings of diversity of place, routines, family, culture and language(s).

What does sustainability mean in Aistear?

Aistear considers how sustainability might be understood through **the three pillars of environmental, economic and socio-cultural**. Educating babies, toddlers and young children about sustainability not only focuses attention on topics such as **climate action** and **biodiversity**, but also in learning about issues such as **inequity, poverty and discrimination**.

Examples of routines and activities to support sustainability in early childhood

Routine / activity	Pillar	Links to Aistear
<p>An intentional awareness of the importance of sharing with others: Creating a foundation of empathy and cooperation to address poverty and hunger.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening a book or toy library within the setting and community. • Learning about food, growing vegetables and fruit; sharing with families. • Setting the table and dining together at mealtimes, sharing food and cooperating. • Being involved in fundraisers to support children and families. 	<p>Economic</p>	<p>Wellbeing: Aim 4 Through nurturing relationships within a supportive environment, babies, toddlers and young children will explore and identify their place in the world and be empowered to live sustainably as agentic, respectful, caring, compassionate global citizens.</p>
<p>An intentional focus on developing and promoting a sense of social justice and equity within each setting, recognising and celebrating the diversity of family and community life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating and displaying photo frames of each child's family members, placed around the setting as easy focal points for conversations. • Celebrating successes for every child by noticing and naming achievements for individual ages, stages and personal delights. • Learning about and making connections with different people and services in the community. • Connecting with families and home by seeking out and valuing their input on important things about and for their baby, toddler or young child – to learn about an important cultural celebration coming up; to hear the proper pronunciation of key words in their home language; to gather 	<p>Socio-cultural</p>	<p>Identity and Belonging: Aim 1 Through nurturing relationships within a supportive environment, babies, toddlers and young children will feel valued and see themselves and their interests and identities reflected in the environment, knowing that their ideas, preferences, needs and rights, as well as those of their friends and peers, are noticed and responded to with respect and consistency.</p>

the news about a family visit or event.		
<p>Bringing attention to the wonders of our world and create a cultural gaze of respect and responsibility.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding space in the outdoors to see the sights and listen to sounds of nature above us in the sky, and beside us on land and in water, making connections with their local environment. • Gentle explorations and investigation of and about bugs, birds and animals and our responsibility in caring for them through the seasons. • Plant seeds in pots or in gardens to learn how things grow introducing and extending learning about biodiversity. • Recycling and re-purposing resources and materials for crafting, building and creating and introducing understanding of climate action. 	<p>Environmental</p>	<p>Exploring and Thinking: Aim 3</p> <p>Through nurturing relationships within a supportive environment, babies, toddlers and young children will learn about life on land and life in water through experiencing, discovering, questioning, engaging, investigating and wondering through play and using digital technologies and books to research and extend knowledge about our planet.</p>

Example 4: Valuing child-led play with babies

Title	Valuing child-led play with babies
Age group	Babies
Principle	Play and Hands-on Experiences
Theme	Exploring and Thinking

Purpose: This resource will highlight the synergies between *Aistear's* Principle of Play and Hands-on Experiences and the Theme of Exploring and Thinking through the lens of child-led play.

Principle: Play and Hands-on Experiences

Babies, toddlers and young children learn best in play, active, hands-on and inquiry-based experiences through which they learn about the world around them and develop holistically. These experiences help them to regulate and co-regulate their feelings, develop as thinkers and language users, develop socially, be happy, creative and imaginative, and lay the foundations for becoming effective communicators and explorers.

Understanding child-led play

I want to play and I have a right to play.

Child-led play is important and means that the baby leads the play and the educator follows that lead. *Aistear's* **Principle of Play** and **Hands-on Experiences** tells us that babies learn best while engaged in **play that is active, hands-on and inquiry-based**. To support the baby to lead their own play, and therefore learning and development, educators notice what the baby is interested in and encourages skills and **positive learning dispositions** such as curiosity, independence, resilience. Babies love to play and **make choices** about when, what, where, how, and with whom to play. Play often mirrors what is important in their lives. Play can **be quiet or noisy, messy or orderly, funny or serious, strenuous or effortless**. It can take place inside or outside and develops as babies, toddlers and young children grow and change. Having fun, being with friends, choosing activities themselves and being outdoors all feature in responses when children are consulted about play. Babies play for different reasons. Sometimes they are exploring or learning new things. At other times they are consolidating existing learning or practising a skill through **observing, questioning, investigating, understanding, negotiating and problem-solving with others within a supportive environment**.

The Theme of **Exploring and Thinking** supports and recognises babies as agentic and competent learners, making sense of the things, places and people in their world by interacting with others; playing; investigating; thinking; questioning; and forming, testing and refining ideas. Through play and interacting with others **in playful inquiry-based learning experiences, babies are empowered to be creative, to take risks, and to make discoveries**. As they play, they develop **learning dispositions**, taking on board new discoveries and experiences in an inclusive and accessible learning environment.

*It is important for my learning and development to have the time, space and resources to play
and*

*I learn by being active and using my senses to explore and learn about the world. I need access to open-ended
and natural materials to help me explore, be creative and use my imagination.*

Babies need extended periods of time to play along with adequate space and suitable resources inside and outside **that stimulate and interest them**. In outdoor spaces babies need a variety of spaces to **move without obstruction which babies can explore sensorially** and begin to **experience risk**: surfaces including grass, sand, wood, raised, rocky, and uneven. There should be gentle inclines to roll down and toddle up, grassy hills to feel secluded, and flat surfaces to strut, clamber, and wobble on **will have opportunities to connect with nature and spend meaningful time in the outdoors while challenging themselves in adventurous and active play** at a pace that suits them as they lead their own play and learning.

Child-led play in practice

Principle: Play and Hand's-on Experiences

Theme: Exploring and Thinking

Aim 1: Babies, toddlers and young children will learn about and make sense of the world around them.

Age group: Babies

Setting: Crèche

Niamh (10 months) is lying near her friend Olena (8 months). The girls are on the mat which is surrounded by lots of open-ended materials such as mirrors, crinkly materials and rattles. Niamh shows Olena that she is enjoying her company. She stretches out her hand and touches Olena's leg. Both babies smile and coo with delight. Niamh's key person, Imani, shows the girls the different features of the mat. He lies beside the two babies and explores the available materials and encourages the girls to do so too. He holds their hands to help them use the rattles. When the girls appeared to lose interest he sings 'Round and round the garden' using actions with each of the girls. The girls let him know they love the tickly feel of his finger doing a circular movement on their hands as he sings with them. Olena holds her hand out many times signalling for more.

Key take away:

Babies are **agentic, confident and competent** in directing and leading their own play to learn about the world around them and develop holistically. Through **play and interacting** with others in playful, inquiry-based learning experiences, babies are empowered to be **creative, to take risks, to make discoveries, to lead their own play and learning and to reach their full potential**.

Glossary

Agency	Babies, toddlers and young children being able act independently and make choices about and in their learning.
Agentic	Babies, toddlers and young children having voice and influence over their own learning.
Agentic educators	An agentic educator makes professional and informed decisions in response to the children's learning needs.
Anecdotal notes	Anecdotal notes refer to brief notes educators take as they notice and write about babies', toddlers' and young children's learning experiences.
Attachment	Supportive, stable, warm relationships that promote learning and development for babies, toddlers and young children.
Attuned	Being in harmony with a baby, toddler or young child through careful observation and tuning into their unique traits.
Augmentative and alternative communication	All the ways that someone communicates besides verbal talking. Augmentative means to add to someone's speech. Alternative means to be used instead of speech.
Assessment	Assessment is the ongoing process of collecting, documenting, reflecting on, and using information to develop rich portraits of babies, toddlers and young children as learners in order to support and enhance their future learning.
Bias	Prejudice for or against one person or group of people, especially in a way that may be considered unfair.
Biodiversity	The rich variety of life on earth.
Body autonomy	The right of babies, toddlers and young children to govern what happens to their body.
Braille	A form of written language for blind people, in which characters are represented by patterns of raised dots that are felt and navigated with the fingertips.
Child-led play	Babies, toddlers and young children being able to direct their own play and learning.
Climate action	Age and stage appropriate efforts taken to combat climate change and its impact.
Consent	Consent is when we seek permission for something to happen or make an agreement to do something. It requires respect and communication from both parties and is an important concept for children to learn about from a young age. Consent includes knowledge about, and respect for, their own and others' boundaries.
Co-regulate	Responsive interactions that provide the support and modelling to babies, toddlers and young children to understand and express their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

Culturally-responsive	Attuned educators ensuring babies, toddlers and young children's cultures, experiences, identities and languages are visible in the learning environment and pedagogical practices.
Curriculum	All the experiences, formal and informal, planned and unplanned in the indoor and outdoor environment that babies, toddlers and young children experience.
Curriculum framework	A scaffold to curriculum development to help educators to plan and develop an emergent, inquiry-based, child-led curriculum underpinned by play and specific to their own context.
Democracy	Involving babies, toddlers and young children directly in matters that affect their everyday lives.
Discrimination	Includes policies, practices or behaviours that lead to unfair treatment of individuals or groups on the basis of their identity or perceived identity. It can be intentional or unintentional and may be direct or indirect.
Dispositions	Dispositions are innate or natural character traits that babies, toddlers and young children possess from birth. Dispositions are individual to each baby, toddler and young child, and are influenced, both positively and negatively, by interactions and relationships, and the lived experience of babies, toddlers and young children.
Diversity	Diversity refers to individual and group differences in society. It is about welcoming and valuing difference as part of life. It is about respecting and celebrating differences while also noticing and valuing our similarities and connectedness.
Documentation	A record of babies, toddlers and young children's experiences, learning and development.
Educator	Reflects the professional role of those working in the early childhood setting but can also be understood as a reference to other adults who engage with the Framework with the intention of supporting learning and development of the baby, toddler or young child in their care.
Emergent and inquiry-based curriculum approach	An approach to learning and development that is child-led and evolves as babies, toddlers and young children discover the world around them. It is built around emerging interests and responds to their curiosity as they learn about and develop working theories about the world.
Emergent literacy	Babies, toddlers and young children develop a growing understanding of print and language as a foundation for reading, writing, and communicating. Through play and hands-on experiences, children see and interact with print as they build an awareness of its functions and conventions, and learn they can be understood by others.
Emergent numeracy	Babies, toddlers and young children develop a growing understanding of maths concepts in the world around them. Through play and hands-on experiences, children see and interact with concepts such as shape, size, volume etc. as they build an awareness of their functions and purpose.

Equity	Providing every baby, toddler and young child the opportunity to participate and have one's perspectives heard and respected. It does not mean treating all babies, toddlers and young children the same.
Ethnicity	Ethnicity refers to a social group that shares a common and distinctive culture, religion, worldview, or language. Ethnicity includes babies, toddlers and young children's identification with a group having some or all of the following shared characteristics: culture, food, language, forms of dress, religion, lifestyle, traditions, customs, and nationality. An ethnic group is a group that sees itself or is regarded by others as a distinct community by virtue of certain characteristics that help distinguish it from other groups.
Fine motor skills	Fine motor skills involve small muscles working with the brain to control movements in areas such as the hands, fingers, lips, tongue and eyes. Developing fine motor skills helps babies, toddlers and young children do things like eating, writing, manipulating objects etc.
Fundamental movements	Fundamental movements support babies, toddlers and young children's overall development, especially their co-ordination and physical dexterity. These skills include movement skills such as crawling, walking, running, galloping, skipping, jumping; balance skills like climbing, bending, rolling, turning, stretching, twisting; and manipulation skills like throwing, catching, kicking and bouncing, which are often called 'ball skills'.
Global citizen	A global citizen is aware of and understands the wider world – and their place in it. Each baby, toddler and young child is a citizen of the world. They take an active role in their community and work with others to make our planet more peaceful, sustainable and fair.
Holistic	Babies, toddlers and young children learn many different things at the same time. What they learn is connected to where, how and with whom they learn.
Inclusive	This refers to respect being shown to all babies, toddlers and young children, listening to them and their families, and being sensitive to their needs and interests.
Inequity	This is a form of inequality that is unnecessary and unfair.
Influence	Refers to the views and opinions of babies, toddlers and young children having a meaningful impact on decisions that affect their learning and development.
Intentional learning experiences	The purposeful actions of educators to support and extend babies, toddlers and young children's interests, ideas, skills, strengths, and needs.
Intentional pedagogy	Responsive educator engagement and interactions with babies, toddlers and young children to support specific areas of learning and development.
Irish Sign Language	Irish Sign Language (ISL) is the native language of the deaf community in Ireland, and is an official language of Ireland.

Key person approach	The key person approach ensures each baby, toddler and young child, and their families, is assigned a key educator to form secure attachments and build close relationships with.
Lámh	A manual sign system used by children and adults with intellectual disability and communication needs in Ireland
Learning stories	An educator led method of recording learning and development through a narrative approach.
Meaningful documentation	Record of babies, toddlers and young children's learning and development detailing what occurred and the learning that took place.
Metacognitive	Supporting babies, toddlers and young children to think about their own thoughts and make sense of life around them.
Modes of communicating	The wide variety of ways of giving, receiving, and making sense of information.
Multicultural	A variety of people or groups from different cultures or ethnicities.
Noticing	Being attuned to babies, toddlers and young children's subtle aspects of learning and development, and responding appropriately.
Observations	A variety of methods of noticing, watching, listening, documenting, and reflecting on children's learning and development.
Parent	The term parent encompasses a foster parent, a guardian or other person acting in loco parentis.
Pedagogical knowledge	The specialised knowledge of educators which promotes the effective learning and development all babies, toddlers and young children.
Pedagogical practice	Pedagogical practice refers to the specialised, holistic nature of early years educators' professional practice particularly those aspects that involve building and nurturing relationships and curriculum development.
Pedagogy	This refers to all the educators' actions or work in supporting babies, toddlers and young children's learning and development. It infers a negotiated, respectful, and reflective learning experience for all involved.
Portrait	A holistic understanding of the individual context, strengths, interests and learning dispositions of each baby, toddler and young child.
Prejudice	Negative ideas, prejudgments, or inaccurate knowledge about a person or group.
Progression of learning	An understanding of how babies, toddlers and young children's skills and learning dispositions present themselves, both in their early forms and in increasingly advanced forms.
Provocations	A collection of open-ended resources, either materials or objects, natural or synthetic, that invite babies, toddlers and young children to explore their ideas, either independently or with peers.
Rights-based	An understanding of babies, toddlers and young children as right's holders who are provided with meaningful opportunities to influence decisions about their lives.

Risk-taking	A positive disposition to learning and development where babies, toddlers and young children gain growing confidence to do things for themselves, try out new things, and be open to new ideas and experiences.
Scaffold	A process by which educators and peers support and guide children's learning, enabling them to reach the next level of ability, beyond their own personal capacity at that particular time.
Schemas	A repeated pattern of behaviour, actions or thinking and are a way of understanding how children's thoughts and actions are linked together.
Self-assess	Babies, toddlers and young children make conclusions and evaluations about their own learning and development.
Self-directed	A space where babies, toddlers and young children make decisions and choices about their own learning and development.
Self-regulate	This is the ability of a baby, toddler or young child to gain control of bodily functions, manage emotions, and maintain focus and attention.
Slow, relational pedagogy	Supportive, stable, warm relationships that promote secure attachments with caregivers, healthy and safe environments and meaningful learning experiences for babies, toddlers and young children.
Social justice	Equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities for all babies, toddlers and young children.
Social worlds	The space in which babies, toddlers and young children live, interact with others and learn and develop.
Socio-cultural	Societal and cultural influences that impact thoughts, feelings and behaviours.
Strengths-based approach	Focuses on individuals' personal strengths and capabilities in a holistic way, seeing what they 'can' do, rather than a deficit perspective.
Sustainability	Refers to the environmental awareness of babies, toddlers and young children. It has three foci - economic, social and environmental.
Stereotypes	An over-simplified generalisation or widely held assumption about a particular group, creating false expectations that individual members of the group will conform to certain (often negative) traits, behaviours or characteristics.
Voice	The many ways babies, toddlers and young children express their views, opinions and moods according to their age and stage of development, including but not limited to utterances, gestures, behaviours, body language, facial expressions, oral language, writing, drawings and art.
Working Theories	Working theories are the ideas children develop about how the world works. These theories develop in response to children's own questions: what? why? when? where? and who? These theories are developed by children who are given opportunities to solve

	problems and to explore, and who are supported to access appropriate information. They learn to be creative and adventurous, and to make decisions about themselves as learners.
Worldview	Ireland today is increasingly diverse and this includes differences in values and beliefs. It is important to acknowledge and embrace this diversity of understanding of the world in supporting holistic learning and development. The term 'worldview' is about appreciating the world from different viewpoints. It includes ideas and attitudes about the world, ourselves, and our lives, and it involves having a set of working theories about the world and how it works. This is informed by babies, toddlers and young children's experiences at home and in the wider world around them.



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment

Aistear
Creatchuraclam na Luath-Oige
The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

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