



NCCA

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

Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2024) and Síolta, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (2017)

Updated Audit:

Similarities and differences

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Introduction

This document provides an updated audit of [*Síolta, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*](#) (2017) and [*Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*](#) (2024). The audit builds on the original [audit](#) (2009) carried out by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) on behalf of the Department of Education and Science.

Síolta was developed, in 2006, by the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE). The CECDE closed in November 2008 and responsibility for *Síolta* transferred to the Early Years Education Policy Unit (EYEPU) of the Department of Education (DE). *Síolta* was reviewed in 2017 by the Department of Education (DE) as part of the National *Síolta Aistear* Initiative (NSAI)¹. *Aistear* was developed by the NCCA in 2009 and updated by NCCA in 2024.

The *Aistear Síolta* Practice Guide was developed by NCCA following a request from the Department of Education and Skills to support early years educators in using *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (2009) and *Síolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* (2006) together to enhance the quality of practice. Grounded in the concept of reflective practice, the Practice Guide was designed to support early years educators to critically review their practice, identify strengths and areas for development, and plan for improvement. Its development, which began in 2014, was informed by key sectoral learning including the *Aistear in Action* initiative completed in 2013, the final report on the *Síolta Quality Assurance Programme*, and findings from joint inspections carried out by the Department of Education Inspectorate and the Pre-school Inspectorate (now under Tusla), which highlighted inconsistencies in curriculum planning and limited use of *Aistear* in practice. The Practice Guide also responded to national policy developments, including *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011–2020* (Department of Education and Skills, 2011), the *National Early Years Access Initiative and Prevention and Early Intervention Programme*, and *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014–2020* (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014). In parallel, the establishment of Better Start: The National Early Years Quality Support Service in 2014 created a specialist mentoring infrastructure for quality improvement, with the Practice Guide serving as a key reference point for this work.

In 2016, the NSAI was established to support the coordinated roll-out of *Síolta* and *Aistear*, the national quality and curriculum frameworks for babies, toddlers and young children. The initiative is delivered through an interagency approach comprising of the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE), the Department of Education and Youth (DEY), Better Start National Early Years Quality Development, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs) and National Voluntary Childcare Organisations (NVCOs). As the NSAI is responsible for the implementation of both Frameworks in practice, the Practice Guide became a key aspect of this initiative.

¹ This was a small scale review which made reference to *Aistear* and amalgamated four *Síolta* manuals (full day care, part time day care, sessional care and childminding settings) into one.

The purpose of this updated audit is to reflect the revisions to *Síolta* (2017) and the updates to *Aistear* (2024) and to consider their implications for the *Aistear Síolta* Practice Guide. The audit will support the early childhood sector in engaging with *Síolta and Aistear* to promote the learning and development of babies, toddlers and young children by:

- identifying links between the Principles underpinning each Framework
- outlining the different emphases of *Síolta and Aistear*
- showing how using the two Frameworks together can enrich babies, toddlers and young children's early learning experiences
- identifying updates to the *Aistear Síolta* Practice Guide to reflect the revisions and updates to both Frameworks.

The Policy Context

Since the publication of the original audit in 2009, early childhood provision in Ireland has undergone significant changes. These changes have been shaped by various national developments, policies and strategies. Key developments have been driven by the DCDE and DEY. Noteworthy changes include the introduction of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, Core Funding, the establishment of the Better Start National Early Years Quality Development Service (QDS) and Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), Equal Start funding model and the initiation of Early Years Education Inspections (EYEI) by DE inspectors. Significant policy developments include:

- First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028;
- Nurturing Skills: The Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare 2022-2028;
- Ireland's Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024-2033: Every Learner from Birth to Young Adulthood;
- National Action Plan for Childminding (2021 – 2028);
- National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028; and,
- The Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-making Action Plan 2024-2028.

First 5 is a whole-of-government strategy aimed at improving the lives of babies, young children and their families, focusing on early childhood care and education (Gol, 2018a). It is “a ten-year plan to help make sure all babies, toddlers and young children have positive early experiences and get a great start in life.” (Gol, 2018b, p.2).

An important commitment in both First 5 and Nurturing Skills is the ongoing development of the National *Síolta Aistear* Initiative which commits to developing and implementing a national plan for the phased, supported and simultaneous implementation of *Síolta* and *Aistear*, in all early years settings for babies, toddlers and young children (Gol, 2018a; 2021).

National Quality and Curriculum Frameworks

Síolta is the national quality Framework for early childhood education and is concerned with all aspects of quality provision in settings for children from birth to 6 years. *Aistear* is the early childhood curriculum framework for all babies, toddlers and young children from birth to six years in all settings other than primary and special schools. The Practice Guide draws the content of the two Frameworks together, without replacing or displacing either of the Frameworks themselves.

Revisions and updates to the Frameworks

Síolta was initially published in 2006. The Framework aimed to define, assess and support quality in all aspects of early childhood education settings in Ireland. The original publication consisted of four manuals that comprehensively covered all Standards and Components of quality under the Framework. The manuals provided guidance and support on how to implement the 16 Standards in different settings, focusing on elements of quality including: parents and families, curriculum, interactions, planning and evaluation, environments, play, rights of the child and community involvement.

In 2017, *Siolta* was revised to make the Framework more practical for early years educators. The revised version maintained the original Framework's Principles, Standards and Components but aimed to reduce duplication and enhance usability by offering a more integrated approach. While each version of the manual used language tailored to specific types of settings, the core content—comprising the Principles, Standards, and Components—remained consistent across all manuals and was relevant to every setting type. Based on feedback from educators and other stakeholders it was agreed to integrate all four manuals into one. The revised manual was also translated into Gaeilge and an English and Irish version remain available at siolta.ie. When conducted it was planned that a wider review of *Siolta* and the Quality Assurance Programme would be carried out in the future. There is a commitment within First 5 to review *Siolta* and develop a single quality Framework, to replace *Siolta* and the two existing inspection frameworks and to be used as the common reference framework for all inspection activities and for self-evaluation so that early years settings can assess their own performance along the quality spectrum, from compliance to excellence (GoI, 2023).

Following seven years of consultation and development, NCCA originally published *Aistear* in 2009. It was the first curriculum framework for early childhood education in Ireland. It provided information to support the early learning and development of babies, toddlers and young children. Because early childhood marks the beginning of babies, toddlers and young children's lifelong learning journeys, the Framework is called *Aistear*, the Irish word for journey. NCCA updated *Aistear* in 2024. The update was completed through a process of research, consultation, networking and deliberation. The update was undertaken to recognise and reflect societal and policy changes that have taken place since the publication of the original Framework in 2009. The update also reflects educational research and new learning about how babies, toddlers and young children learn and develop and how educators can enrich and encourage this appropriately. The update was undertaken by NCCA to ensure *Aistear* continues to support and enrich babies, toddlers and young children's learning and development in Ireland now and in the future.

The main updates include:

- a renewed emphasis on the rights of babies, toddlers and young children, respecting them as agentic, competent, confident learners. Agentic means they have voice and influence over their own learning
- an understanding of sustainability in nurturing babies, toddlers and young children to care for themselves, for others and for the environment
- a celebration of the diversity of contemporary Irish society and support for the meaningful inclusion and participation of all babies, toddlers and young children
- a renewed emphasis on relationships being at the heart of learning and development, friendships are valued, and interactions are nurtured between babies, toddlers, young children, educators, families, communities and learning environments
- embedding Irish culture and history in *Aistear* through the use of Irish words and phrases helping to connect babies, toddlers, young children, their families and educators to the language and heritage of Ireland.

The relationship between *Síolta* and *Aistear*, as the two national Frameworks for early childhood provision was an important consideration in the updating process, and a focus on continued alignment and synergy between the two Frameworks remains.

Cross-referencing the Frameworks

This audit looks at the two Frameworks at four different levels.

1. Level One of the cross-referencing exercise explores the general Vision and Purpose of each Framework, the ages of the children concerned, the setting the Framework is applicable to and the audience for which each Framework is relevant
2. Level Two looks at the structure of the two Frameworks
3. Level Three explores the underlying Principles of each Framework
4. Level Four takes a more in-depth look at the Frameworks' contents and how they can be used together to improve the learning experiences of babies, toddlers and young children.

Level One: Vision, purpose and audience

Similar to the original audit, the initial review of the Vision, Purpose and target audience illustrated synergy between the two Frameworks (see Table 1). Each Framework has a clear and specific purpose. *Síolta* focuses on all facets of quality within early childhood settings including learning and development. *Aistear* focuses on providing a Framework for educators to develop a rights-based, emergent and inquiry-based curriculum to support the learning and development of babies, toddlers and young children in their care. In fulfilling these purposes, each Framework plays a role in promoting and enhancing quality provision on a national level. In this way, the Frameworks complement and support each other.

With regard to the age range, both Frameworks focus on babies, toddlers and young children aged birth to six years, in all early childhood settings other than primary and special schools. Both Frameworks also distinguish the age groups within this over-lapping age range to reflect the diversity of the pace that babies, toddlers and young children learn:

- babies - birth to 18 months;
- toddlers - 12 to 36 months;
- young children - 2½ - 6 years.

Both Frameworks are intended for use by educators who have responsibility for the care and education of babies, toddlers and young children within these age ranges. In *Aistear* those using the Framework, including parents, childminders and early years educators are referred to as 'educators'. Each educator comes to *Aistear* informed by their relationship with the baby, toddler and young child, the family, their knowledge and experience, as well as knowing the features of the different learning environments.

Table 1: Comparison of *Síolta* and *Aistear*: Vision, purpose and audience

Framework	Vision	Purpose	Age	Settings	Audience
<i>Síolta</i>	<i>Síolta</i> focuses on the quality of environments, relationships and practices.	The purpose of <i>Síolta</i> is to improve the overall quality of settings and experiences for babies, toddlers, young children and their families.	Birth – 6 years	All early childhood settings	Educators who care for and educate babies, toddlers and young children
<i>Aistear</i>	<i>Aistear</i> focuses on learning and development, emphasising the rights, agency and early learning experiences of babies, toddlers and young children through an emergent and inquiry-based curriculum approach, underpinned by play and relationships.	The purpose of <i>Aistear</i> is to support babies, toddlers and young children's learning and development.	Birth – 6 years	All early childhood settings other than primary and special schools	Educators who care for and educate babies, toddlers and young children Other professionals who work with babies, toddlers, young children and their families.

Level Two: Structure of the Frameworks

Both Frameworks, while complementary, differ in their core focus. *Síolta* is a quality framework that focuses on ensuring Standards of quality are met in early childhood settings. Its Principles emphasise the structural, environmental and process based factors that underpin quality experiences, such as relationships, teamwork and the role of the adult in providing consistent, safe and responsive environments. *Aistear* is a curriculum framework centred around babies, toddlers and young children's learning experiences, emphasising the importance of rights, agency, holistic learning and development and active participation. It views babies, toddlers and young children as agentic, competent and confident learners who are global citizens and highlights the significance of play and inquiry-based learning underpinned by nurturing relationships.

The two Frameworks work in harmony. *Síolta* ensures the quality and consistency of the environment and practices within settings, while *Aistear* provides the pedagogical guidance for babies, toddlers and young children's early learning and development.. Both Frameworks complement each other by providing a holistic approach to supporting babies, toddlers and young children's early learning and development and ensuring quality practices.

In the next table we will consider the contents of both Frameworks.

Table 2: Structure of both Frameworks

Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (2017)		Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2024)	
Framework		Framework	Guidance for Good Practice
Introduction	Standards of Quality	Vision of Aistear	Introduction
Principles of Síolta		Purpose of Aistear	Supporting Learning and Development through a Rights-Based Approach
» The value of Early Childhood	» Standard 1: Rights of the Child	Principles of Early Learning and Development	» Rights and agency
» Children First	» Standard 2: Environments	» Agentic Global Citizens	» Global citizenship in early childhood
» Parents	» Standard 3: Parents and Families	» Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	» Supporting sustainability as global citizens
» Relationships	» Standard 4: Consultation	» Relationships and Interactions	
» Equality	» Standard 5: Interactions	» Family and Community	Supporting Learning and Development through Relationships and Interactions
» Diversity	» Standard 6: Play	» Agentic Educators	» Slow relational pedagogy
» Environments	» Standard 7: Curriculum	» Transitions	» The key person approach
» Welfare	» Standard 8: Planning and Evaluation	» Holistic Learning and Development	» Friendships
» Role of the Adult	» Standard 9: Health and Welfare	» Play and Hands-On Experiences	» The agentic educator
» Teamwork	» Standard 10: Organisation	» Learning Environments	
» Pedagogy	» Standard 11: Professional Practice		Supporting Learning and Development through Partnerships and Connections
» Play	» Standard 12: Communication		» Partnerships with families
	» Standard 13: Transitions		» Community connections
	» Standard 14: Identity and Belonging		
	» Standard 15: Legislation and Regulation		Supporting Learning and Development through Play
	» Standard 16: Community Involvement		» Prioritising play
			» The inclusive learning environments
			Supporting Learning and Development through a Reflective Cycle of Planning and Assessing
			» Reflective cycle of planning and assessing
			» Meaningful assessment and documentation
			» Transitions

Síolta's Structure

Síolta is designed to assist all those concerned with the provision of quality early education in Ireland to participate in a developmental journey towards the improvement of the quality of their practice.

The *Síolta* Principles of quality closely align with *Aistear*'s Principles of early learning and development and represent the vision which underpins and provides the context for quality practice in Ireland. They are interdependent and individual Principles are not intended to stand alone.

The Standards and Components of Quality define quality practice within the Framework. The Standards and Components are closely related. Each Standard has a number of associated Components that break down the Standards into 'bite-sized' items. Each Component has a number of Signposts for Reflection which are made up of questions followed by bullet points called 'Think Abouts'. These can be described as discussion points or thought-provoking suggestions. They offer a focus for discussion about quality improvement in individual work, in the work of the setting or in a number of other situations. They are open-ended, there are no right or wrong answers and most importantly, they are not tick boxes.

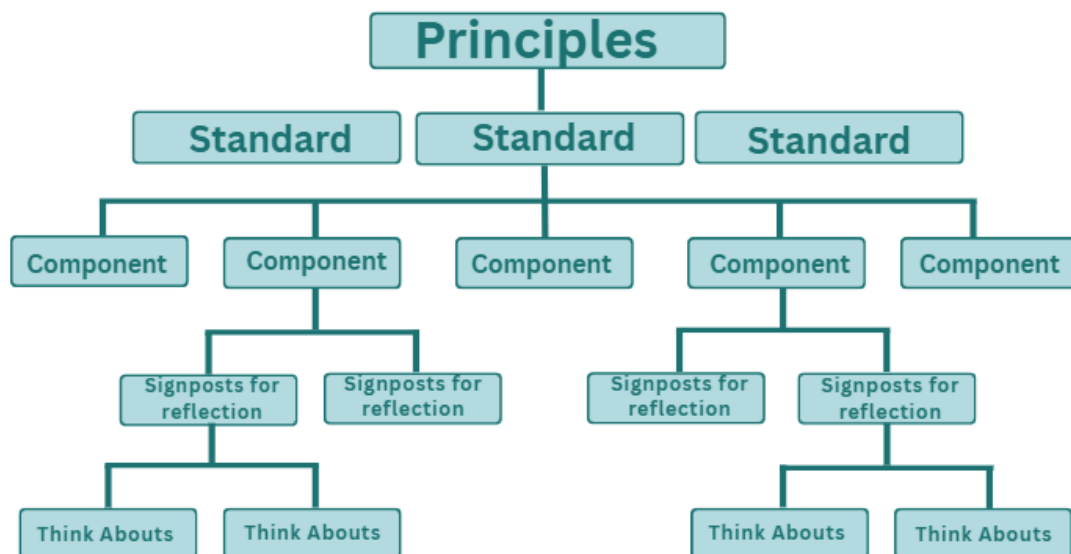


Figure 1: Structure of *Síolta*, The National Quality Framework of Early Education

Aistear's Structure

Aistear is based on nine Principles of early learning and development. These are the foundation of the Framework and bring the curriculum vision to life. They are also embedded throughout the Framework's Themes, Aims and Learning Goals, and in the *Guidance for Good Practice*.

Each Principle is presented using a short paragraph. This is followed by an interpretation of the Principle from the perspective of babies, toddlers and young children. This interpretation highlights the educator's role in facilitating voice and influence in early learning and development as well as advocating for and enacting the Principles in practice.

Aistear presents babies, toddlers and young children's learning and development using four interconnected Themes, underpinned by the Vision and Principles. The Themes are:

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

Each Theme describes what babies, toddlers and young children learn. Each Theme description is followed by four Aims which set out broad aspirations for learning and development. Each Aim is underpinned by three Learning Goals. These are broad yet observable statements that bring important dispositions, attitudes and values along with skills, knowledge and understanding to life. The Themes are there to inform planning for babies, toddlers and young children's learning and to support the documenting and assessing of their progress and achievements.

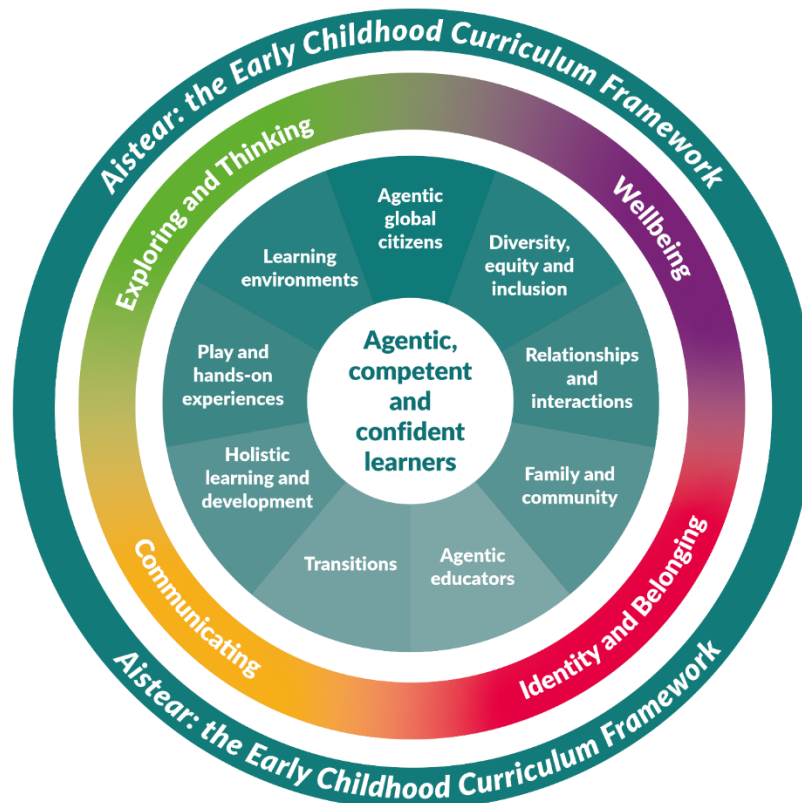


Figure 2: The Structure of Aistear

Level Three: Underpinning Principles

The next part of the audit involves looking at the Principles underlying both Frameworks. Throughout both Frameworks, some Principles vary slightly in wording or are unique to one Framework. In some Principles the wording varies while the sentiments behind them are similar. For example, one of Aistear's Principles is agentic global citizens. It states:

Babies, toddlers and young children are competent, confident and agentic global citizens. Being agentic means they have voice and influence and that they can make choices about and in their learning. Babies, toddlers and young children have the right to be cared for, nurtured and supported to grow and develop. They can experience democracy by having their voice heard and respected by educators who support active participation. Listening to and learning to respect others and their views is a key part of this. As citizens of the world, babies, toddlers and young children have deep connections with people and the environment, valuing justice and human rights.

Síolta's has a Principle called Children First. It states:

The child's individuality, strengths, rights and needs are central in the provision of quality early childhood experiences. The child is an active agent in her/his own development through her/his interactions with the world. These interactions are motivated by the individual child's abilities, interests, previous experiences and desire for independence. Each child is a competent learner from birth and quality early years experiences can support each child to realise their full potential. Provision of these experiences must reflect and support the child's strengths, needs and interests. Children have the right to be listened to and have their views on issues that affect them heard, valued and responded to.

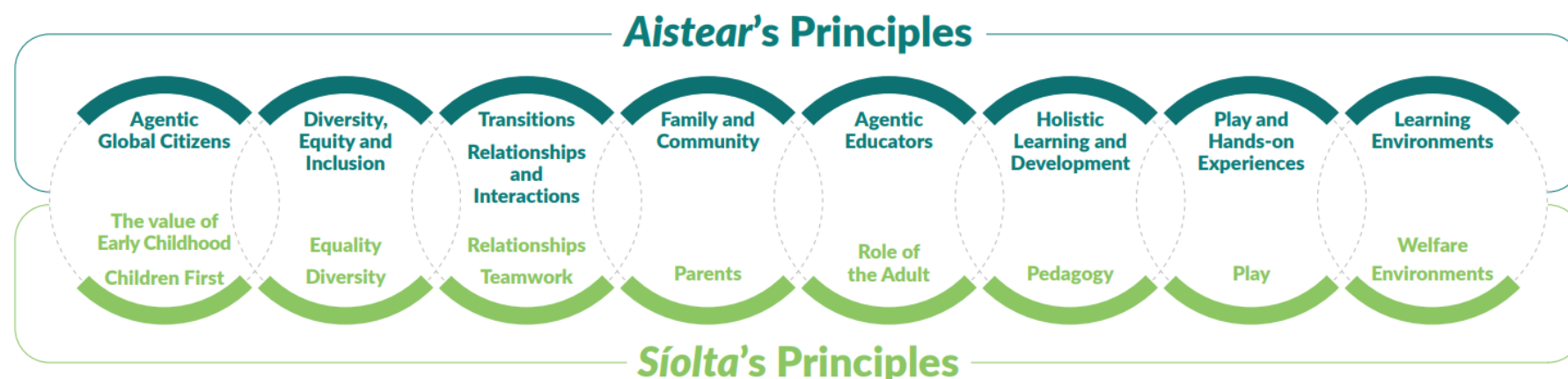
Aistear has a single Principle on Diversity, Equality and Inclusion while Síolta has two separate Principles: one relating to Equality and another relating to Diversity. Aistear has a Principle on Family and Community which focuses on important people who nurture and care for babies, toddlers and young children. This includes parents, foster parents, adoptive parents, step-parents, legal guardians, carers, extended family, educators and community members. Similarly, Síolta Principle of Parents recognises parents as the primary educators of their child and notes how a respectful partnership with parents is essential in promoting the best interests of the child. It goes on to note that the development of connections and interactions between the early childhood setting, parents, the extended family and the wider community also adds to the enrichment of early childhood experiences by reflecting the environment in which the child lives and grows.

The following table presents the Principles of Síolta and Aistear together and informed Table 4 which outlines the connections between the Frameworks'.

Table 3: Principles of *Síolta* and *Aistear*

<i>Síolta</i>	<i>Aistear</i>
The value of Early Childhood	Agentic Global Citizens
Children First	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
Parents	Relationships and Interactions
Relationships	Family and Community
Equality	Agentic Educators
Diversity	Transitions
Environments	Holistic Learning and Development
Welfare	Play and Hands-on Experiences
Role of the Adult	Learning Environments
Teamwork	
Pedagogy	
Play	

Table 4: Connections between the Frameworks



Síolta's Principles	Aistear's Principles	Connections between Principles of Síolta and Aistear
The Value of Early Childhood Children First	Agentic Global Citizens	Both Frameworks emphasise the child's rights, individuality and agency. Aistear's Principle of Agentic Global Citizens highlights babies, toddlers and young children as active participants in their learning, which aligns with Síolta's Children First Principle that children are active agents. The value of nurturing and respecting early childhood as a distinct phase is common in both Frameworks, as they both emphasise the need for care, support, and respect for babies, toddlers and young children's development.
Equality Diversity	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	Both Frameworks emphasise the importance of respecting and validating each baby, toddler and young child's individual identity, culture and abilities. Both Frameworks support babies, toddlers and young children's diverse needs and promote equal access to good quality early learning experiences. The important recognition of diversity is shared, with both

		Frameworks aiming to create a sense of belonging and inclusion for all babies, toddlers and young children.
Relationships Teamwork	Transitions Relationships and Interactions	Both <i>Síolta</i> and <i>Aistear</i> emphasise the importance of relationships for babies, toddlers and young children's early learning and development. They recognise that respectful, reciprocal interactions and strong attachments are key to babies, toddlers and young children's sense of wellbeing. A slow relational pedagogy affords time and space to build secure attachments supporting positive transitions across the daily routine. Reciprocal relationships, often fostered through effective educator teamwork, have an important influence on babies, toddlers and young children's learning and development. The key person approach, as noted in both Frameworks, is central to this.
Parents	Family and Community	Both Frameworks emphasise the critical role of families in supporting babies, toddlers and young children's early learning and development. <i>Síolta</i> and <i>Aistear</i> recognise the importance of partnerships between educators and families, acknowledging that babies, toddlers and young children's experiences at home and in the community shape their identity and learning. Both also stress the value of community involvement in enriching babies, toddlers and young children's learning environments.
Role of the Adult	Agentic Educators	Both Frameworks recognise educators as key figures in shaping babies, toddlers and young children's early learning and development. They emphasise that educators should build respectful, responsive relationships with babies, toddlers and young children and their families, using their professional skills and knowledge to create environments that support individual needs.
Pedagogy	Holistic Learning and Development	Both <i>Síolta</i> and <i>Aistear</i> emphasise a holistic approach to early learning and development, recognising that babies, toddlers and young children's learning and development are interconnected and influenced by their learning environment. They value play-based, hands-on experiences that

		support holistic learning and development. Both Frameworks advocate for child-centred, emergent and inquiry-based learning.
Play	Play and Hands-on Experiences	Both Frameworks recognise the fundamental role of play in babies, toddlers and young children's development. <i>Síolta</i> and <i>Aistear</i> emphasise that play should be child-led, joyful, and central to learning, supporting holistic development. Both emphasise the need for environments that provide time, space and resources for play-based experiences that promote the development of positive learning dispositions.
Environments Welfare	Learning Environments	Both Frameworks emphasise the importance of inclusive and stimulating learning environments—indoors and outdoors—that support babies, toddlers and young children's exploration, independence and curiosity. These environments should be responsive to babies, toddlers and young children's rights and needs, and promote opportunities for holistic learning and development. Central to both Frameworks is the understanding that the safety, welfare and wellbeing of all babies, toddlers and young children must be protected and promoted. A quality environment not only safeguards them from harmful experiences but also actively supports their wellbeing through warm, trusting relationships and opportunities for meaningful engagement. The environment enables a rich, varied and developmentally appropriate environment where babies, toddlers and young children have agency in their own learning and development.

Level Four: Frameworks' Standards, Themes and Guidance

We now move to the fourth level of the audit where we compare the Standards of *Síolta* with the Themes and Guidance in *Aistear*.

Table 5: Comparative analysis of the Frameworks Standards, Themes and Guidance

Standards of <i>Síolta</i>	Themes and Guidance of <i>Aistear</i>
Standard 1: Rights of the Child	Themes: Wellbeing, Identity and Belonging, Communicating and Exploring and Thinking Guidance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting learning and development through a rights-based approach
Standard 2: Environments	Themes: Wellbeing, Identity and Belonging, Communicating and Exploring and Thinking Guidance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting learning and development through a rights-based approach Supporting learning and development through relationships and interactions Supporting learning and development through partnership and connections Supporting learning and development through play Supporting learning and development through a reflective cycle of planning and assessing.
Standard 3: Parents and Families	Themes: Wellbeing, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, Exploring and Thinking Guidance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting learning and development through relationships and interactions Supporting learning and development through partnership and connections
Standard 4: Consultation	Themes: Wellbeing, Identity and Belonging, Communicating Guidance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting learning and development through a rights-based approach Supporting learning and development through partnership and connections
Standard 5: Interactions	Themes: Wellbeing, Identity and Belonging, Communicating and Exploring and Thinking Guidance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting learning and development through a rights-based approach

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting learning and development through relationships and interactions Supporting learning and development through partnership and connections
Standard 6: Play	Themes: Wellbeing, Identity and Belonging, Communicating and Exploring and Thinking Guidance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting learning and development through play Supporting learning and development through a reflective cycle of planning and assessing.
Standard 7: Curriculum	Themes: Wellbeing, Identity and Belonging, Communicating and Exploring and Thinking
Standard 8: Planning and Evaluation	Themes: Wellbeing, Identity and Belonging, Communicating and Exploring and Thinking Guidance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting learning and development through a reflective cycle of planning and assessing.
Standard 9: Health and Welfare	Themes: Wellbeing, Identity and Belonging, Communicating and Exploring and Thinking Guidance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting learning and development through a rights-based approach Supporting learning and development through relationships and interactions
Standard 10: Organisation	Themes: Wellbeing, Identity and Belonging, Communicating and Exploring and Thinking
Standard 11: Professional Practice	Guidance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting learning and development through a rights-based approach Supporting learning and development through relationships and interactions Supporting learning and development through partnership and connections Supporting learning and development through play Supporting learning and development through a reflective cycle of planning and assessing.
Standard 12: Communication	Themes: Wellbeing, Identity and Belonging, Communicating and Exploring and Thinking Guidance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting learning and development through a rights-based approach

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting learning and development through relationships and interactions • Supporting learning and development through partnership and connections • Supporting learning and development through play • Supporting learning and development through a reflective cycle of planning and assessing.
Standard 13: Transitions	<p>Themes: Wellbeing, Identity and Belonging, Communicating and Exploring and Thinking</p> <p>Guidance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting learning and development through a rights-based approach • Supporting learning and development through relationships and interactions • Supporting learning and development through partnership and connections • Supporting learning and development through play • Supporting learning and development through a reflective cycle of planning and assessing.
Standard 14: Identity and Belonging	<p>Themes: Wellbeing, Identity and Belonging, Communicating and Exploring and Thinking</p> <p>Guidance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting learning and development through a rights-based approach • Supporting learning and development through relationships and interactions • Supporting learning and development through partnership and connections • Supporting learning and development through play • Supporting learning and development through a reflective cycle of planning and assessing.
Standard 15: Legislation and Regulation	<p>Themes: Wellbeing, Identity and Belonging, Communicating and Exploring and Thinking</p>
Standard 16: Community Involvement	<p>Themes: Wellbeing, Identity and Belonging, Communicating and Exploring and Thinking</p> <p>Guidance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting learning and development through a rights-based approach • Supporting learning and development through partnership and connections

Aistear Síolta Practice Guide

Since 2015, the *Aistear Síolta* Practice Guide has been available to support early years educators in using *Síolta* and *Aistear* together to develop the quality of their practice and, in doing so, to better support babies, toddlers and young children's learning and development. In this way, the Practice Guide can be used for on-going review, development and improvement by early years educators either working independently or working together with colleagues or a mentor. Early Years Quality Specialists working with Better Start, the National Early Years Quality Development Service use the Practice Guide as they work with settings. The Practice Guide is also used by other professionals working in a support or mentoring role, for example, by CCCs and by NVCOs, and those working in an evaluation role.

The *Aistear Síolta* Practice Guide draws on key elements of both Frameworks and illustrates how *Síolta*'s Principles and Standards connect with *Aistear*'s Principles, Themes, and *Guidance for Good Practice*. In doing so, it supports early years educators to plan and create inclusive, meaningful learning experiences for babies, toddlers, and young children.

The Practice Guide includes: Curriculum Foundations and six interconnected Pillars of Practice. These pillars are: Partnerships and Connections, Learning Environments, Learning Through Play, Relationships and Interactions, Planning and Assessing, and Supporting Transitions. Each Pillar of Practice offers practical ideas, reflection points and examples to guide early years educators in their work.

For example, *Síolta* Standard 1: Rights of the Child is reflected across *Aistear*'s four Themes of Wellbeing, Identity & Belonging, Communicating and Exploring and Thinking and is supported by Curriculum Foundations, which highlights a rights-based approach to early learning. Similarly, *Síolta* Standard 2: Environments aligns with *Aistear*'s four Themes of Wellbeing, Identity & Belonging, Communicating and Exploring and Thinking and is supported by the Learning Environments Pillar, which supports early years educators to create spaces that are welcoming, adaptable and engaging for all babies, toddlers and young children. The Play Pillar reflects the importance of *Síolta* Standard 6: Play and *Aistear*'s Themes ensuring that play is central to babies, toddlers and young children's learning.

The Partnerships and Connections Pillar reflects *Síolta* Standard 3: Parents and Families and *Síolta* Standard 16: Community Involvement, helping early years educators to build strong, respectful relationships with families and the wider community. *Síolta* Standard 13: Transitions and *Aistear*'s Theme of Wellbeing focus on supporting babies, toddlers and young children through both transitions in their daily routine and other important transitions such as starting in an early years setting, primary or special school, is embedded within the Transitions Pillar, ensuring continuity and security for babies, toddlers and young children as they move through different experiences.

Together, these connections demonstrate how the Practice Guide serves as a 'bridge' between the two Frameworks, supporting early years educators to effectively bring the Principles of quality and curriculum to life in their daily practice.

Conclusion

The revisions to *Síolta, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* and the updates to *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*, represent important developments in the landscape of early childhood in Ireland. These Frameworks are crucial for facilitating high quality learning and development opportunities for babies, toddlers and young children. The integration of these Frameworks through the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* is essential for coordinating curriculum and quality support, thus improving the quality of early years experiences for babies, toddlers and young children.

This audit has reviewed *Síolta, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* (2017) and *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (2024). As outlined, the purpose of *Síolta* is to enhance all elements of early years practice while *Aistear* focuses exclusively on babies, toddlers and young children's early learning and development. Used together and supported by appropriate resources, *Síolta* and *Aistear* present significant opportunity to support the development of practice for all educators who care for and educate babies, toddlers and young children in Ireland.

The work undertaken in this audit directly informed and underpinned the update of the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide*, ensuring it continues to align with both Frameworks. As part of this process, an audit of existing resources was conducted to identify gaps and areas for enhancement, forming the basis for a structured update and development plan. The updated Practice Guide is set to be hosted on the Nurturing Skills Learning Hub, nurturingskills.ie, positioning it within the broader quality support system. This ensures that it will continue to support early years educators, mentors and other professionals to implement *Aistear* and *Síolta* in meaningful and impactful ways.

The *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* plays a vital role in ensuring that both Frameworks are not only understood but actively embedded in practice. By bringing *Síolta* and *Aistear* together in a structured, practical way, the Practice Guide serves as a key resource for early years educators, mentors and other support professionals. It provides guidance, self-evaluation tools and opportunities for reflection that support early years educators to continuously enhance their practice, deepen their understanding of quality and create meaningful learning experiences for babies, toddlers and young children. As the sector moves forward with these revised Frameworks, the Practice Guide remains an essential tool in supporting early years educators to bridge policy and practice.

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