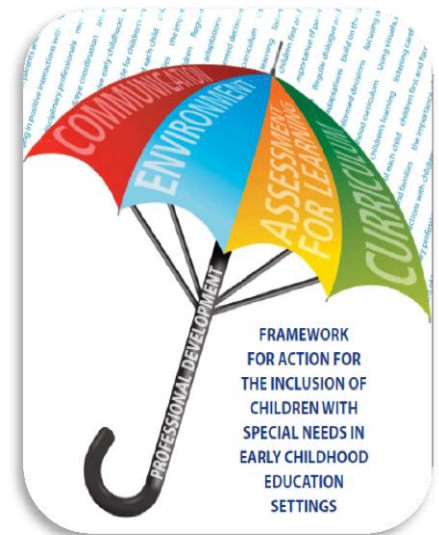
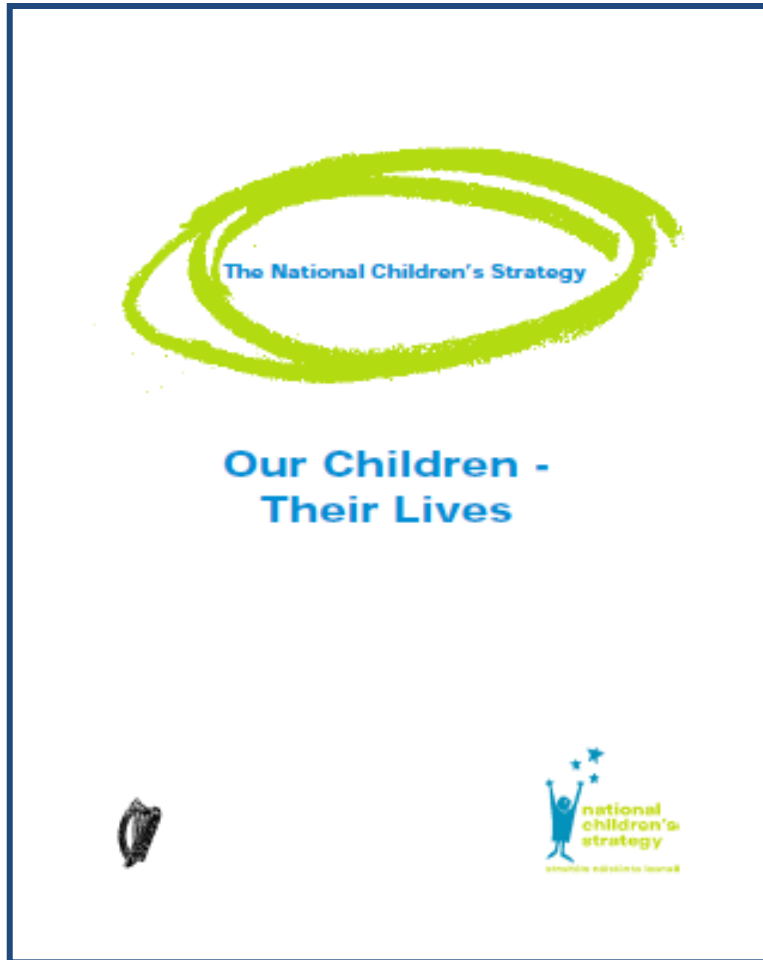


# ***Getting it right in the first six years: Inclusive policy and practice for Children with Special Educational Needs in Early Childhood settings***

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# The National Children's Strategy



- ❖ Children will have a **voice**
- ❖ Children's lives will be **better understood**
- ❖ Children will receive **quality supports and services**

# Core objective

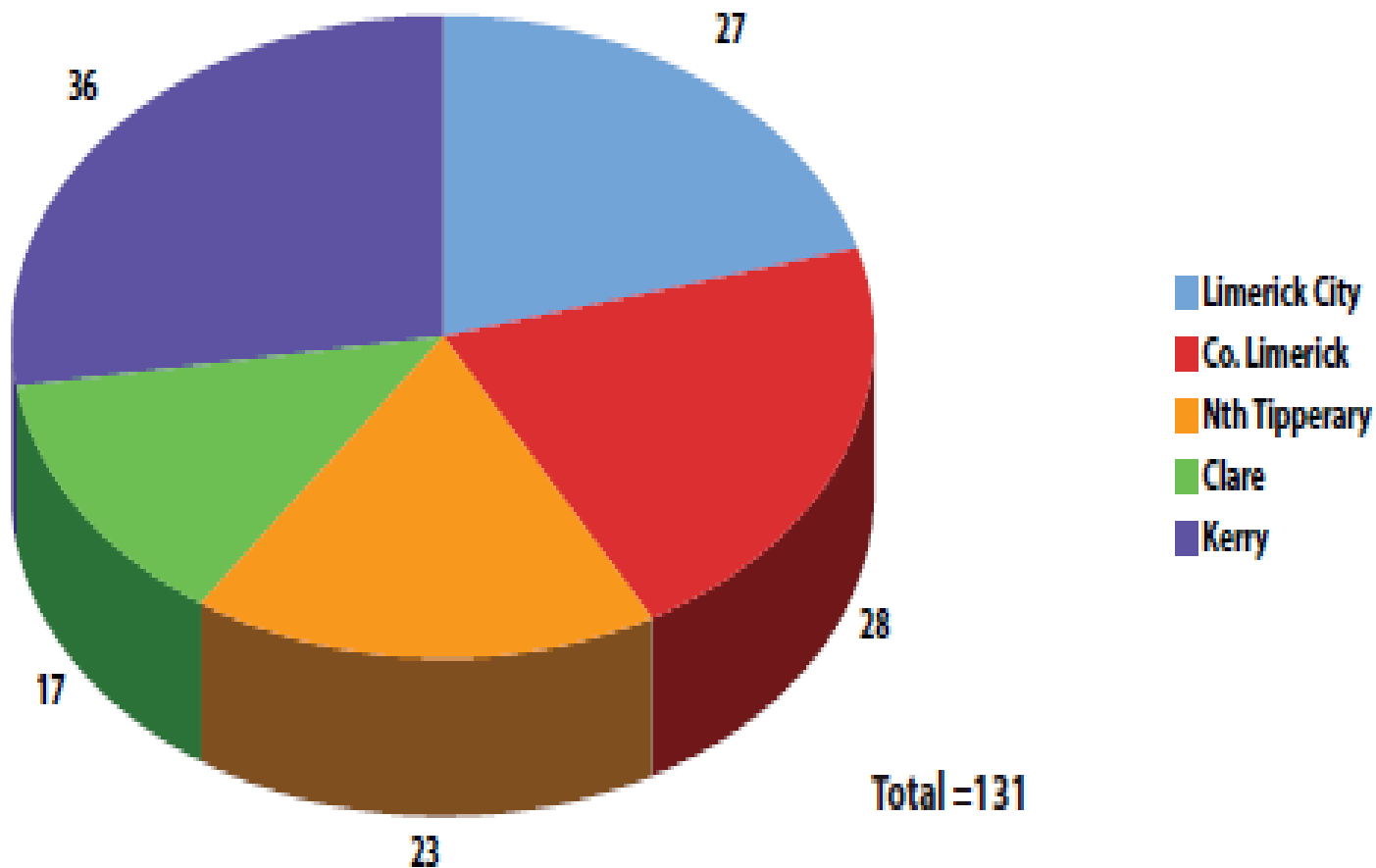
*“Children’s early education and developmental needs will be met through quality childcare services...(p.50)*

## **Aim of this objective**

*to ensure that “all children have access to quality support services offering early education, developmental and socialisation opportunities” (p. 50)*

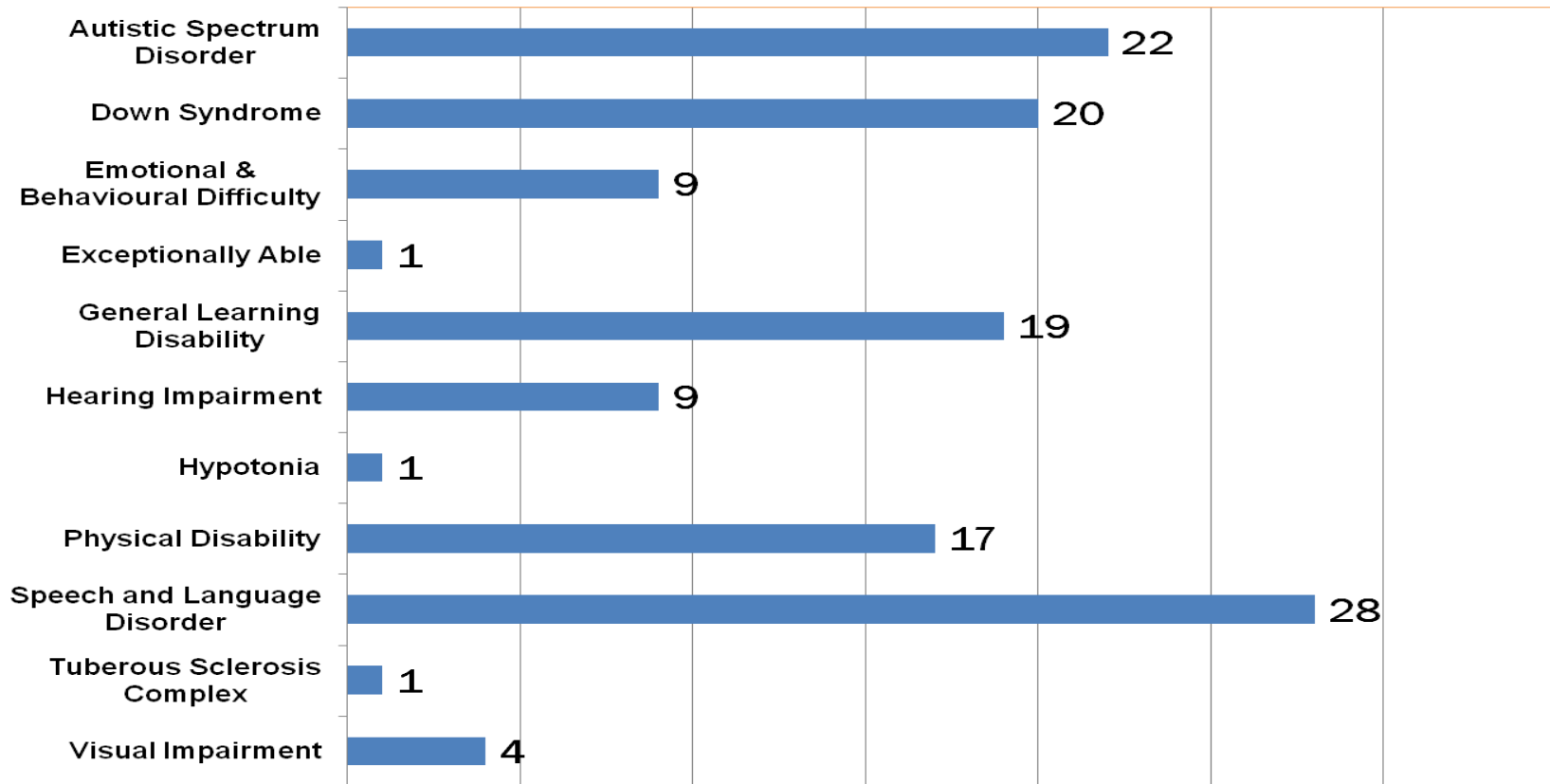
# Research - Phase 1

- **Audit of Provision**
- **Child Observations (60 hours)**
- **Focus Group Discussions (9) with key stakeholders nationally (162 participants)**
- **Key Informant Interviews (50)**
  - Parents **(10)**
  - ECCE Managers **(15)**
  - Childcare staff working directly with children who have SEN **(15)**
  - Pre-school Special Needs Assistants **(10)**



- 3, 633 children in the birth to four age cohort were accessing these early year's settings
- 171 children; 3.6% were diagnosed with SEN

# Profile of Children with SEN



# Draft Framework for Action



# Phase 2 - Methodology

- **Capacity Building:** 3 training **workshops** in Limerick and Tralee
  - Home / Setting Communication Notebooks
  - Reflective Journals
  - Observation Logs
  - Portfolios for Children's Work
  - Materials to support inclusive practice
  - Draft Framework for Action incorporating practical strategies and professional tools
- **Contemporaneous and post-intervention interviews** with childcare providers, staff and pre-school special needs assistants
- **Parent feedback questionnaires.**
- **2 final review workshops** in Limerick and Tralee - feedback re strengths, weaknesses, gaps, challenges. Final Evaluation Forms.

## Phase 2: Piloting of the DFA

Setting	Type	Practitioners	PSNAs
A	Private full day care	3	
B	Private sessional	5	1
C	Private sessional	2	1
D	Private sessional	4	
E	Private sessional	3	
F	Childminder	1	
G	Private sessional	3	1
H	Community crèche	3	3
I	Community crèche	3	1
J	Community sessional	3	1
K	Community sessional	3	1
L	Community sessional	3	
M	Community crèche	3	1
N	Community crèche	4	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>11</b>

# Participant's responsibilities

- Prioritise **4 actions**: 1 from each area within the **DFA**: Communication, Environment, Assessment and Programmes.
- Maintain **portfolios** and **samples** of children's work
- Complete a **reflective journal**

*We learned how to observe children. I am more confident now about doing observations...suggestions on curriculum were so easy to follow and suitable for any child at any stage of development. We see the benefits of our involvement everyday not just for the child with special needs but all the children.*

*One of the most encouraging insights has been to observe the child respond and develop as the structures fell into place. For the first time we felt that we were doing things right.*

*I have new skills that I can apply to other situations. The mothers of the children are encouraged by the additional support their children received and the children have made considerable progress.*

*One of the most encouraging insights has been to observe the child respond and develop as the structures fell into place. For the first time we felt that we were doing things right.*

*Everybody should have a copy and everybody should have the support we had to put it into practice.*

*I hadn't a clue how to plan the curriculum. I read the framework and it seemed so easy but I just couldn't do it until.... [The researcher] went through it and looked at our observations and helped me to make sense of them".*

*Ongoing support and mentoring "made all the difference", "we just wouldn't have been able to do it without the help that the Mary I team gave, their support was just invaluable", "the workshops and the visits were brilliant, I don't think we could have done it without them"*

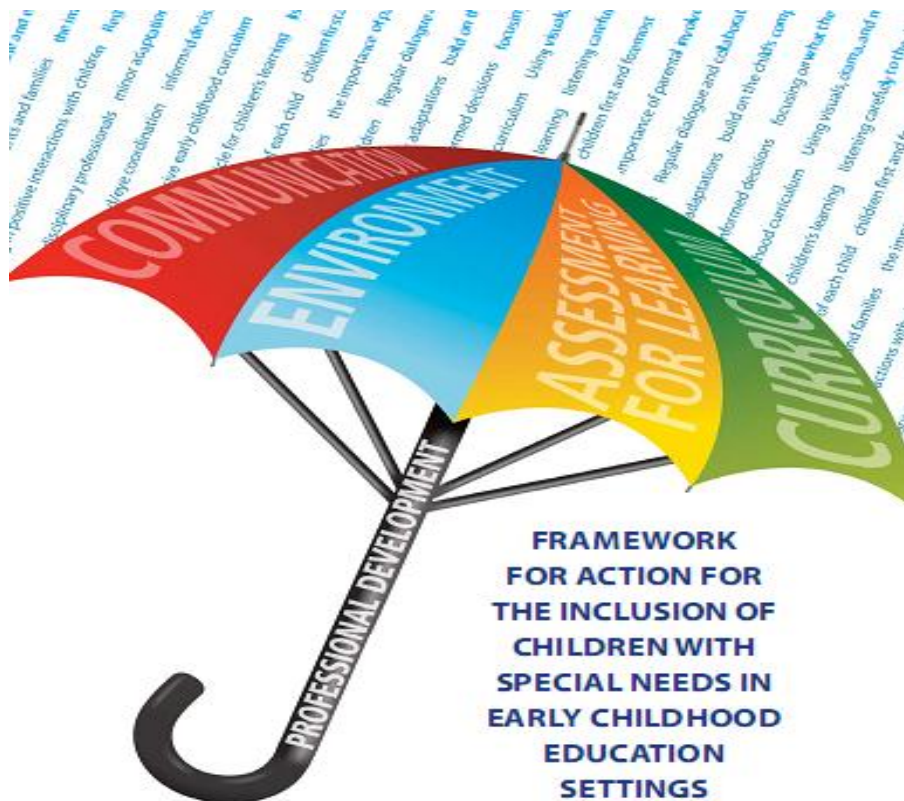
# Critically...

***“We needed the training that the support team gave to us and if we are to continue we need even more training.”***

***The “success of the programme was the four tiered approach, that we had to do something about all four areas. It put huge pressure on us and we couldn’t have done it without the information and training we got and the ongoing advice from the Mary I team.”***

***“We need training, training and more training to make it work”***

# ECCE Sector Ready for Meaningful Inclusive Practice



**Workforce Development Plan** (in progress)

**Free pre-school in ECCE Scheme 2010**

**Aistear, 2009**

**Diversity and Equality Guidelines, 2006**

**Siolta, 2006**

**Childcare Regulations 1996, 2006**

# Key Findings

1. DFA enabled practitioners to **enhance the quality of children's experiences** within settings
  - practitioners claimed that the success of the study stemmed from the initial **training workshops** together with the **ongoing mentoring** and support provided by the research team.
2. **Level and quality of practitioner training:** Inclusion is challenging. It calls upon practitioners to recognise a “continuum of diverse needs amongst all children and utilise all its available resources to make appropriate provisions to meet their needs” (Puri, 2004: 42).

# Key Findings

- 3. Lack of practitioner knowledge and skill** about how to work effectively with children who have SEN creates an inevitable barrier to the implementation of inclusive ECCE practices
- Many practitioners **ill- equipped to cater for a child with SEN**
  - Some ECCE settings may **refuse access to children with SEN**
  - Practitioners may **abdicate responsibility for the child with SEN to the PSNA**
  - Compounded by the fact that **PSNAs receive little or no training** themselves in relation to their role, responsibilities or inclusive practice

# Key Findings

- 4. Quality of existing provision:** considerable weaknesses in terms of day to day practice specifically in relation to the **learning environment, communication, and curriculum.**
  - directly related to a lack of appropriate pre-service and ongoing professional development within the ECCE sector particularly in the area of special needs
- 5. Communication and collaboration** was weak with relatively few communicating strategies in place.
  - Especially the case with regard to communicating with parents where communication was limited
  - collaboration between practitioners, early intervention services and multi-professional services was weak right across the sector

# Key Findings

- **Dearth of collaboration** between practitioners, early intervention services and multi-professional services impacts negatively upon service provision and has a direct impact on children's experiences within settings.
- Most evident in terms of the considerable lapses in developing and reviewing **Individual Development Plans** for the child with SEN as well as practitioners misunderstandings about how best to work with the child.

# Key Findings

- 6. Availability and allocation of PSNAs:** Multiple inconsistencies identified in relation to:
- How PSNAs were allocated to children with SEN
  - PSNA roles and responsibilities.
- Current method of allocating PSNAs **is inequitable to families, parents, children and services**; analogous to “**geographic inclusion**” where access to services is determined by geographic location as well as parental capacity to advocate for access to appropriate supports and services for their child.

# Key Findings

## 7. Timely assessment

**8. Continuum of provision:** in so far as possible, mainstream provision is the best possible option, affording as it does opportunities for children with SEN to develop and learn alongside their typically developing peers.

- Study raises important questions about the suitability of existing provision to meet the needs of all children with SEN, particularly those, whose needs are more complex.

# Recommendations for policy

## 1. National ECCE Inclusion Policy

Policy makers from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the Department of Health and Children and the Department of Education and Skills work cooperatively to devise a clearly stated and communicated national inclusion policy for the Early Childhood Care and Education sector in Ireland.

**Recommend:** Establish an **interagency working group** at senior management level with immediate effect to develop this National ECCE Inclusion Policy.

# Recommendations for policy

## **2. Continuum of Provision**

Provide a continuum of early years provision to ensure that a wide range of choices are available for parents and children with SEN

## **3. Training and Education to support Inclusion in the Early Years**

Introduce a mandatory training requirement over a period of five years for new entrants to the ECCE sector and for those already working with children who have SEN.

## Recommendations for policy

### 4. National Roll-out of the *Framework for Action for the Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Early Years Settings*

The *Framework for Action for the Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Early Years Settings* to be rolled out nationally with early years providers, early years practitioners, PSNAs and all those working with young children who have SEN.

# Recommendations for Policy

## 5. Establishment of a National Professional Early Years Inclusion Support Service

- Staffed by early years educators/mentors with specialist knowledge of interventions for children with SEN in the birth to 4 age cohort would be of enormous support to the ECCE sector.
- The PEYISS would work closely with the established ECCE infrastructure (the City and County Childcare Committees, The National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative, the Health Service Executive and the National Disability Agencies) at local and regional level to provide training and support to providers, practitioners and PSNAs.
- Ultimate aim to ensure a co-ordinated and consistent approach to up-skilling the ECCE workforce across the country and to serve as the central cog in terms of playing an advisory role for providers, practitioners, parents and families of children with SEN.

# Recommendations for Policy

## 6. National Funding to Support Inclusion

Allocate a dedicated national funding stream to support inclusion in the early years as a matter of priority to enable the ECCE sector to support inclusive practice.