

# A Focus on Learning in Early Years Services

## *The Quality Assurance and Support role of the Inspectorate*

Presentation by the Inspectorate  
Department of Education and Skills

Start Strong Conference

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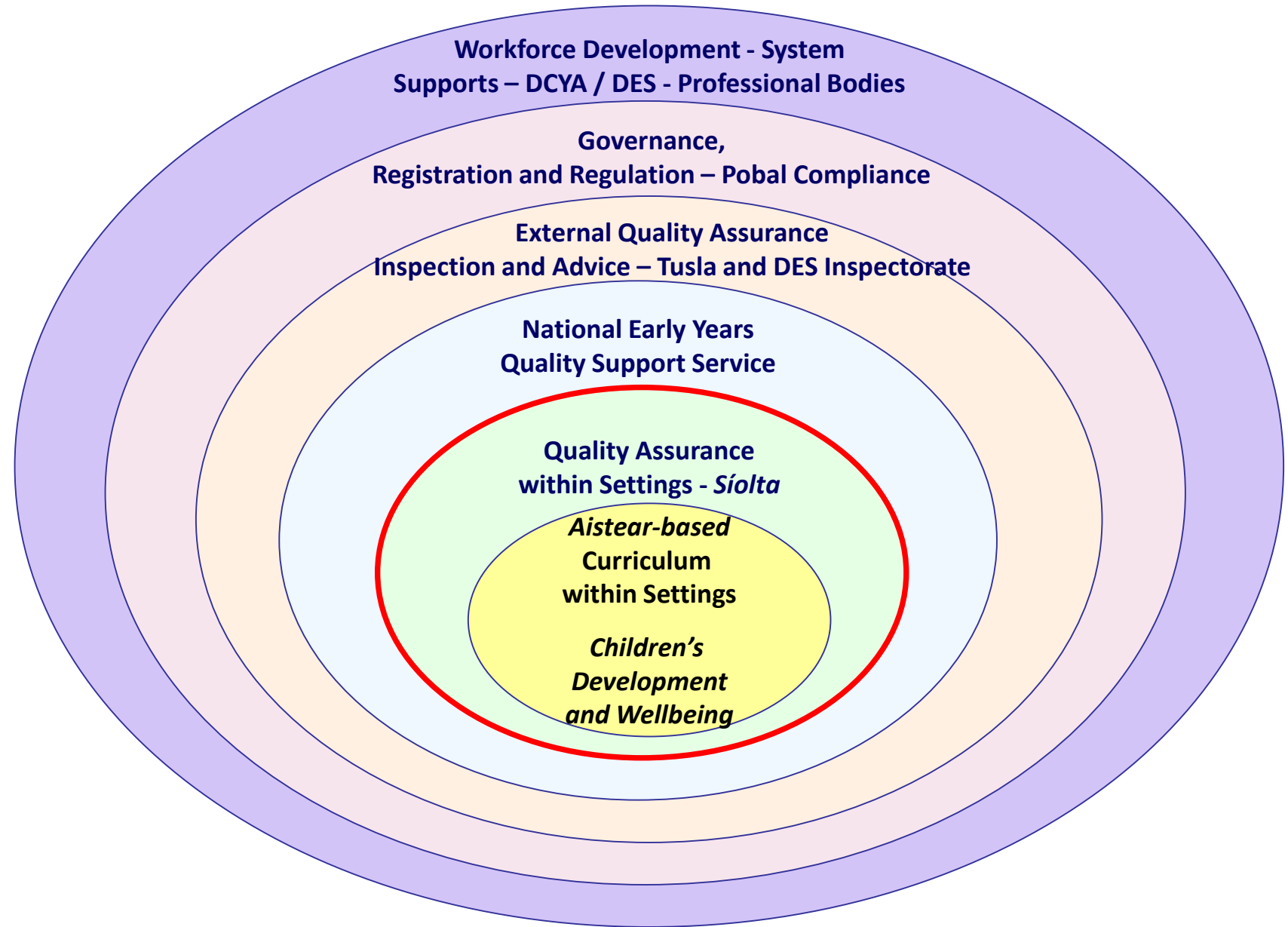
# COMPELLING MESSAGES ABOUT CHILDREN AS LEARNERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD — *Aistear – The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*

- ❑ Children are competent, confident and capable learners, able to make choices and decisions.
- ❑ They love learning about their world—why and how things happen the way they do. Children do this by interacting with people and things in different places.
- ❑ Children learn:
  - through their senses—seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling
  - by ‘doing things’
  - by playing
  - using language
  - in interesting and challenging indoor and outdoor environments
  - when they feel secure and loved
- ❑ *Early childhood is an important time for developing children’s ability to persevere, take risks and solve problems; to develop confidence and independence; to nurture their curiosity; and to develop an identity as a learner.*

# INTRODUCTION – BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- ❑ Shared interest of DCYA and DES in providing high-quality pre-school experience for all children ECCE, Early Start and Infant Classes
- ❑ Research on impact of Early Years education on later learning – compelling rationale for investing in quality support and quality assurance
- ❑ Early years learning highlighted as an area of focus by Government in the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2011
- ❑ Joint inspections with TUSLA Pre-school Inspectorate and DES Early Start evaluations show the importance of high quality educational provision in pre-school settings
- ❑ DCYA commitments set out in the quality assurance measures initiated by Minister Fitzgerald in 2013 and continued by Minister Flanagan and now by Minister Reilly
- ❑ Minister for Education and Skills and DES strongly supporting quality measures for Early Years

# The Quality Context: *Overview of Elements*



*.... historic developments in Early Years Policy, Structures and Support for Practice*

# EDUCATION FOCUS – PART OF THE EARLY YEARS QUALITY AGENDA

- ❑ Compliance inspections and data management by Pobal
- ❑ Tusla Early Years Inspectorate - New registration system for services - Developments in systems and procedures - National Quality Standards
- ❑ Education-focussed inspections by DES on behalf of DCYA in Pre School Year
- ❑ Workforce training funding for ECCE staff
- ❑ National Quality Support Service for Early Years Services
- ❑ New practice manual (*Aistear and Síolta*) for early years services

*.... alignment of education-focused inspection with other elements of the Quality Agenda will be essential*

# PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THE WORK OF THE INSPECTORATE

- ❑ Identifying, acknowledging and affirming the good practice that we see – a co-professional approach with practitioners
- ❑ Promoting a focus on high quality learning facilitated in settings
- ❑ Through recommendations arising from inspection visits advising the practitioners and the leadership and management of settings regarding next steps towards best practice
- ❑ Promoting internal quality assurance - self-evaluation and continuous development by staff and management (Síolta National Quality Framework)
- ❑ Providing an assurance of quality in relation to educational provision and practice - based on first-hand observation and engagement and the use of valid and reliable inspection processes

*.... **Co-professional dialogue** and two-way engagement with practitioners in ECCE settings will be a foundation stone of the relationship between the Inspectorate and centres... and with the wider groups of Early Years stakeholders*

# QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATION-FOCUSSED INSPECTIONS – *in development for consultation*

## OBJECTIVES OF EDUCATION-FOCUSSED INSPECTIONS

- ❑ Central purpose is to support development and improvement in the quality of the learning in ECCE pre-school settings (within the 0 to 6 Early Years Continuum)
- ❑ Evaluation Framework based on extensive research of Early Childhood quality assurance systems across the world
- ❑ An education-focussed evaluation model rooted in the Early Years' sector – based on evaluations developed for Early Start settings
- ❑ Use appropriate norms for young children (age 3 to 4) in the care and educational context of pre-school settings
- ❑ Four Quality Areas incorporate 20 main Quality Outcomes
- ❑ In January 2015 we will initiate a consultation process on the evaluation framework and inspection procedures – involving all stakeholders

# QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATION-FOCUSSED INSPECTIONS (DRAFT)





**Area 1**  
**Quality of  
support for  
children's  
learning and  
development**

**1**

A context that nurtures children's learning and development

**2**

Responsive, reciprocal and sensitive relationships

**3**

Children's sense of identity and belonging is nurtured

**Area 2**  
**Quality of  
provision for  
learning and  
development**

**4**

Provision is informed by the *Aistear* framework

**5**

The environment and resources support development and learning

**6**

High quality interactions with children

**7**

Play-based approaches are central

**8**

Emergent language and numeracy skills are fostered

**9**

Learning and development is progressive and sufficiently challenging

**10**

Children learn within an inclusive environment

Area 3  
Quality of  
children's  
learning  
experiences and  
achievements

11

Information about the children's development informs next steps in learning

12

Children are motivated, interested and engaged in their learning activities

13

Children enjoy their learning

14

Children have a sense of **belonging** and of their own **identity**

15

Children **communicate** experience, ideas and feelings with others in a variety of ways

16

Children make sense of their world by interacting with others through playing, investigating and questioning

**Area 4**  
**Quality of**  
**management**  
**and leadership**

**17**

Planning, evaluation and review enhance experiences and outcomes for children - *Síolta* framework

**18**

Leadership and management provide for a high quality learning and development experience

**19**

Clear channels of communication between the ECCE Setting and parents and children

**20**

Transitions into and from the setting are managed effectively

# PROMOTING QUALITY THROUGH EDUCATION-FOCUSSED INSPECTIONS

## SHARING WITH YOU WHERE WE ARE CURRENTLY WITH THE DRAFT INSPECTION MODEL

- ❑ Inspections conducted in 24 Early Start settings were unannounced to benefit from visiting settings on an authentic pre-school day
- ❑ There was a focus on advising and supporting personnel in settings to enhance the quality of educational provision
- ❑ Most of the evaluation time was spent observing children engaged in learning and development activities and interacting with them
- ❑ Relevant documentation relating to learning was reviewed
- ❑ Professional dialogue and a feedback meeting was facilitated with staff and leader

# THE INSPECTORATE'S TEAM FOR EDUCATION FOCUSSED INSPECTION

- ❑ A team of 10 early years inspectors will be recruited by the DES Inspectorate early in 2015
- ❑ The early years inspectors will have qualifications and experience in early years education and care and relevant leadership experience
- ❑ This team will join experienced inspectors on our staff currently who have assigned responsibility for early years evaluation work as part of their work
- ❑ The team will be deployed across the Inspectorate's five regions
- ❑ There will be extensive training and induction in evaluation work
- ❑ The evaluation model and procedures will be refined through piloting in ECCE settings in the period up to July 2015 and through consultation
- ❑ A significant tranche of evaluations will be implemented in 2015/2016
- ❑ Reports will be published in order to inform parents and to provide a measure of public accountability – in line with what happens in schools
- ❑ Inspections are likely to be one-day events involving one or two inspectors depending on the size of setting.

## NEXT STEPS - CONSULTATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

- ❑ January 2015 - we will initiate an open consultation on the evaluation model and procedures – and give stakeholders a voice in shaping the model
- ❑ We will work very closely with Tusla and with Pobal and the National Early Years Quality Support Service to align our work fully
- ❑ Common purpose around children's learning that helps to develop a quality culture and greater professional capacity to facilitate learning in ECCE settings
- ❑ Taking account of context and diversity of provision in supporting a journey towards excellence for all... *... understanding that this will take time to achieve*
- ❑ Commitments regarding our professional standards, codes of practice, and entitlements of practitioners to factually verify our judgements and to respond.

*We look forward to working with you as co-professionals  
... with a strong focus on learning and development for all children*