

Start Strong

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Government needs to prioritise young children.

Start Strong, an advocacy organisation campaigning for young children's care and education, today called on the Government to prioritise young children in the forthcoming budget and financial plans. Start Strong is also urging the Government to commit to developing a long-term national plan for children's early care and education in Ireland.

Speaking ahead of the launch of Start Strong's report *Children 2020: Planning Now, for the Future*, director Ciairín de Buis said that Ireland needs to prioritise young children in the December budget and the forthcoming 4-year financial plan. "Young children should not pay the price of bad investments made by bankers. Cost-benefit analyses of early childhood supports have shown a return on investment of up to 16 times the cost, with much of the return being to the State. That's an investment worth making," she continued.

Start Strong calls on the Government to prioritise young children, and in particular to **maintain the Free Pre-School Year**, which was a major step forward in the development of early care and education in Ireland. The scheme already has a participation rate of 94%, showing that parents vote with their feet when they can access affordable care and education for their young children. Overall Government spending on young children has dropped drastically in the last few years. We cannot afford to let it drop any further, according to Start Strong.

A recent CSO survey found that 60% of households in Ireland do not have access to high quality, affordable childcare in their community. The OECD has also found that childcare costs to families in Ireland are amongst the highest in the world.