

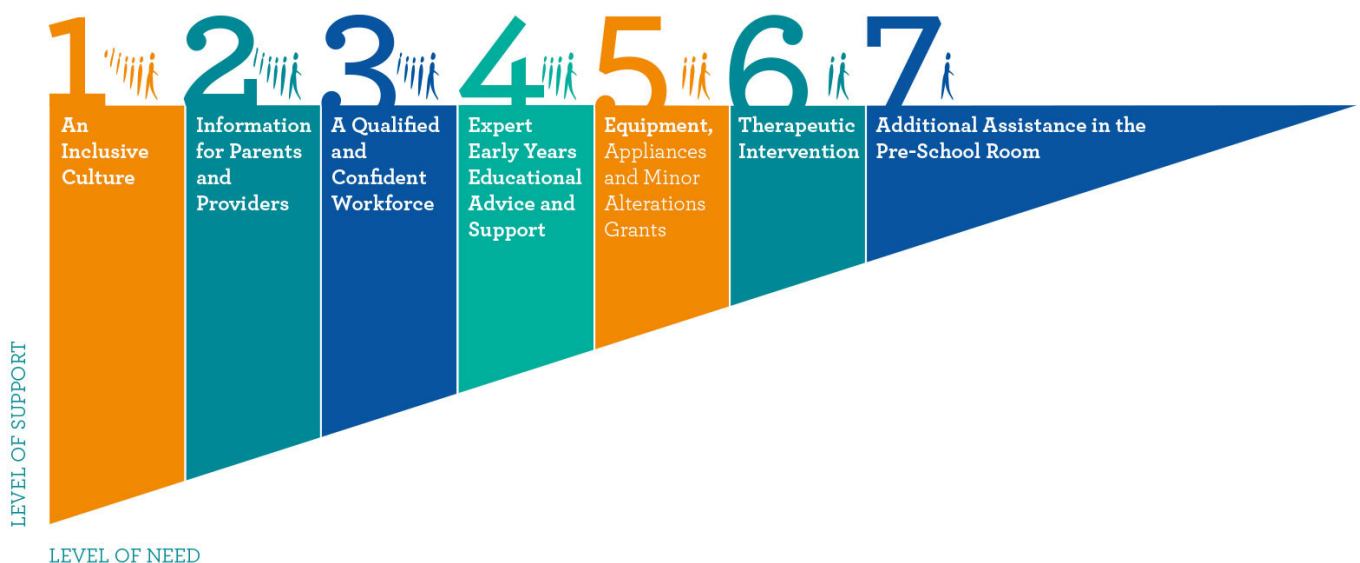


Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)



The Access & Inclusion Model (AIM) was introduced in June 2016. AIM is designed to ensure that children with disabilities can access the [Early Childhood Care and Education \(ECCE\) programme](#). The model's goal is to empower Early Years settings to deliver an inclusive preschool experience, ensuring that every eligible child can meaningfully participate in the ECCE programme and benefit from Early Years care and education.

AIM is a child-centred model and involves seven levels of progressive support. These move from universal to targeted, based on the needs of the child and the preschool service. AIM offers tailored and practical supports based on need and does not require a formal diagnosis of disability.



Eligibility

To access AIM supports for an individual child, the child must be registered on the ECCE programme in a registered setting or be able to avail of the ECCE programme and be registered and approved for the Community Childcare Subvention Plus (CCSP) scheme.

CCSP was replaced by the [National Childcare Scheme \(NCS\)](#) in 2019. For those who benefitted from CCSP before that date, and chose not to transfer to NCS, CCSP remains as a 'legacy scheme'. Where a child avails of the NCS and the ECCE programme, the child can only avail of AIM during ECCE programme hours, up to 15 hours per week.

Universal Supports

Levels one to three of AIM are universal supports. These benefit the whole preschool environment by empowering settings to create a more inclusive culture. This is achieved through Continuous Professional Development (CPD), an Inclusion Charter and guidelines for preschools and a level 6 qualification in Inclusion for staff.

The first level of universal supports is Inclusion Coordinator Training. The Leadership for Inclusion in Early Years Care (LINC) qualification is a level 6 special purpose award for Early Years educators. This qualification allows them to become Inclusion Coordinators in a preschool setting. Inclusion Coordinators are there to provide leadership within the Early Years setting in relation to issues of diversity, equality, and inclusion. Where a service provider is a fully qualified Inclusion Coordinator or employs a fully qualified Inclusion Coordinator in their setting, that provider will qualify for an increase of €2 per child per week in ECCE capitation.

The second level involves providing up-to-date and consistent information for parents and providers to plan and prepare for a child's enrolment and participation in preschool. To meet this need, a national website (<https://aim.gov.ie/>) was developed to act as a single, comprehensive information resource.

The third level involves CPD and provides three courses in the areas of disability and inclusion. *Hanen Teacher Talk* takes place over three days and educates providers on how to enable young children to develop language and literacy skills. *Lámh* is a manual sign language system used by children and adults with intellectual disabilities and additional communication needs. The final course is the *Sensory Processing E-Learning programme* which helps providers support children with sensory processing difficulties.

Targeted Supports

Levels four to seven are targeted supports that cater to a wide range of abilities. They are focused on the needs of the child and do not need a diagnosis of disability. For many children, AIM universal supports will be sufficient to ensure inclusion but some may require further supports to ensure that they can participate meaningfully in the ECCE programme.

Level four of AIM is delivered by the Better Start Early Years Specialist Services. The Early Years Specialist works with parents, providers and with other professionals to develop inclusive learning environments in preschools. Better Start also provides coaching and

mentoring to the staff in a setting on how best to support children in the ECCE programme. If a child requires additional assistance to meaningfully participate in preschool, Better Start staff can give advice about applying for other targeted supports.

Level five involves specialised equipment, appliances, or capital grants towards minor building alterations to guarantee a child's meaningful participation in preschool. Examples of these can include a hoist, a hearing aid, or a wheelchair ramp. Providers are given free training on how to use the equipment.

Level six supports involve therapy services. AIM provides services in collaboration with the HSE under therapeutic supports. These services can be either universal or targeted. Universal services involve the provision of leaflets or other supporting information, whereas targeted services are individualised and could include behaviour support plans, classes, equipment, professional advice, or preschool visits.

Level seven of AIM provides additional funding to settings that have a child requiring extra support. This funding can either be used to reduce the child-to-adult ratio in the preschool room or to fund an extra staff member as a shared resource with other children in the preschool setting. From September 2022, services can avail of a rate of €160 per week to supplement their staffing by ten additional staff hours per week. They can also avail of a rate of €240 per week to supplement their staffing by 15 hours per week. Previously, these were €140 and €210 per week, respectively.

Early Childhood Ireland's Work

Early Childhood Ireland welcomed the increase in AIM funding that was announced in June 2022. Our [Budget 2023 Submission](#) sought further changes to the model.