

General Election 2024

First Things First

Early Childhood Ireland is calling on the next government to set a date by which Early Years and School Age Care graduates will be brought within public sector pay and conditions, in line with teachers.



Early Years and School Age Care helps to lay the foundation for children's futures. It is a vital public good. Major advances have been made in the last five years. There are essential developments, which are well advanced, in funding reform, workforce planning and Childminding. Each of these needs to continue under the next government, supported by additional investment and proper capacity planning, both locally and nationally. The next government will need to spend an additional €1.5 – 2.5 billion to bring the Irish system in line with other wealthy countries.

Early Childhood Ireland believes that every child in Ireland deserves high-quality experiences which should be their right and which is the norm elsewhere. In most OECD countries Early Years educators are required to hold a bachelor's degree or equivalent, as it is recognised that qualifications are significantly correlated with higher quality Early Years and School Age Care environments.

First Things First – Prioritise Staffing

Despite increased investment and a new wage setting mechanism, staffing remains the most significant and enduring challenge. It is a daily concern for most of the 4,483 Early Years and School Age Care settings in communities across Ireland. Average staff turnover stands at 24% and recruitment remains an ongoing pressure point.

According to a major review of the Early Years and School Age Care system, an additional 15-20,000 staff will be needed by 2028. Yet, despite thousands of students participating in degree-level Early Years courses each year, many pursue careers elsewhere because their prospects working in settings are still quite poor.

The Indecon review also identified the need for the system to increase capacity and there are already thousands of children on crèche waiting lists throughout the country. Any expansion in places – which is so badly needed – will be hampered, unless Early Years and School Age Care settings can attract and retain highly skilled and motivated staff whose pay and conditions align with their qualifications and experience.

Parity with Primary Education

Graduates in Early Years education are competent professionals, providing high quality care and education to children. Their counterparts in primary school are appropriately compensated and have secure career paths in permanent and pensionable jobs.

The next government can show its commitment to 330,000 children and their families, by guaranteeing parity of treatment between Early Years and School Age Care graduates and their equivalents in primary education. A vital first step is to name an early date by which these professionals will be brought into the public pay system, and to lay the groundwork for this to happen successfully.

As well as deserved recognition, this commitment would also improve stability within the Early Years and School Age Care system, provide greater transparency for public investment and support affordability for parents.

Alongside the annual Employment Regulation Order and the implementation of the vital workforce plan, Nurturing Skills, this first step by a new government would be transformative for our society. It would place Ireland beside those countries where there are guaranteed places for every family, lower levels of child poverty and greater gender equality. It is a social and economic win-win.

To move closer to a publicly funded model, and to elevate the status of Early Years and School Age Care to that of Primary education, Early Childhood Ireland is calling on the next government to set a date by which Early Years and School Age Care graduates will be brought within public sector pay and conditions, in line with teachers.

Early Childhood Ireland urges every Party and every Independent candidate standing in the general election to agree to take this first step which is a giant leap for Ireland's future.

About Early Childhood Ireland

Early Childhood Ireland is the leading national children's advocacy and membership organisation. We work in partnership with Early Years, School Age Care and Childminding settings to ensure that every child is thriving and learning. We advocate for an effective and inclusive system which values, supports and invests in childhood, children and services.

Tel: 01 405 7100
Email: info@earlychildhoodireland.ie
www.earlychildhoodireland.ie

