

New childcare plan to give €80 a month to parents of under-3s ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

All parents will be able to avail of new childcare subsidies from September including an €80 per month allowance for children aged between six months and three years of age.

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs Katherine Zappone launched a new website - <https://www.buddlenurseries.co.uk/> ^[3] - to provide information about the More Affordable Childcare scheme outside Leinster House on Tuesday.

Parents of a child aged between six months and three years in full-time registered childcare can avail of the non-means tested subsidy of €80 per month.

There will also be increases of up to 50 per cent in subsidies provided by the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) Programme which helps disadvantaged parents, those in education or in low paid employment to avail of childcare at reduced rates for children aged between six months and 15 years.

From September there will be four different eligibility bands under the scheme, instead of three, with subsidies now ranging from €50-€145 per week.

If the child is under six months, some parents may qualify for a means-tested childcare subsidy of up to €145 per week. This was previously set at €95.

Parents who wish to apply for the childcare scheme are asked to contact their chosen childcare provider or local City/County Childcare Committee (CCC).

"This is a very good day for parents and families and children," Ms Zappone said.

"For decades, several Governments of all political persuasions have struggled to come up with an equitable way to make childcare more affordable.

Training

Currently, parents can avail of the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme or the Training and Employment Childcare(TEC) Programme.

This provides childcare subsidies to parents on community employment schemes or attending training courses, with allowances currently ranging from €80-€145 per week. The Department said these subsidies will remain "largely unchanged".

Parents with children aged between three and five and a half years can currently avail of the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme whereby a pre-school service is provided free of charge for a set number of hours each week.

On top of this, children under the age of six receive free GP care while parents receive children's allowance (€140) until the child turns 18 if they remain in full-time education.

An extra €19 million was provided in budget 2017 for the additional investment in childcare, which is expected to benefit up to 70,000 children and their families.

Investment

Ms Zappone said she believed the scheme would help parents who wish to return work while indicated she would aim to get further investment in the next budget to address issues raised by childcare providers.

"The primary issue the childcare providers are raising with me have to do with their pay as well as their working conditions...What I want to do is increase the amounts of money to be provided to crèches and early education and care centres so that they can pay a little bit more for the non-contact time they have with children," she said.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs said the More Affordable Childcare Scheme ensured a continuum of childcare support from

six months old through to school.

“Parents have been paying all of it out of their own pockets up to when the free pre-school year kicked in.

“The free pre-school year is not about subsidising childcare, it does help, it’s more about preparation for setting out for school. Up to now there hasn’t been a universal support available for the under-threes,” said a spokesman for the Department.

However, Catherine Walsh, spokeswoman for Stay at Home Parents Association said the scheme was “of no help at all to stay at home parents.”

“We feel that it is focused towards one group of parents and comes at a cost towards that those who decided to stay at home to mind their children,” she said.

“It seems to be that we’ve been overlooked completely and I don’t know if that was a personal crusade of sorts...We do feel that the measures going forward have all been focused towards centre-based childcare.

“People who are shift workers are another group who are ignored here. Not everyone can avail of a crèche.”

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

Britain

The British government has committed to give working families 30 hours free childcare for three and four year-olds from September - twice as many as they currently receive.

It also announced the Tax-Free Childcare Scheme last March whereby the government will contribute 20p for every 80p that parents spend on care costs each year. This is the equivalent of the 20 per cent tax most pay on their earnings - hence the name ‘tax free’.

The government has recently committed itself to investing £6billion each year for childcare until 2020.

Sweden

Educare is a nationwide network of subsidised preschools that provide childcare and education for children of working parents from the age of one.

While preschools in Sweden typically operate between 6.30am and 6.30pm daily, many have extended hours to accommodate shift workers including nights and weekends.

Children from the age of three receive 525 hours a year free of charge.

Finland

Since 1996, all children in Finland under the age of seven have had the right to subsidised full-time day care provided by local authorities, if their parents choose to avail of it.

This entitlement was controversially reduced last August to part-time only for families where one parent is at home caring for another child or has been unemployed for more than two months.

No family has to pay more than €290 a month to have a child in day care with fees less for lower income households.

-reprinted from Irish Times

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Links

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