

What is the impact of out-of home integrated care and education settings on children aged 0-6 and their parents? ^[1]

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Excerpt

This report looks at research that assesses the impact of out-of-home integrated care and education settings on children aged from birth to six. Integration is currently a topical issue in the field of early childhood provision, but there is considerable confusion about how and why integration should be pursued, and what works in what contexts. Arguments for integration include: - the benefits to children of receiving consistent care and education in the same place and at the same time, rather than the disruption of moving between different provisions; - the benefits to parents of the comparative simplicity of these arrangements; - the cost-effectiveness of single provision. In many European countries, it is conceptually problematic to present the care and education of young children as separate because they are simply not distinguished from each other. It might be more appropriate to represent integration of care and education as a continuum, with the UK, where childcare and education have been treated as distinct in policy and in practice, representing one extreme. Childcare in the UK, where it exists, has been 'wrapped around' a standard two-and-a-half hour education offer for 3-4 year-olds. Attempts are now being made to change this situation, and to offer 'integrated' provision in 'children's centres'. However, 'integration' is an umbrella term that encompasses many different meanings. It may refer only to different types of services working alongside one another, in adjacent spaces, loosely coordinated, but without any fundamental change of approach; or it may mean a coherent service equally accessible to all potential users, with a common costing, staffing, health, pedagogic and curricular framework for all provision. It may also mean combining care and health provision, rather than care and education provision. These are the issues that this review set out to clarify. Most of the research literature is framed within one of three particular approaches: the effects of day care on children and their mothers; the effects of various kinds of educational curricula; and the effects of intervention on multi-risk families.

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