

Irish childcare settings will be inspected on their quality of education ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Making the announcement last week on Budget 2015, Ireland's minister for children and youth affairs James Reilly revealed that early childhood settings participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE) will in future be inspected on their quality of educational provision.

Under the ECCE, also known as the free pre-school year, children aged over three years and two months and less than four years seven months are entitled to a free childcare place.

The inspections, funded by a £60m boost in capital to Ireland's education budget for 2015, will be carried out by qualified early years inspectors, of which there are currently five, with plans to have a total of 49 in place by the end of the year.

The move follows campaigning by early years organisation Start Strong to move from compliance-only inspections carried out by public health nurses together with environmental health officers, to inspections carried out by qualified and experienced early years professionals.

Speaking last week, Mr Reilly said that the education-focused inspections will be based upon best practice in early years settings in Ireland and abroad, and will concentrate on a number of key areas including:

- quality of provision for children's learning and development;
- quality of children's learning experiences and achievements;
- quality of management and leadership for learning.

They will aim to promote continuous improvement in early childhood education settings.

The Irish Government is to consult with early years providers and members of the public on the plans to move to education-focused inspections.

While Start Strong welcomed the news, it raised concern that only settings participating in the Free Pre-School Year programme will be inspected under the new regime.

A spokesperson for the organisation said, 'This new focus on children's learning and development is extremely positive. However, there is a real danger that the Government is falling into the trap of assuming that the Free Pre-School Year is educational while other early years provision is not.'

The minister for children and youth affairs also announced during Budget 2015 that the new National Quality Standards for early years services will be published shortly.

The Standards will provide the basis against which services will be inspected and reported.

Region: Europe ^[3]

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