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ETI: Promoting Improvement in the Interest of all Learners



Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education  
Department for the Economy  
and other commissioning Departments



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## 1. Introduction

1.2 In 2014, the Minister for Education authorised funding through Extended Services (ES) to the voluntary and private pre-school sector to provide parity with Extended Schools funding in the statutory school sectors.

1.3 The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) were commissioned in 2015 to assess the quality of the outcomes achieved using ES funding as a part of the routine inspection process in eligible pre-schools.

1.4 The findings in this report are based on evidence gathered during inspection visits to 13 pre-school settings between January and June 2016. The inspection evidence was based on first-hand observations, reading relevant documentation made available by the pre-school and discussions with the staff, leadership and management. The allocation of funding to each pre-school in the cohort which received an inspection visit varied significantly from £825 to £8,875 over a two-year period.

1.5 The inspection visits focused on how effectively the pre-schools:

- identified, planned for and implemented their proposed interventions;
- monitored and evaluated the outcomes for the children;
- worked in partnership with others in the delivery of the interventions; and
- planned to sustain the improvements in the provision to support underdeveloped social, emotional or communication and language skills.

## 2. Key findings

- All of the pre-school settings are using the funding in line with the associated Department of Education (DE) guidance to support and develop the key areas of developed social, emotional, physical or communication and language skills that are foundational for all other learning for pre-school children. This is a highly relevant focus for the children living within areas of high deprivation<sup>1</sup>.
- The funding is being used to provide a wide range of additional education and learning services or activities that would not normally be funded from the Pre-school Education Advisory Group allocation, with no additional fees or charges being placed on parents for the additional services or activities.
- The training being provided to staff as part of most of the interventions is building the capacity of staff to support more effectively the children's language and communication skills, emotional development and self-regulation of their behaviours.
- The additional resources purchased through the additional funding are enhancing the learning environment and providing better opportunities to develop the children's language and communication, social skills and sensory experiences.

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<sup>11</sup> 51% or more of pre-school children (in funded places) drawn from a Neighbourhood Renewal Area or the 30% most disadvantaged wards/Super Output Areas using both the NISRA Multiple Deprivation Measure or Education Domain Measure; and/or 37% or more of pre-school children (in funded places) who would have a Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME).

- In the best practice (38% of pre-schools inspected), developing effective partnerships with the parents is a key element of the intervention work. In these pre-schools, the parents are being equipped through workshops and resources to build on the work within the pre-school and support further their child's learning and development at home. In particular, they report a greater confidence to implement strategies to support positive behaviours and language skills in their home environment.
- While there are direct benefits to the children in all the pre-schools receiving ES funding, there is variation in the overall effectiveness of what is being provided. Good or very good use is being made of the funding in a majority of the pre-schools. The remaining 47% have important areas for improvement in aspects of the planning, delivery and monitoring of the outcomes for the children.
- Identification of which aspect of the children's needs will be targeted through the funding is good or better in almost all of the pre-schools. The guidance from DE on a limited choice of key areas has been helpful in keeping staff well focused. In the most effective practice, the leader consults widely with staff, parents and feeder primary schools and in addition takes account of advice from relevant professionals and inspection reports in order to identify the most relevant priorities.
- The outcomes of the funded interventions indicate improvements in developing effectively aspects of the children's language and communication and social skills are good or better in 61% of the pre-schools. In particular, better social interactions and collaboration between children during their play; increased expressive and descriptive language and communication skills and more interest in exploring books.
- The additional resources purchased are contributing to more language-rich learning environments within the pre-schools. In the best practice, the staff training is implemented effectively to maximise the learning potential of the additional resources to help children to self-regulate their behaviours and emotions and promote well the children's language development.
- Despite the DE guidance highlighting the need for settings to align the use of the extended services funding with priorities identified in their development plan, the strategic planning is not effective in over 61% of the pre-schools. In a minority of pre-schools, the leaders plan effectively through consultation, taking account of relevant advice and guidance and aligning their use of ES funding with current priorities and the associated staff development required. The lack of strategic planning leads to elements of the interventions being less effectively delivered and sustained.
- There is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the intervention and the outcomes for the children to assess the effectiveness of the interventions and inform further improvements in over half of the pre-schools. In the best practice, the staff make good use of a range of tools to monitor the outcomes for the children and the parents. These include questionnaires, meetings with parents and observations of the children to track the impact of the resources and strategies on the quality of the learning and feedback from the pre-schools early year's specialist.

- While DE are particularly keen to encourage pre-school settings to work together with other pre-school/primary settings in providing extended services, almost all of the pre-schools had limited evidence of any partnerships working in the delivery of extended services. Those pre-schools with existing links through clusters reported it was helpful to discuss their ideas with other leaders. Key reasons for not working together more substantially included time available for staff to plan and develop links and lack of geographical proximity to other pre-schools with extended services funding. In the best practice, two playgroups delivered their training and workshops for staff and parents together providing value for money in sharing the venue and cost of training. There was also the added benefit of a cross-community link involving both the staff and the parents.
- None of the pre-schools chose to use the funding to meet any additional costs associated with an existing member of staff's involvement in the delivery of extended activities outside of the normal pre-school day.
- In the most effective practice, a majority of pre-schools, the use of the ES funding has elements which will provide a sustainable benefit to future intakes of children. The training is increasing the capacity of staff to promote more effectively the children's language and communication and social skills, and the resources purchased enhance the learning environment and experiences. In the very best practice, effective communication with the parents and the primary schools allows a continuity of the strategies and approaches that have been developed.
- Factors which impact negatively on the sustainability of improvements include poor strategic planning, missed opportunities to engage parents, a change of leadership or significant turnover of staffing and less effective advice and support from their early years specialist.

### 3. Recommendations

- **The leadership and management of pre-schools** need to improve their strategic leadership and to plan more strategically to maximise the benefits of ES funding for the children.
- The **early years specialists** need to take more consistent account of ES funding in their support, training and feedback.
- The processes for monitoring and evaluating the impact on the children's learning and development needs to be improved and implemented **in most pre-schools**.
- The most effective practice identified through this report should be disseminated and used to bring about improvements by **ETI and DE**.
- **DE** needs to review and amend any guidance to take account of the findings and instances of best practice.

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