



Association of Childhood Professionals
The Professional Body Representing Practitioners in
Early Years and School Age Care & Education

The Association of Childhood Professionals says 'NO!'

Statement on Education-Focussed Inspections of Early Years Settings

While the Association of Childhood Professionals welcomes the fact that this government has finally recognised the need for an inspectorate comprising of experienced early childhood graduates, we are advocating to our members and other childhood professionals to say no to the recently announced education-focussed inspections of early childhood settings. This is a further layer of inspection that has no statutory basis and is replicating roles already in existence thereby wasting valuable resources that could be used elsewhere to increase quality and sustainability in our profession.

All childhood professionals are in agreement that children are entitled to high quality care and education. We also agree that for this to happen there needs to be an appropriate regulatory framework and a supportive inspection system.

We have been assured by TUSLA officials that the current inspectorate is fully qualified to inspect centres to monitor compliance in accordance with the Child Care Regulations 2006, including Regulation 5 which states that

A person carrying on a pre-school service shall ensure that each child's learning, development and well-being is facilitated within the daily life of the service through the provision of the appropriate opportunities, experiences, activities, interaction, materials and equipment, having regard to the age and stage of development of the child and the child's cultural context.

Inspection under this regulation includes monitoring the quality of educational experiences that the child is receiving in each service.

The DES and the DCYA state that education-focussed inspections will centre on the following key areas:

Quality of provision for children's learning and development
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements
Quality of management and leadership for learning.

A key focus of these inspections will be to

... promote continuous improvement in early childhood education settings. The inspections will seek to affirm good practice and to provide sound advice and recommendations for improvement.

The inspections will seek to foster professional dialogue with the practitioners and other personnel in each setting.

What then is the role of the Early Years Specialists who were recently recruited under the Better Start National Quality Programme and are currently being trained to

... work directly with early years services to build their capacity to deliver high quality early childhood care and education experiences for children and their families. ... and will work in partnership with the management/staff to develop and implement quality improvement plans across a wide range of areas of practice guided by the core elements of Síolta and Aistear.

The ACP is disappointed that consultation with the sector has not taken place prior to the development of plans by the DCYA and DES to recruit Early Years Education Inspectors by February 2015 and commencement of inspections for publication by July 2015. With such a tight timeline obviously much work has already been done to advance this proposal yet we, the professionals who are expected to engage in this process, are only hearing of it now. This does not augur well for meaningful consultation and working in partnership.

The inspection system in Ireland is not fit for purpose. The majority of the inspectorate are highly qualified and experienced public health nurses but by proposing these education-focussed inspections this government is demonstrating that they agree with childhood professionals that PHNs are not the appropriate personnel to monitor and support the implementation of the Child Care Regulations 2006.

The Association of Childhood Professionals calls on this government to stop the frantic development and imposition of new policies that are disjointed and lacking cohesion and are contrary to their own quality agenda.

We are calling for reform of the inspection system that draws from international best practice, is fit for purpose, employs appropriately qualified and experienced inspectors, instils sector and public confidence and protects the rights of children.

And finally, the ACP calls on this government to publish a draft National Early Years Strategy and to consult widely and meaningfully with childhood professionals to build a world class early childhood education and care system that is streamlined, efficient, cost effective and does justice to the rights of children, parents and childhood professionals alike.

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