

## **Outline of the General Terms and Conditions governing participation in the free Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme.**

1. Services must be notified to the HSE as a pre-school service and have a satisfactory level of compliance with the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No. 2) Regulations 2006. During the period January 2010 – August 2010, services registered with the Irish Montessori Educational Board (IMEB) will be considered to meet this requirement.
2. Participating children must normally be aged between 3yrs 3 months and 4yrs 6 months on the 1<sup>st</sup> September of each year. Exceptions will be allowed where children have been assessed by the HSE as having special needs which will delay their entry to school or it is appropriate to accept children at an older age due to the enrolment policy of the local primary school.
3. Services must have a minimum enrolment of 8 children in their pre-school year. Subject to compliance with all other contractual requirements, exceptions will be considered in the case of:
  - services which have an enrolment of at least 8 children but, for good reason, only 3 or more are in their pre-school year and the remainder will be eligible for a pre-school year in the following year, and
  - smaller services which are considered appropriate settings for delivery of the pre-school year but, for good reason, have an enrolment of not less than 5 children in their pre-school year.
4. Services must be trading as a sole trader, partnership, limited liability company or school Board of Management, and must demonstrate tax compliance by providing an up to date Tax Clearance Certificate.
5. Services must agree to provide an appropriate educational programme for children in their pre-school year, which adheres to the principles of Síolta, the national framework for early years care and education. Services will be supported in meeting this requirement through the assistance of Síolta Co-ordinators, funded for this purpose, and by their local CCC. Services must agree to accept assistive visits and advice from Síolta Co-ordinators and staff of the local CCC.
6. A pre-school year catering for 16 to 20 children, as appropriate to the setting, must be delivered by a Pre-school year Leader assisted by a childcare worker. Where a pre-school year caters for not more than 8 or 10 children, as appropriate, it must be delivered by a Pre-school year Leader. Pre-school year Leaders must hold a certification for a major award in childcare/early education at a minimum of level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications of Ireland (NFQ) or an equivalent nationally recognised qualification or a higher award in the childcare/early education field. During the first 2 full years of the scheme, the qualification requirement will be considered to be met where a person can demonstrate that he or she has achieved a certification for an award in ECCE that includes significant content relating to early childhood education/early learning and child development and has at least 2 years experience of working in a position of responsibility with children in the 0-6 age range.
7. Services will be paid in a capitation grant for eligible children enrolled and attending its service, at the start of each term or quarter, as applicable. They can participate in the scheme on the basis of a number of options.

A playschool sessional service will be required to provide a pre-school service for 3 hours per day, five days a week for 38 weeks (183 days) per year, in return for a capitation fee of €64.50 per week. (During January/June 2010, the capitation grant will be payable in respect of 23 weeks). *Where for good reason a sessional service is unable to operate over 5 days, consideration will be given to allowing it to participate in the scheme on the basis of providing the pre-school year for 3 hours 30 minutes per day for 4 days per week. In such cases, a service will be required to provide the pre-school year over 41 weeks (157 days) and references to 38 week services should be taken as applicable to these services.*

A full or part-time daycare service will be required to provide a pre-school service for 2 hours 15 minutes per day, five days a week for 50 weeks (241 days) per year, in return for the capitation fee of €48.50 per week. (During January/August 2010, the capitation grant will be payable in respect of 35 weeks.) *Where for good reason one or more children attend a full or part-time daycare service for 3 days a week only, consideration will be given to allowing it to participate in the scheme on the basis of providing the pre-school year to those children for 3 hours 45 minutes per day for 3 days per week. In such cases, a service will be required to provide the pre-school year over 50 weeks (145 days) and references to 50 week services should be taken as applicable to these services.*

Arrangements for the pre-school provision may vary as follows. A full or part-time service may choose to provide a sessional service over 38 weeks of a year (or 2 sessional services each day) while a sessional service may choose to provide 2 hours 15 minutes per day over 50 weeks. Where a service proposes to participate in the scheme by providing a 38 week service and a 50 week service, a separate application form should be completed in each case.

8. In all cases, participating services must operate the relevant pre-school provision free to parents in return for the applicable capitation grant and parents should be given access to the service where their child only attends the pre-school element of the service. However, services may charge parents for optional additions as follows:

- hours which are additional to the free pre-school year requirement. In the case of a full or part-time service, the service will offer additional hours to the pre-school provision which they will charge for. In the case of a sessional service, an additional 30 minutes per day may be offered as an optional addition which can be charged for. A part-time service within the 38 week model can offer up to 2 hours per day as an optional addition which can be charged for;
- optional additional services can also take the form of various one-off or on-going activities or services such as outings, birthday parties, specific teaching resources such as dance or music, and food.

*Note: Services must ensure that parents are informed that their agreement to additional hours or to any optional charge is not compulsory and that agreement is not a condition of initial or continued enrolment and appropriate programme based activities are provided to children not participating in an optional activity where this takes place during the required period of pre-school provision. Booking deposits may be required from parents provided this is not more than twice the weekly capitation fee applicable to the service and provided it is repaid to parents by the end of January 2010.*

9. All places provided under the scheme by a service must meet the requirements in terms of length per day, days per week and weeks per year. It is not mandatory that children attend every day, however services should prioritise places for children where parents indicate that they intend to avail of the place for at least 4 days each week. Services should not enrol children under the scheme on the basis of providing a part place (i.e. where more than 1 child share one place and each attends for a number of days per week), however, during January/August 2010 where a service already has children enrolled in part places (i.e. where more than 1 child share one place and each attends for a number of days per week), it may be accepted under the scheme on the basis of a pro-rata capitation grant (i.e. the grant will be calculated by reference to the total number of children attending each day rather than the total number of children attending per week). Should additional capacity arise in the service during this period e.g. a child leaves to take up a full pre-school year place in another service, the additional capacity must be made available to another child or children already attending the service.

10. Applications must be completed and returned to services' local City or County Childcare Committee no later than 10 July 2009. Services will be required to complete all contractual requirements and have a contract in place with the OMCYA by 25 September 2009. Contractual requirements will include requirements governing record-keeping, accounts, reporting and audit procedures. All approved providers will be required to submit a Fees Policy to the CCC at contract stage which demonstrates that, where children attend for more than the minimum hours, the capitation is used in full to reduce the fee charged for the additional hours. In January 2010, services will be required to make an electronic return to the OMCYA giving details of eligible children enrolled and for whom the capitation grant is being claimed.