

PRESS RELEASE



**An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige**
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

Minister O’Gorman welcomes 90% of early learning and care services into second year of Core Funding

- **Over 4,000 services have now applied for a second year of Core Funding, committing to working in partnership with the State for the public good, and to a fee freeze on parental fees.**
- **Uptake continues to increase, with applications remaining open for the scheme worth €287 million to the sector.**

14 September 2023

Roderic O’Gorman, Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, today announced that 90% of Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC) services have signed up for Core Funding.

Core Funding Year 2, which runs from September 2023 to August 2024, provides €287m direct State investment into services in return for a fee freeze, an increase of €28m (11% increase) on its first year.

This year the scheme will continue to support increases to capacity and accessibility for parents whilst also ensuring improved quality and sustainability of Partner Services. €7.22 million is allocated for targeted measures designed to support sessional and small Partner Services in particular.

Core Funding will be allocated based on the service’s capacity, with those services with longer opening hours and higher places receiving more funding. However, smaller services will also see a significant increase in publicly funded financial support.

Recent Tusla data shows that, following the introduction of Core Funding, closures of Early Learning and Care services have fallen to a five year low, while the overall number of Early Learning and Care and standalone School-Aged Childcare services is now increasing.

Welcoming the latest Core Funding application data, Minister O’Gorman said:

“I am delighted that 90% of services have chosen to come into partnership with the State by signing up for the second year of Core Funding, and I am encouraged that this number continues to grow. This substantial funding will promote the interests of children, their families as well as educators and practitioners while at the same time ensuring continued sustainability for providers, and supporting expanded capacity.

I look forward to working in partnership with these services and building on the successes of the new funding model, Together for Better, in the coming year.”

Commenting on the impact of the funding, Lelia Murphy, Crumlin Childcare Centre, says:

“The certainty that Core Funding has given my service has allowed us to improve staff’s pay and conditions and to consider expanding the service.

I see Core Funding as supporting the professionalisation of the sector, by improving pay and conditions and the training opportunities of staff, it has helped to demonstrate to both the staff themselves, but also to parents, the importance of early learning and care and that the first few years are a vital stage of a child’s life.”

Mick Kenny, Urlingford Community Childcare Centre, says

“For my community service, Core Funding has enabled us to budget for the year ahead meaning we have been able to give staff a well-deserved pay raise. As a service working in one of the most disadvantaged parts of Kilkenny, the staff are crucial to delivering child-centred care and it has been heartening to pass on the benefits of Core Funding to them.

While there is much more that needs done, particularly the Equal Participation Model and roll out of hot meals provision, Core Funding is a significant first step in the right direction for our sector and profession.”

More information on Core Funding, including a list of Partner Services for the 2023/2024 programme year which will be published shortly, is available at <https://first5fundingmodel.gov.ie/core-funding/>.

Another initiative in the range of measures to ensure that high-quality early learning and childcare is affordable and accessible to all children is the National Childcare Scheme (NCS). The NCS provides financial support to families for their early learning and childcare costs for children from 24 weeks to 15 years.

The NCS will be at the National Ploughing Championships in Rathineska, Co. Laois this year at the Government of Ireland Village, Block 3, Row 23, Stand 360. Expert Advisors will be on hand at the event from 19-21 September, to help with childcare queries and to discuss the range of early learning and childcare supports available to families. More information is available at <https://www.ncs.gov.ie/en/>

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Note for Editors:

Together for Better is the new funding model for the early learning and childcare sector that supports the delivery of early learning and childcare for the public good. It brings together three major programmes, the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, including the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) and the new Core Funding scheme. A fourth programme – the Equal Participation Model is under development.

The early learning and care sector saw a dramatic increase in funding through Core Funding, with €259 million allocated in the first year of operation. In Budget 2023, the Minister secured an additional €28 million for year 2 of Core Funding, which represents an 11% increase to bring the overall budget to €287 million. This new funding was allocated as follows:

- 8.47m towards funding the natural growth of the sector.
- €6.11m towards non-staff overheads, to support Partner Services with increases to non-staff costs while maintaining the fee management system.
- €2.2m towards administrative staff time.
- €4m towards the removal the year 3 requirement for the Graduates Premiums, underpinned by EROs. €7.22m for new targeted measures which are aimed at improving the sustainability of smaller and sessional Partner Services.

A new strand of sustainability funding remains available to all Partner Services who are experiencing financial difficulty, to ensure that all services can remain sustainable within the new funding model. As with previous strands of the Sustainability Fund, it focuses on the provision of operational as well as short term financial supports where appropriate, and will assist services in managing their immediate financial difficulties, providing advice to support their long term sustainability, while transitioning to a more sustainable model of service delivery.

Services who would choose to withdraw from Core Funding and remove the affordability benefits to their parents by increasing their fees are strongly encouraged to instead reach out to their local CCC to start availing of these supports.

**Issued by the Press and Communications Office at the Department of Children, Equality,
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