



INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (IECE) PROJECT

Curious Minds Preschool

An Inclusive Early Childhood Education provision that includes the age group 3 years to the start of primary schooling

Curious Minds Preschool provides early childhood education to 46 children, aged between two years and ten months and five years.

Accessible to all the diversity of children of the locality

Curious Minds Preschool is an accessible and inclusive service. It reflects the diversity of children and families living in the Castlebar area. Our admissions policy outlines our commitment to a diverse service. The management considers all enrolments annually in order to achieve a service that reflects the makeup of our local community. Some of the issues that the management reflects on in relation to enrolments are:

- Achieving an appropriate mix of children that reflects the cultural and socio-economic status of families in the community
- Access for children with a physical and/or intellectual disability.

An inclusive setting that welcomes diversity and provides support as part of the regular activities promoting participation and engagement of each child

Curious Minds Preschool is an inclusive preschool that welcomes diversity and provides support for each child and their family through the implementation of a contextually appropriate anti-bias approach. This approach is embedded in the everyday life of our service. The implementation of the anti-bias approach is based on our belief that all children have the right to participate equally in our service.

We believe that in order to meet children's individual needs, we need to work in partnership with parents and other local agencies involved with the child and family.

A provision that is subject to National Standards/regulation of inclusive early childhood education and care provision

We have achieved the highest quality level in Síolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education.



A provision that implements a holistic curriculum that promotes all aspects of children's development and learning including physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development

In Curious Minds Preschool, the foundations of our work are based on an anti-bias approach and the HighScope Curriculum Approach, which we also link to Aistear, the Irish National Curriculum Framework (2009). Our holistic curriculum approach is the basis from which we build on the children's interests and plan learning experiences that promote all aspects of children's development. We link all our work to the national Síolta Quality Framework (2006) and the national Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers (2006) to critically reflect on our practice.

Equipped with a skilled workforce with real opportunities for continuing professional development

Curious Minds Preschool has a dedicated, highly motivated and skilled team. Staff qualifications include a Higher Diploma in Early Childhood Education and a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education, while two members of staff are currently studying FETAC (National Framework of Qualifications) level 6 in Early Childhood Care and Education. Staff are encouraged to engage in both formal and informal training opportunities internationally, nationally and locally. Ann Halligan, one of the co-owners/managers, has incorporated Diversity and Equality and Persona Doll training into her work with children for over 20 years. Ann is actively involved in the Equality and Diversity Early Childhood National Network (EDeNn), where she trained as a diversity and equality trainer and has delivered this training nationally. The service is involved in the Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training (DECET) European network. Ann regularly provides in-service training to staff.

A provision that engages families as partners

In Curious Minds Preschool, parental partnership is crucial to our work. We believe that partnership with parents is critical to children's overall development and enjoyment in preschool. The stronger the relationship between home and preschool, the better the care children will receive in both settings. This is clearly outlined in our Parent and Carer Involvement Policy. There are a variety of opportunities for parents to be involved in activities within the setting, taking into account the range of parents' circumstances, interests and availability.

Some activities include regular meetings with their child's key worker, where we complete a 'Family History Questionnaire', participation in their child's 'Mo Aistear Book' (portfolio of children's learning over the preschool year), visiting the preschool to share and accurately celebrate important events in their children's lives



such as Eid, St Andrew's Day and Traveller Pride and also sharing information about their occupations/skills/interests and participating in the many preschool events that take place during the preschool year.

An IECE provision that addresses the issues of transition from home to IECE and from IECE to primary school

Curious Minds Preschool provides support to parents/guardians and children to assist in the transition from home into our service. This support begins before children start in our service as part of our Registration Evening. Families are encouraged to attend our Open Day with their children prior to starting in the service. The Open Day allows children to explore the preschool and meet the staff with their parent/guardian close by. When children first begin attending, parents/guardians are encouraged to spend as much time as they can to help their child settle. Parents are encouraged to bring in photographs of people who are important in their children's lives to build our 'family wall' which is at the heart of our playroom. The photographs are laminated and mounted on the wall with Velcro, at the children's level, so the children can take their pictures to proudly share with the group and also to comfort them when they are missing home.

To support the transition of children with additional needs into our service we organise protocol meetings with parents/guardians and the local early intervention team and all other relevant stakeholders. These meetings give parents and staff an opportunity to exchange key information about a child's individual needs and how the service can effectively meet these. We discuss the programme and experiences we already provide and what changes, if any, we need to make to ensure that every child can fully participate in all our daily activities in an inclusive environment.

We support children to transition into primary school through a number of methods. At the end of year we liaise with the local primary school to organise a trip to visit the junior infants classroom, teacher and pupils. This provides children with an opportunity to ask questions and become familiar with their new school. We complete an individual transition form for each child based on our observation throughout the year. We share these with parents/guardians and encourage them to add additional comments/observations they feel will help ease their child's transition into primary school. With the parents'/guardians' permission we meet formally with the teachers in the school to pass on information about children, children's interests, skills, knowledge and learning dispositions observed and documented during the preschool year so as to facilitate children's smooth transition into primary school. The basis of our work is to support the children in our service to reach their full potential. Our wish is that children feel confident and have a sense of belonging. We work to build children's sense of pride in themselves and



to have empathy with each other. Building a strong sense of identity supports children in their transitions.

Togher Family Centre

An Inclusive Early Childhood Education provision that includes the age group 3 years to the start of primary schooling

Togher Family Centre (TFC) provides early years education (EYE) to 100 children.

Accessible to all the diversity of children of the locality

TFC is open to all children in the Togher area.

To increase our accessibility, in 2015 TFC invested extensively to open a third early years setting. This project was undertaken to address the need for EYE in the Togher area and to ensure that all children who wished to avail of EYE could be accommodated. This demonstrates commitment and investment in community EYE.

An inclusive setting that welcomes diversity and provides support as part of the regular activities promoting participation and engagement of each child

TFC is open to all members of the community. The centre strives to accommodate children's needs, be they physical, emotional, social, educational or cultural. This is undertaken through continuous staff training, parental engagement and support, expertise and management.

A provision that is subject to National Standards/regulation of inclusive early childhood education and care provision

A provision that implements a holistic curriculum that promotes all aspects of children's development and learning including physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development

TFC deliver the aims of Síolta and the objectives of Aistear through the implementation of the HighScope model of EYE and the employment of structured and non-structured curriculum elements.

Equipped with a skilled workforce with real opportunities for continuing professional development

TFC is a learning organisation with staff development at its core. Staff have qualifications in a diverse range of topics including a Bachelor's degree in Early Years, a Master's degree in Management and a professional diploma in Bereavement and Loss, among others.

HighScope implementation.



Special needs education and many others.

Staff are encouraged to attend training courses as part of their work time and are facilitated to undertake training.

Staff are supported to engage in training at all levels up to doctoral degree within the centre and are encouraged to use the centre as a site for on-going research and development.

A provision that engages families as partners

TFC is a family centre and, as such, places the family at the heart of the learning experience for children.

This is implemented through regular formal and informal contact with parents throughout the year, including a schedule of parental activities designed to bring parents into the learning space using art, music, drama and literacy activities.

TFC has the capacity to provide additional support to parents who are vulnerable, including those who come to the centre through the referral process, those parents who have children with additional needs, and parents who require advocacy support.

An IECE provision that addresses the issues of transition from home to IECE and from IECE to primary school

TFC provides a range of actions which support children through transition.

This support begins with the provision of open night orientation for parents. It includes the support of parents through the transition to EYE. It includes extended settling-in periods for children who may have additional needs. It includes ensuring there is a high staff-child ratio to comfort and support a child.

At the other end of the educational experience of children, TFC engages in a 'school readiness' week. This supports children and parents to know what to expect when going to school, including information and support around healthy lunches, how to communicate with your child about school, etc.

TFC also runs a Youth Resilience project for children between the ages of 4 and 12. Many children from EYE continue to come to TFC and receive support throughout their educational life.