

## INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (IECE) PROJECT

### EXAMPLE OF IECE PROVISION: UK (NORTHERN IRELAND)

#### 1. Abstract

Larne is a town with a harbour which provides an important link for passengers and freight to ports in Scotland and England. In recent years, this once very prosperous town has seen some decline and a marked rise in unemployment. This, along with Northern Ireland's history of sectarian division, presents particular challenges for educationalists.

Corran Integrated Primary School and its Nursery School provision were both established in 1991 by parents who wished to take an important step to help heal the division in the local community. In 2011, the staff of the Primary and Nursery School joined with their partners in the Larne Early Education Partnership (LEEP) to take part in a Department of Education funded initiative (Pilot A). The Larne Early Education Partnership subsequently developed from this.

(<http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/surveys-evaluations/surveys-evaluations-special-education/surveys-evaluations-special-2015/an-evaluation-of-the-special-educational-needs-capacity-building-pilot-a-early-years-setting.pdf>)

Through LEEP, the staff gain confidence in addressing the specific needs of children with special educational needs (SEN), good working relationships are built, good practice is shared within and between different educational settings and provision is improved to support the children with SEN and the rest of the class.

The LEEP partners currently include: the local Sure Start programme

(<http://www.familysupportni.gov.uk/listing/sure-start-horizon-carrickferguslarne/>);

Roddensvale Special School Nursery; St Anthony's Nursery School; Corran Integrated Primary School Nursery Unit; Linn Primary School Nursery Unit; St Anthony's Primary School, St MacNissi's Primary School; Little Robins Playgroup; Harbour Bears Playgroup; Hansel and Gretel Playgroup; Glenarm Community Playgroup; and Rainbow Day Nursery.

LEEP provides opportunities for capacity building, staff development, sharing good practice and linking across the local community. Between meetings, settings share resources and facilitate staff swaps and job-shadowing opportunities.

Of particular benefit to the partnership is the specialist expertise of Roddensvale Special School staff, as is the opportunity to visit other settings. The main beneficiaries, however, are the local pre-school children, particularly those with SEN and their respective families.



## 2. Inclusive features

Since 1998, the Department of Education in Northern Ireland has provided at least one year of fully funded pre-school education for all children. Some children attend pre-school playgroups, other attend nursery units, others free-standing nursery schools and others (with SEN) a Special School Nursery. The fact that the provision of this partnership is accessible to children from all backgrounds is significant in the Northern Ireland context.

In each of these settings, an initial individual assessment of need is undertaken for each child. This is built upon by regular observations to monitor social, emotional, physical and cognitive development. All pre-school education settings are open to regular inspection by the local Health and Social Care Trust and the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), which report on the extent to which the children are safe and secure and also the extent to which the provision is in line with departmental guidance and appropriate to the children's needs, abilities and interests.

Under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (Northern Ireland) 2005, all venues providing a public service must have physical accessibility for all users – for example, for wheelchair users.

The Education Authority provides funding for learning assistants to support children with SEN in accessing their learning and to ensure they derive the maximum benefit from the daily activities in the provision.

Also, under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (Northern Ireland) 2005, there is a presumption of inclusion of children in mainstream education. Therefore, the majority of children with SEN are in mainstream schools. The opportunity for teachers to work alongside and learn from specialist teachers (from the Special School Nursery) is important, as is the benefit of being able to share specialist resources.

Apart from the individual assessment of need conducted within each setting, a partnership assessment of each setting's needs has led to the partnership drawing up an action plan for each of the settings.

All pre-school settings are obliged to adhere to Departmental pre-school curriculum guidance ([http://www.deni.gov.uk/pre\\_school\\_guidance\\_pdf](http://www.deni.gov.uk/pre_school_guidance_pdf)) and each setting is subject to regular inspection by ETI.

## 3. Inclusive highlight

A particular highlight of this provision is the multi-dimensional nature and scope of



it. In the divided context of Northern Ireland, this partnership brings children of all backgrounds together. Because all the provision is free of charge, there is no financial barrier; this is important in the Larne community, which has experienced a significant rise in unemployment levels in recent years.

The pre-pre-school interventions of the Sure Start programme help to ensure that support is provided as early as possible.

The educationalists in this partnership link also with health professionals. For example, the partnership's Parent Support Programme for Autumn 2015 includes sessions on: 'Healthy Meals on a Budget', 'Setting up Routines with Toddlers', 'Developing Language' and 'Positive Behaviour for Starting School'.

The Larne Early Education Programme is clearly child-centred and seeks to provide a continuum of provision which is matched to the diversity of need in the local community.

#### **4. Other evidence of quality IECE**

The Northern Ireland Education Authority has recognised the Larne Early Education Programme as an exemplar of good practice in professional collaboration to provide high-quality inclusive early childhood education. The Early Years Inclusion Service of the Northern Ireland Education Authority has filmed sessions, so that they can be shown to newly qualified teachers and to other practitioners in different parts of Northern Ireland who may be open to, or actively considering, similar collaboration to benefit the young children in their care.

The keys to the programme's success to date have been: its child-centred focus; systematic needs assessment (of children, of staff and of settings); the competence, enthusiasm and flexibility of staff (to work across different types of settings and beyond normal working hours); the strong commitment from the leaders of each educational setting; and the open communication and active collaboration on the part of all involved.