

Minister O’Gorman announces additional investment to support children with disabilities in pre-school care.

Additional funding for the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) secured by Minister O’Gorman in Budget 2021 will be made available from January. AIM payments to enable ECCE (free preschool) providers to reduce the adult-child ratio, to support inclusion of children within the pre-school room, will rise by 7% from €195 to €210 per week.

The Access and Inclusion Model supports the meaningful participation of children with disabilities in the ECCE programme. The ECCE State scheme provides 2 years of free pre-school for children between 2 years 8 months and school entry. AIM includes seven levels of supports for children and the pre-school, one of which funds services either to reduce the number of children in the pre-school room or to buy in additional assistance to enable a lower adult-child ratio. This assistance is a shared resource for the pre-school room, ensuring children with a disability can participate, learn and socialise with their peers in an inclusive and supportive environment.

Since AIM was introduced in 2016, over 11,000 children have benefited from lower adult to child ratios. This AIM support generally allows 2 qualified early education practitioners to work with each group of 11 children. Tens of thousands more children have benefited from the other supports available through the AIM programme.

Minister O’Gorman welcomed the increase in funding stating, *“Every child should have access to high quality early learning and care. Through the award-winning Access and Inclusion Model, we can support children with disabilities in accessing mainstream pre-schools and help pre-schools recruit and retain qualified staff to support inclusion. This increase in funding is a clear sign of my Department’s commitment to continue fostering an inclusive culture, one where all children are supported in benefitting from early learning and care.”*

The increased capitation will be paid to early learning and care services approved for AIM additional assistance support from the first week of January 2021. The 7% increase will align AIM capitation rates to current ECCE capitation rates, which were increased by 7% in September 2018.

For more information on the Access and Inclusion Model see www.aim.gov.ie

-----ENDS-----

Further information from: DCYA Media (contacts)

Note for Editors:

(i) The Access and Inclusion Model, AIM, provides a range of both targeted and universal supports, to enable children with disabilities to participate meaningfully in the ECCE free pre-school programme in mainstream settings. AIM helps pre-school services be more inclusive – benefiting all children.

(ii) AIM has entered its fifth year of operation. Over the last four years, AIM has provided 14,800 children with targeted supports, in over 3,600 services nationwide. AIM also funds training and CPD programmes for pre-school staff, and supports over 2,330 preschools to have *Inclusion Coordinators*, who focus on promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in the setting.

(iii) A one year review of AIM was published in 2019; a further evaluation of AIM's first 4 years of operation will be undertaken during 2021.