

Podcast transcript: *Introduction to Aistear*

Welcome to Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. Aistear is the new curriculum framework for all children from birth to six years in Ireland.

Aistear is the Irish word for journey. It was chosen as a title because early childhood marks the beginning of the lifelong learning journey we all set out on from the moment we are born. Children may take many different roads as they go, with each road bringing different and exciting experiences which help them to learn about the world they live in – the places, the people and the things around them. Aistear guides children’s learning and development as they set off on their adventurous journey as young learners.

Aistear is for all children from birth to six years. This means it can be used in the variety of out-of-home settings we have in Ireland such as

- childminding settings
- sessional services including playgroups, pre-schools and naíonraí
- full and part-time daycare settings such as crèches and nurseries
- and infant classes in primary schools.

Aistear can also be used by parents in children’s own homes.

The Framework gives practical information, ideas and suggestions to help practitioners and parents provide experiences that motivate and challenge children, are fun and exciting for them, and that help them to learn about the world around them.

In doing this, *Aistear* helps our youngest citizens grow up with a strong sense of well-being; proud of themselves, their families and their communities; confident and competent to share their thoughts, opinions and feelings; and curious to explore their surroundings, and to think about and find out as much as they can about how and why things work and happen as they do.

There are four components to *Aistear*.

- *Principles and themes* describes children’s learning and development.
- *Guidelines for good practice* focuses on different aspects of your work with children.

- *A user guide* gives practical information on how you might begin to use *Aistear* in your setting.
- And *Key messages* summarises important points from research used in developing *Aistear*.

The curriculum framework is based on 12 broad principles. Many of these are familiar to all of us who work with children from birth to 6 years. For example, there are principles on the uniqueness of each child, children as citizens, play, the importance of parents, family and community, the role of language and communication, and many others.

Aistear shares many of these principles with *Síolta, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* and also with the *Primary School Curriculum* for junior and senior infants.

Guided by these principles *Aistear* describes the types of learning that are important in children's early years, and offers ideas for what we as adults can do to nurture this learning. *Aistear* focuses on developing children's dispositions, such as curiosity, independence, perseverance, and playfulness, and skills like walking, climbing, cutting, and mark making. *Aistear* also nurtures attitudes and values like respect for others, care for the environment, and positive attitudes to learning and to life. Finally it builds children's knowledge and understanding of their world, for example by helping them to develop a sense of colour, time, shape and number, learning how things work and understanding that words have meaning.

Many of us use developmental domains to help us support all aspects of children's learning. Others such as primary school teachers use curriculum areas or subjects to do this. *Aistear* uses an alternative way. It describes what children learn using four interconnected themes. These themes are:

- *Well-being*
- *Identity and Belonging*
- *Communicating*
- and *Exploring and Thinking*.

The themes give lots of suggestions for activities and experiences that you can adapt to suit the children in your setting. Importantly, each theme connects with most if not

all of the developmental domains and the subjects in the Infant Curriculum in primary schools.

Aistear also includes guidelines which can support you in using the principles and themes when working with children. These guidelines describe and give examples of good practice in

- building partnership between parents and practitioners
- learning and developing through interactions
- learning and developing through play
- and supporting learning and development through assessment.

Each set of guidelines includes learning experiences. These are detailed accounts or stories of children learning together through particular activities or events. They describe what the children say, do and make and they also show the adult's important role in supporting and extending the children's learning and development. You can search these learning experiences according to the age group of children you work with, or the type of setting you work in or even the theme in *Aistear* that you want to focus on in your work.

Aistear builds on and connects with a number of other early childhood developments. These include:

- *Síolta*
- *The Revised Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations*
- And the *Primary School Curriculum*.

Síolta supports the improvement of quality in all aspects of early childhood practice, while *Aistear* focuses specifically on children's early learning and development. So there are many benefits in using the two frameworks together. For example, *Aistear* can help you to develop your practice in many of the *Síolta* standards such as curriculum, environments, partnership with parents and families, interactions, and play.

The *Revised Pre-School Regulations*, and in particular, Regulation 5, highlights the importance of facilitating each child's learning, development and well-being. With *Aistear's* focus on helping all children from birth to six years to learn and develop the

curriculum framework can help you to provide children with the experiences and opportunities to do this.

Aistear also has much to offer teachers working with junior and senior infants. For example, the four themes present ideas for planning for the integration of children's learning across the subjects in the Primary School Curriculum. Like the Infant Curriculum, *Aistear* also highlights the importance of children learning by 'doing' things. It gives particular attention to using play as a way of enabling children to do just this and offers lots of examples of how you might use different types of play in your infant classroom. *Aistear* also gives examples of using different assessment methods and interaction strategies with children at infant level.

Aistear is the outcome of much research, consultation, planning and development. The partnership between the NCCA and practitioners, children, parents, researchers, those in training and education, and policy makers has enabled us to develop a curriculum framework which builds on day-to-day experiences in early childhood settings in Ireland, and is informed by evidence and research.

Aistear sets out an exciting and challenging vision to which we can all aspire in our work, ultimately enriching the lives of all children from birth to six years. *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* is available at www.ncca.ie.