



An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs

National Quality Guidelines for School Age Childcare Services

Guidelines, Components and Elements



September 2020

National Quality Guidelines for School Age Childcare

This document is the output of the Working Group (see Appendix for details) set up by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in line with the first action identified in the Action Plan for School Age Childcare (2017) and is the fulfilment of the Working Group's remit.

The Guidelines, which comprise guidelines, components and elements, are intended to complement the regulations for school-age childcare services.¹ The purpose of these Guidelines is to assist and guide school-age childcare service providers and staff to reach beyond and aspire to achieving more than the minimum standards set out in regulations.



¹ Initial Regulations – the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Registration of School-Age Services) Regulations 2018 – came into force in 2019. Work has begun to develop comprehensive regulations that will, when they are finalised and come into force, replace the initial Regulations.

Minister's Foreword



It gives me great pleasure to publish the National Quality Guidelines for School Age Childcare Services, which will be an important resource for the diverse range of services providing school-age childcare in Ireland – both today and in the future.

This publication is the output of the Working Group set up by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in line with the first action identified in the Action Plan for School Age Childcare (2017). The Working Group brought together stakeholders and experts in school-age childcare. I would like to thank all the members of the Working Group for their dedication to the task and for their commitment to the advancement of high quality in school-age childcare services.

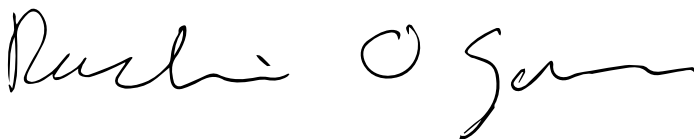
The publication comprises of guidelines, components and elements. It describes the features of a high quality service and is intended to show how services can go beyond the minimum standards that are specified in regulations. It is intended to be a practical tool, and it will form the basis of training and other supports to help school-age childcare providers to offer high quality services for children.

School-age childcare is a necessity for many families and a positive support for many children. It is a time for rest, relaxation and recreation, and – when it is high quality – it is also a place where children can grow and develop socially and emotionally, following their interests and widening their horizons.

The number of families accessing school-age childcare has seen significant growth and development in recent years, and I am committed to further widening the opportunities for after-school provision. These National Quality Guidelines will assist and guide school-age childcare services to reach beyond and aspire to achieving more than minimum standards set out in regulations. We have made much progress, but school-age childcare is still in the early stages of development and this publication can guide further progress.

I am very pleased that the Guidelines give central importance to children’s rights, child protection and welfare, equality and diversity, and environmentalism. I also warmly welcome the strong emphasis in the Guidelines on listening to the voices of children and working in close collaboration with parents, families and communities. Consultation has been a pivotal process at various stages in the development of these guidelines, including a consultation with children in 2016, a consultation with parents and providers in 2019, and a testing of the final draft Guidelines with a number of providers in 2020. I am publishing the report of the 2019 consultation process at the same time as these Guidelines.

My Department will continue to build on the Guidelines over the years ahead in the development of comprehensive regulations for school-age childcare and the development of training to support staff to deliver high quality services in line with these Guidelines.



Minister **Roderic O’Gorman** TD

September 2020

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Introduction

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs instigated the development of National Quality Guidelines for School Age Childcare services following publication of the inter-departmental (DCYA and DES) *Action Plan on School Age Childcare*, launched in 2017.

These quality guidelines are informed by evidence-based best practice in a range of countries, including Australia, New Zealand, the UK, and the USA. In addition, many organisations in Ireland, including County Childcare Committees, National Voluntary Childcare Organisations, and Mary Immaculate College have produced guidance documents and recommendations to support and improve the quality of school age childcare services.

Sectoral experts on school age childcare developed, reviewed and endorsed the seven areas of quality which underpin the quality guidelines outlined in this document.

The seven guidelines, which represent a benchmark of quality, underpin all aspects of service delivery. While the similarity of the content of some of the guidelines is unavoidable, they have been limited to seven areas to avoid any unnecessary overlap and excessive cross-referencing between the guidelines. A common thread running through the Guidelines is a strong focus on **the Rights of the Child, Child Protection and Welfare, Equality and Environmentalism**.

Definition of School Age Childcare

These Guidelines focus specifically on centre-based school age childcare and do not address school-age childcare in home-based settings (childminding). For the purpose of this document, school-age childcare is defined as:

Any centre-based service for school going children aged 4-14 years (inclusive), which operates during one or more of the following periods:

- Before school
- After school
- During school holidays



These services may be delivered in a variety of settings:

- Standalone services for school going children;
- Part of service provision offered by sessional or part time pre-school providers (e.g. where there is a pre-school morning session, and school age afternoon provision);
- Part of service provision offered by a full daycare/crèche provider;
- Aligned to a school.

Settings can include a wide variety of facilities - community halls, crèches/ daycare premises, pre-school premises, purpose-built stand-alone facilities, school premises, places of worship, libraries, etc. School-age childcare services may be managed in a number of different ways, e.g. by voluntary management committees, private individuals or schools. School age childcare services may or may not be in receipt of State or other funding.

School-age childcare services use a range of terms to describe the type of service offered: breakfast clubs, after-school clubs, out of school programmes, summer camps, etc. Occasionally, they are referred to as 'homework clubs'. However, it is important to note that homework-specific clubs are usually led by qualified teachers. They can be stand-alone, part of school provision, or operate from a school age childcare service. In these clubs, the main focus is upon homework completion and supporting children's formal learning. These homework specific clubs are distinguishable from 'homework support' provided as part of a school age childcare service, which is not seen to be the core activity of the service. In keeping with the definition of 'school-age services' in the Child Care Act 1991, homework-specific clubs do not come within the remit of this document.²

² The Child Care Act 1991 (Section 58A, as amended by the Childcare Support Act 2018) defines a 'school-age service' as a service for school-going children under the age of 15 that 'provides a range of activities that are developmental, educational and recreational in manner, which take place outside of school hours, the primary purpose of which is to care for children where their parents are unavailable' and that does not solely provide activities relating to the arts, youth work, competitive or recreational sport, tuition, or religious teaching.

School Age Childcare - Children's Voices Rest and Play

Article 12 (1) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) recognises that **'States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'**.

The child has a right to be heard and to have his/her opinions and views respected. The role of adults in supporting children to do this is not to be underestimated. Opportunities for consultation on a range of topics support children with decision making and participation.

The child's right to play is enshrined within Article 31, which recognises **'the right of the child to rest and leisure (and) to engage in play and recreational activities'**. Play, which *has the potential to improve all aspects of children's well-being: physical, emotional, social, and cognitive* (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005) is critical for all children. This commitment to, and recognition of the importance of play is reflected in the practice frameworks Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, and Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.

While both practice frameworks focus on children from birth to six years, the underpinning principles are just as relevant to the needs of older children. Síolta and Aistear therefore inform these Guidelines.

An effective school age childcare service recognises the **importance of play**. It offers children free time and loosely structured, fun activities that help children and young people to be creative, develop imagination and abstract thinking, develop or enhance leadership and social skills, self-esteem, interests and hobbies, conflict resolution skills and academic achievements.

Why National Quality Guidelines?

The development of National Quality Guidelines for School Age Childcare Services arose from a commitment in the Action Plan on School Age Childcare to develop quality standards for school-age childcare. Quality standards were proposed at the time the Action Plan was published in 2017 as regulations for school-age childcare were at that time conceived as a longer-term ambition. The introduction of the National Childcare Scheme on a statutory footing through the Childcare Support Act 2018 necessitated a change in this sequence. Initial Regulations came into force in February 2019, setting out legally enforceable minimum requirements for school-age services. To ensure a clear distinction between legal minimum requirements and the description of good practice, embodied in draft quality standards, the draft quality standards were re-framed as Quality Guidelines.

The implementation of National Quality Guidelines is a goal shared by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the Department of Education and Skills and members of the School Age Childcare Standards Working Group that developed the Guidelines.

The implementation of National Quality Guidelines by school-age childcare providers and staff is a hallmark of professional development, providing reassurance to parents and meaningful opportunities for children. Critically, it is to enable the school-age childcare profession to develop a shared understanding of quality as well as a common language and standardisation of practice.

The Overarching Purposes of the National Quality Guidelines are:

- a) To define the expectations of children/young people and their parents in the provision of all centre-based school age childcare services
- b) To develop and enhance the quality of school age childcare services
- c) To inform future funding development of the sector.

Key Principles Underpinning the National Quality Guidelines for School Age Childcare Services

The following seven principles underpin these Guidelines for School Age Childcare Services

1. Equality, diversity and non-discrimination are championed by staff and children

Equality involves a commitment to positive experiences for all children irrespective of their or their parent's or guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status. To achieve this, different groups may need additional supports.

Part of the adult's role is to prepare children for an ever-changing world. Understanding and acceptance come from genuine relationships with people of diverse backgrounds that allow for exchange of ideas and stories and, the celebration of various cultures and traditions.

Non-discrimination includes a right to equality of concern and respect in a supportive environment free of prejudice. The ethos and practice of a school age childcare service will value diversity and promote equality and non-discrimination.

2. Children have a right to express their voice, to participation and to play and rest

Children have a right to be heard on issues directly affecting their own welfare, with due regard to their age and maturity. Equally, children have a right not to voice an opinion. Children have a right to play and rest. Adults must respect this.

Ensuring that children and young people's rights are met means that they are enabled to exercise choice, have a voice in decisions that affect them and are considered active participants in their own development and learning.

It is important that children and young people have a central role and purpose within the service, have choice in how they spend their time in the setting, are encouraged to actively participate in programme development and, have opportunities for personal development within the context of appropriate boundaries.

3. Services adopt a holistic approach to child development, recognise the diversity of needs of children and build on children's strengths and abilities

A holistic approach recognises the social, emotional and physical needs, as well as the cognitive needs, of children and young people and their parents and families.

Different levels of need require different strategies to meet them, including strategies for children with additional needs and complex needs.

All children have strengths and abilities. Children grow and develop from their strengths and abilities. When children and those around them, including staff in school age childcare services, appreciate, understand and support the child's strengths and abilities, then the child is better able to learn and develop.

4. Parents are full and valued partners in school age childcare services and active participation of all parents is encouraged and supported

As full and valued partners in the service, parents are encouraged to develop a strong sense of ownership and connection with the setting. They are welcome in the service, and their support and assistance sought. Parents are involved in decisions that affect their children and supported in this role by the service. It is essential to support parents from a diversity of backgrounds to be involved in the service, and communication and dialogue with all parents is regular, open, two-way and meaningful.

5. School age childcare services offer a home-from-home environment that is child and young person-friendly

During out of school time, children and young people have opportunities and time to discover themselves. This works best when the space itself is not a barrier. It is essential that the SAC is a safe and exciting place where children and young people are encouraged to help create the environments. The emphasis is on creating a warm and welcoming environment; a 'home-from-home' setting, which is a well maintained physically inviting space that adapts in response to the needs and interests of the groups of children and young people using it. Having a variety of spaces, both indoors and outdoors, to cater for the needs of all age groups using the service is best.

6. School age childcare services need to support the representation and participation of school age children from a diversity of backgrounds

It is important to recognise a diversity of backgrounds of children and young people. This includes those experiencing poverty and social exclusion, at risk of early school leaving, experiencing bullying, mental health difficulties and/or special educational needs, children from migrant and ethnic minorities, children with disabilities and/or physical ill-health, asylum seeking and refugee children, children in care and LGBTI+ children.

Establishing and maintaining the processes and structures that ensure these groups' inclusion and participation in school age childcare services is critical.

7. Adults in school age childcare services play a crucial, facilitative role

A key role of the adult in a school age childcare service is to facilitate the initiative and ideas of children and young people, rather than to direct them. Facilitative adults encourage interaction among children and between children and adults, recognising that social interaction leads to discovery and application of great ideas.

Intentionality is the key to interactions between adults and children and young people. Intention is a determination to act in a specified way, or to do something by design. It is important that adults' interactions and actions with and for children and young people are intentional and thoughtful, to guide and support them as they grow.

Likewise, adults working in school age childcare need to be supported by their service to develop the skills and capacities to allow them to play a facilitative role, led by example.

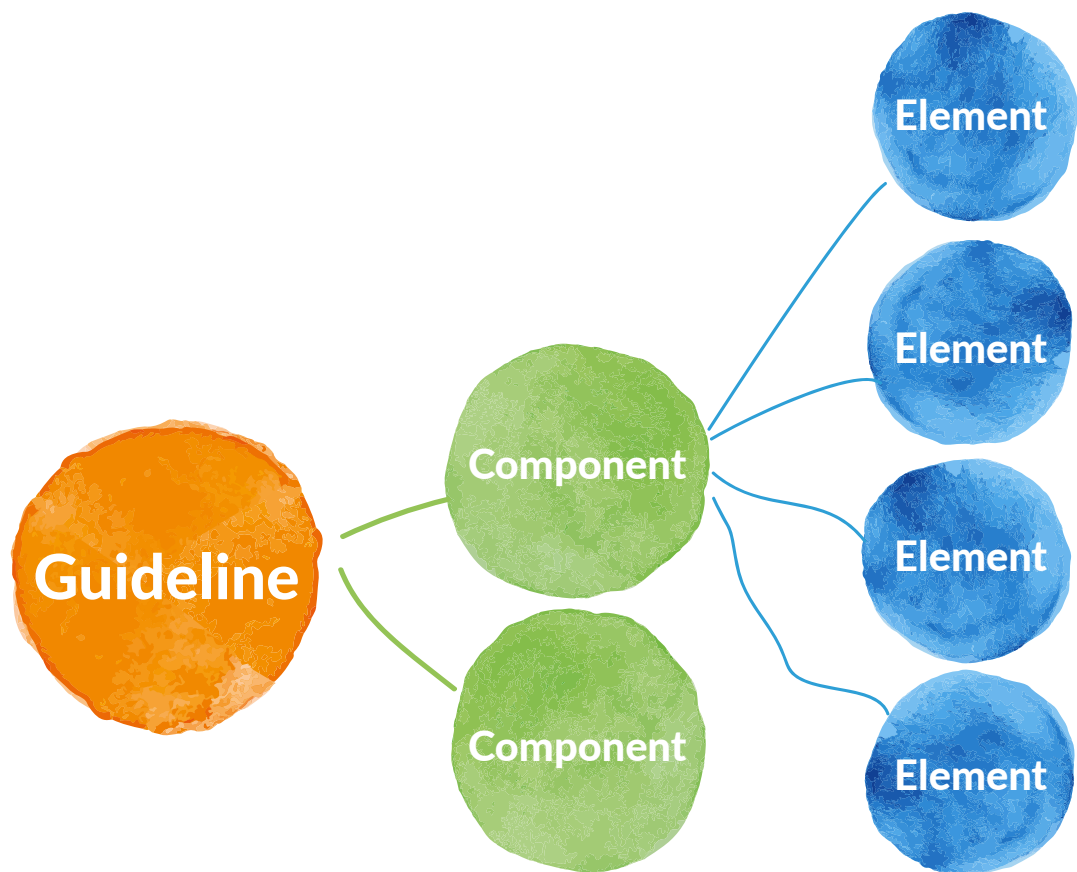


Working with the Guidelines

Guidelines - Components - Elements

Each of the seven **Guidelines** consists of **Components** and **Elements**.

Together, they cover key areas of practice that are fundamental to quality School Age Childcare provision. The **Components** break each Guideline into manageable parts, which are further broken down into **Elements**. These elements provide a detailed focus upon specific aspects of service delivery.



Guidelines
are set out
in chapters

Components
are the divisions
of each Guideline

Elements
contain the
detail

Cross Referencing is indicated in brackets (), where some areas of practice are interrelated.

School Age Childcare National Quality Guidelines

Figure 1:



Guidelines and their Components

Guideline 1. Leadership, Governance and Service Management

The success of the service is dependent upon having an effective, responsible and responsive management structure in place that ensures compliance with all applicable legislation, regulations and contractual requirements including in relation to health and safety, child protection and welfare, financial management, administration and human resource management.

Components

- 1.1 Children's Rights
- 1.2 Legislation, Regulations and Contractual Requirements
- 1.3 Ethos of the Service
- 1.4 Policies and Procedures
- 1.5 Management Structure
- 1.6 Documentation
- 1.7 Staff Supports
- 1.8 Quality Improvement
- 1.9 Grievances and Complaints

Guideline 2. Staff and Professional Practice

Management ensure, on recruitment and selection, that all staff have appropriate values, attitudes and dispositions for working in the area of school age childcare. Staff are equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and qualifications to carry out their role and responsibilities.

Components

- 2.1 Recruitment
- 2.2 Qualifications
- 2.3 Record Keeping
- 2.4 Reporting Responsibilities
- 2.5 Homework
- 2.6 Programme Planning and Implementation
- 2.7 Management and Staff Communication and Relations
- 2.8 Staff Professional Development

Guideline 3. The Environment

The environment is well maintained, safe, accessible and adaptable. It is equipped with a range of appropriately sized furniture to suit the various age groups attending the service. Equipment and materials are sufficient in number and carefully chosen to offer a variety of challenging and stimulating indoor and outdoor experiences. Children/young people are consulted about the environment and are involved in the review, evaluation and purchasing of equipment.

Components

- 3.1 Legislation and Regulation
- 3.2 Design, Layout and Organisation
- 3.3 Safety
- 3.4 Environmentalism

Guideline 4. Health, Well-being and Safety

Management and staff provide and maintain a safe, physically and psychologically, healthy environment for children and young people, staff, parents, visitors and volunteers.

Components

- 4.1 Legislation and Regulation
- 4.2 Child Protection and welfare
- 4.3 Risk Assessment
- 4.4 Fire Safety
- 4.5 Food Safety
- 4.6 Accidents, Emergencies and Illness
- 4.7 Health and Welfare
- 4.8 Supervision
- 4.9 Children and Young People's Involvement in Health & Safety
- 4.10 Well-being of Children and Young People
- 4.11 Food and Nutrition
- 4.12 Health Promoting Activities
- 4.13 Internet, Digital Media, and Mobile Phones



Guideline 5. Nurturing Relationships and Supportive Interactions

All children and young people attending the service feel welcome, secure and valued. Staff build warm, positive, collaborative relationships that support children's/young people's social skills, self-esteem, well-being and identity.

Components

- 5.1 Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion
- 5.2 Nurturing Relationships
- 5.3 Supportive Interactions
- 5.4 Developing Relationships with New Children/Young People
- 5.5 Key Person Approach
- 5.6 Listening to, Hearing and Responding to the Voice of the Child
- 5.7 Responding to Children's and Young People's Behaviour
- 5.8 Bullying Prevention Strategy

Guideline 6. Programme of Activities

The service provides a wide range of play, rest and recreation activities to meet children and young people's individual and collective needs and interests. Staff work collaboratively with children and young people to develop a programme that is rich in experiences and opportunities that support the holistic development of all children and young people.

Components

- 6.1 Planning for Play and Recreation
- 6.2 Programme of Activities
- 6.3 Play
- 6.4 Rest and Relaxation
- 6.5 Resources and Equipment
- 6.6 Supporting Children and Young People's Homework

Guideline 7. Collaborative Partnerships with Parents, Families and Communities

Collaborative and respectful partnerships and links with children and young people, parents, families, schools and communities are central to service provision.

Components

- 7.1 Partnerships with Parents and Families
- 7.2 Partnerships with Schools
- 7.3 Partnerships with Communities



School Age Childcare

National Quality Guidelines, Components and Elements

Guideline 1.

Leadership, Governance and Service Management

The success of the service is dependent upon having an effective, responsible and responsive management structure in place that ensures compliance with all applicable legislation, regulations and contractual requirements including in relation to health and safety, child protection and welfare, financial management, administration and human resource requirements.

1.1 Children's Rights

1.1.1 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, ratified by Ireland in 1992, underpin these guidelines, with particular emphasis upon:

- Best interests of the child/young person
- Non-discrimination
- Right to play
- Right to choice and participation
- Respect for the views of the child/young person

1.1.2 Services are underpinned by the rights of the child, having respect for each child/young person's individuality, integrity and autonomy.

1.2 Compliance with Legislation, Regulations and Contractual Requirements

Those managing and working in the service operate within the law, meeting all applicable legislation and regulations, as well as meeting contractual requirements, e.g. for State funding schemes.

1.2.1 Compliance with Regulations is critical. The initial Regulations in place for school-age childcare are the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Registration of School Age Services) Regulations 2018. Comprehensive Regulations are currently being developed.



The current, initial Regulations (which do not apply to temporary or drop-in services for school-age children) include requirements relating to the following:

- Registration (Regulation 5)
- Tusla's Register of Early Years Services (Regulation 6)
- Premises (Regulation 11)
- Changing the details on the Register (Regulation 7)
- Notifying Tusla if a Service Closes (Regulation 7)
- Providing Information to Tusla (Regulation 15)
- Staffing Levels (Regulation 9)
- Policies and Procedures for SAC Service (Regulation 10)
- Complaints about a Service (Regulation 13)
- Garda Vetting (National Vetting Bureau) (Regulation 8)
- Insurance Requirements (Regulation 12)

Other important Legislation includes the following:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding
- Employment Law
- Equality Law
- Health & Safety Regulations
- Food Regulations
- Infectious Diseases
- Tobacco Regulations
- Building and Planning Regulations
- Fire Regulations
- Toy Safety
- Finance and Taxation
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- Freedom of Information

This list is not exhaustive and professional advice should be sought, as legislation is continually being updated.

A service may also have contractual requirements that must be met, e.g. for State funding schemes.

1.2.2 The service has a designated person, within management, who is responsible for ensuring compliance with all relevant legislation making sure that the service is up to date with any new legislation, regulations or contractual requirements that may affect practice.

1.3 Ethos of the Service

The ethos underpinning the service is established and guides all aspects of practice.

1.3.1 The written ethos is reflected in the vision, aims, objectives and principles, defining the function of the service and statement of purpose.

1.3.2 The ethos is representative of the diversity of the service and the community.

1.3.3 The ethos forms the basis of practice through which policies and procedures promote positive interactions and relationships between staff/children and young people; parents/families; and between staff/ staff and management/staff.

1.3.4 The ethos is regularly reviewed and updated by the manager, in collaboration with staff, parents, children, young people and others as necessary (for example, schools).

1.3.5 All stakeholders, including children, parents, staff, volunteers, are made aware of the ethos of the service.

1.4 Policies and Procedures

A range of comprehensive policies and procedures are drawn up in consultation with staff, parents, children / young people and others where necessary. They are reviewed on a regular basis, at least annually, in line with any legislative or regulatory changes and made available to all those using, or intending to use the service.

- 1.4.1 The ethos underpins the policies, procedures and practice of the service.
- 1.4.2 Practices within the service are underpinned by documented policies and procedures that are consistently implemented, readily available at the service, and regularly reviewed and updated, at least annually.
- 1.4.3 Systems are in place to ensure all staff, parents and volunteers are aware of, and adhere to relevant policies and procedures.

See Appendix 1 for a list of recommended policy areas.

1.5 Management Structure

A clear management structure is in place that operates within the ethos of the service.

- 1.5.1 All parents are made aware of the management structure. The views of parents are sought, and taken into account by management either through committee representation or a consultation process.
- 1.5.2 The manager of the service has the necessary qualifications, skills and competencies to fulfil their role.
- 1.5.3 The management or manager has overall responsibility for all administration, financial processes and procedures, staffing, environment, equipment and activities.
- 1.5.4 Financial management systems are in place to ensure financial accountability and stability, and to ensure compliance with mandatory taxation and financial reporting requirements.

1.6 Documentation

Well-maintained records and clear policies and procedures are in place for the efficient and safe management of the service.

- 1.6.1 A system is in place for recording, upon arrival and when leaving the service, both children/young people and staff attendances and absence on a daily basis. (1.7.7)
- 1.6.2 Comprehensive enrolment records containing all relevant information for each child attending the service are kept, including:

- Name and date of birth of child/young person
- Name, address and contact details of parents/guardians
- Details of school attended by the child/young person.
- School drop off arrangements (if necessary)
- Authorisation for collection of the child/young person from the service (4.2.3)
- Emergency contact details
- Details of any illness, allergies, disability, medical needs
- Details of a child/young person's specific dietary needs
- Name and contact details of doctor
- Permission for administration of medication
- Permission for outings
- Permission for photographs, video, social media, etc.

1.6.3 Records and information are stored appropriately in line with Data Protection legislation, including the EU General Data Protection Regulation. Data protection rights apply where details are held on a computer, on paper, in the form of videos, digital recordings and photographs.

1.6.4 Records and information about individual children/young people are shared only with the child/young person's parent/guardian and are kept secure and confidential.

1.6.5 Children's, parents', staff and volunteers' personal details are kept only for clearly stated, lawful purposes. Their personal information is kept safe. Information stored needs to be factually correct, complete and up-to-date, and is to be changed or removed if it is not.

1.6.6 Children/young people, parents, staff and volunteers know if their personal details are being held by the service; know that they can request a copy of their personal information from the service; and know that they have a right to access these details.

- 1.6.7 Systems are in place to ensure that all grievances and complaints are addressed in a timely matter, investigated fairly and consistently, responded to and documented in accordance with the ethos, policies and procedures of the service. (1.9.3)
- 1.6.8 Records of staff recruitment, selection and personnel details (e.g. qualifications, Garda Vetting etc.) are properly maintained and stored in line with Data Protection legislation. (2.3.1)
- 1.6.9 Children/young people, parents, staff and volunteers know that they have a right to complain to the national Data Protection Commission if they believe that the service has not observed its obligations on privacy and data protection.

1.7 Staff Supports

All staff working in the service are supported to create safe, caring, interesting and fun environments for children, to develop and promote warm, respectful relationships with the children/young people, parents, staff, management and others as appropriate.

- 1.7.1 The management/manager ensures that a comprehensive induction process is conducted for all new staff, staff returning from extended leave, students and volunteers. (2.1.4)
- 1.7.2 A system is in place to ensure that each individual who begins work at the service has a clear understanding of their role and what is expected of them.
- 1.7.3 Appropriate staffing arrangements are in place to ensure the required ratios of staff to children are present to guarantee safe supervision, supportive relationships and to support the programme of activities with the children, including:
- Activity rooms
 - Outdoors
 - Outings
 - Transport
 - Community engagement

Outings, transport and community engagement – as per the service insurance requirements.

Regulations specify a legally required minimum adult-child ratio. Services must adhere to this ratio at all times. However, many services aspire to or implement a lower adult: child ratio

- 1.7.4 A staff support, supervision and appraisal process is in place to enable staff to discuss, and reflect upon their performance, and to work towards addressing any issues or concerns they may have in a structured and respectful way.
- 1.7.5 Regular staff meetings take place, which are recorded to ensure effective communication, and to promote the development of the team.
- 1.7.6 A staff roster is in place outlining who is on duty each day, including who is responsible for drop off and pick up for the various schools (where applicable).
- 1.7.7 A procedure is in place to cover and deal with staff absence.
- 1.7.8 A code of behaviour is in place for staff.

1.8 Quality Improvement

A system is in place to ensure quality development of the service.

- 1.8.1 Systems are in place to document self-assessment and quality improvement processes.
- 1.8.2 Staff are committed to, and responsible for continually reviewing and evaluating all aspects of service provision and practice, and contributing to the self-assessment and quality improvement processes within the service.
- 1.8.3 Children/young people, parents and staff contribute to the evaluation and review of the service and the programme of activities on offer.

1.9 Grievances and Complaints

An effective management system is in place to ensure that any grievance or complaint is addressed and dealt with in a timely and appropriate manner.

1.9.1 There is clear information, readily available and displayed in a prominent place within the service, for all stakeholders, on how to raise a grievance or complaint, and how they are managed by the service, including:

- Whom to make a complaint to
- Response time
- Process for investigation
- Process for sharing response/outcome
- Appeals process if unhappy with the outcome

1.9.2 All grievances and complaints are investigated fairly and promptly according to policy and procedure.

1.9.3 All grievances and complaints are documented and in accordance with confidentiality requirements. (1.6.7)

1.9.4 A system is in place to ensure children and young people know whom they can complain to and are aware of the procedure for doing so. Information on the complaints procedure is made available in child friendly language.



Guideline 2.

Staff and Professional Practice

Management ensure, on recruitment and selection, that all staff have appropriate values, attitudes and dispositions for working in the area of school age childcare. Staff are equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and qualifications to carry out their role and responsibilities.

2.1 Recruitment

Comprehensive and robust recruitment and selection policies and procedures are in place, taking account of all relevant employment legislation.

- 2.1.1 The service recruits staff and volunteers through a robust recruitment process, which includes Garda vetting (Police vetting if required), proof of ID, up to date CV and, at least two verified references, written and verbal, from reputable sources, including one from the most recent employer.
- 2.1.2 The service strives to recruit suitably qualified staff that are able to offer diversity within the staff team, informed by their background, experiences and skills.
- 2.1.3 Employment contracts are issued within one month of commencing employment (in keeping with employment legislation).
- 2.1.4 Management ensure that there is a comprehensive induction programme for all new personnel, with staff being strongly supported throughout the probationary period. (1.7.1)
- 2.1.5 Each member of staff has a clear job description.
- 2.1.6 Line management structures are in place, which include regular supervision, annual appraisal, performance management, and continuing professional development (CPD) appropriate to the development and age ranges of the children/young people in the service.

2.2 Qualifications and Training

- 2.2.1 The service employs staff with skills, experience, training and qualifications appropriate to their role and responsibilities.

2.2.2 Staff qualifications are in keeping with – or at a higher level than – qualification requirements that may be set out in Regulations.

2.3 Record Keeping

A system is in place to maintain and update staff, students' (undertaking work placements) and volunteers' personnel details in accordance with the data protection policy of the service, and in compliance with national Data Protection requirements. (1.6.3)

2.3.1 The service maintains full and comprehensive staff records for all those employed in the service, including:

- Proof of ID
- Employment history, as appropriate
- Two references, including from the most recent employer
- Garda vetting (Police vetting if required)
- Evidence of qualifications
- Contact details of next of kin
- Employment contract and job description/person specification

2.3.2 Student Portfolios are maintained to support those on work placement within the service including:

- Students' ID and contact details
- Introductory letter from the college
- College Tutor/Supervisor contact details
- Letter of insurance from the college
- Garda vetting (Police vetting if required)
- Two references, including from the most recent employer
- Record of staff - student support meetings

2.3.3 Policies and procedures are in place to guide and support students on work placement, as well as volunteers.

2.3.4 Management ensure all students/volunteers take part in an induction process.

2.4 Reporting Responsibilities

All staff have a clear understanding of the service's record keeping and reporting procedures regarding the maintenance of children/young people's records.

- 2.4.1 Staff complete all necessary records for individual children/young people, including day-to-day monitoring, evaluation, progress records, special events, use of equipment/environment, accidents/incidents/illness, etc.
- 2.4.2 There is a system in place to enable staff to pass on clear information to a child's/young person's key person (as appropriate). (5.5)
- 2.4.3 Systems are in place to ensure that staff communicate regularly with parents/guardians, keeping them informed of all matters concerning their child.
- 2.4.4 Management and staff are aware of their reporting procedures in line with the Children First National Guidance and the Children First Act 2015. (4.2.6)

2.5 Homework

There is no requirement for school age childcare settings to provide homework support. If the setting provides homework support this should be in agreement with children and their parents/guardians.

Staff understand and follow the service's policies and procedures regarding homework support.

- 2.5.1 A policy and procedure is in place for homework support, taking account of the following:
 - Maximum time allocated for homework (6.6.4)
 - Nature of homework supervision
 - Parental responsibility
 - Provision of a calm and quiet environment

- 2.5.2 This policy is shared and agreed with parents and children/young people.
- 2.5.3 Parents' expectations about homework completion are negotiated and agreed at the beginning of the year.
- 2.5.4 A quiet and calm environment is provided for all children/young people doing homework.
- 2.5.5 Homework support is balanced with other needs of the child/young person, including the need to relax, develop new skills, eat, engage in physical activities, and socialise.

2.6 Programme Planning and Implementation

Staff plan, implement and evaluate stimulating, challenging fun experiences and activities based upon children/young people's interests, needs and abilities, in collaboration with children/young people. (6)

- 2.6.1 Non-contact time is provided to enable staff to plan for play and recreational activities, as well as time to review and evaluate these as a staff team, and with children/young people.
- 2.6.2 Staff ensure that activities and experiences take account of opportunities for:
 - Relaxation and play
 - New interests, skills and hobbies
 - Socialising with friends or siblings
- 2.6.3 Both structured and non-structured activities are included in the programme of activities. The staff respond to opportunities for spontaneous activities, based on children/young people's emerging interests and needs.
- 2.6.4 There are opportunities for children/young people to have access to both indoor and outdoor activities, staff encourage and support children/young people to participate in physical activity.

- 2.6.5 Children/young people's health, well-being, learning and development is promoted by providing a diverse fun and exciting range of activities, based on their interests, abilities, talents and needs in consultation with them.
- 2.6.6 A diverse range of activities are offered to support children/young people to learn about themselves, their community and the world around them.
- 2.6.7 Staff observe and record children/young people's experiences and development, using observations, and documentation for example, to enhance and extend their experiences, and inform programme planning.
- 2.6.8 All children/young people are treated with fairness and consistency. Staff avoid favouritism in their relationships with children/young people.
- 2.6.9 Staff recognise and respect the values and beliefs, which result from the children/young people's cultural, ethnic and religious background.

2.7 Management and Staff Communication and Relations

Management, staff, students and volunteers support each other in their interactions, modelling mutual trust, respect, confidentiality and ethical practice.

- 2.7.1 Policies and procedures are in place to facilitate effective communication between management, staff and all other stakeholders.
- 2.7.2 A strategy is in place for clear communication with and between all team members.
- 2.7.3 All staff are aware of their individual roles and responsibilities.
- 2.7.4 Staff work collaboratively by sharing information, joint planning, evaluating and implementing the programme of activities. They also develop a shared understanding of how to achieve programme objectives.

- 2.7.5 Staff support and learn from each other through acknowledging diversity, personal strengths and each other's professional experiences, and/or qualifications/training.
- 2.7.6 The service has an anti-bullying policy in place to provide a statement on the expectations from staff and volunteers, address bullying in the workplace, and clearly set out the procedures to address bullying. All stakeholders are made aware of this policy. Regular audits, through support and supervision or ongoing review of staff's performance are conducted to ensure no bullying is taking place.
- 2.7.7 Anti-bullying procedures are fair and transparent, and allow for due process.

2.8 Staff Professional Development

The performance of all staff members is appraised. Individual development plans are in place to support staff with self-evaluation and reflection, ongoing professional development and continuous improvement.

- 2.8.1 Staff are committed to accessing ongoing training, information and development opportunities. Staff training needs are assessed and carefully planned and evaluated, and the impact of the training on practice is monitored.
- 2.8.2 The service has an effective system for identifying and supporting staff development needs. (1.7.4)
- 2.8.3 All staff attend and contribute to regular staff meetings. These meetings are recorded in writing.
- 2.8.4 Line Managers support staff and provide appropriate feedback and advice. (1.7.4)

Guideline 3.

The Environment

The environment is well maintained, safe, accessible and adaptable. It is equipped with a range of appropriately sized furniture to suit the various age groups attending the service. Equipment and materials are sufficient in number and carefully chosen to offer a variety of challenging and stimulating indoor and outdoor experiences. Children/young people are consulted about the environment and are involved in the review, evaluation and purchasing of equipment.

3.1 Compliance with Legislation and Regulation

The building and environment complies with all relevant legislation and regulation.

3.1.1 The premises is compliant with all legal requirements, including:

- Building and Planning
- Health, Safety and Welfare
- Fire safety
- Insurance
- Toilet and hygiene facilities
- Food Safety
- Heating, ventilation, and lighting
- Accessibility

This list is not exhaustive and legislation is continually updated.

3.2 Design, Layout and Organisation

The physical environment is welcoming and inviting. In line with the ethos, vision and, purpose of the service, Children/young people and families of all backgrounds and abilities are respected and, included.

3.2.1 The service takes into account various features including provision for: rest, relaxation, socialisation with friends, homework support, activity areas, physical play, access to natural environments, etc.

- 3.2.2 The indoor and outdoor environment supports and encourages children/young people's independence and autonomy in a safe and homely atmosphere, reflecting the informal nature of school age childcare services.
- 3.2.3 The environment is planned to respond to the different ages of children/young people attending, providing space for younger and older children/young people to engage in activities on their own or with friends or peers of similar or mixed ages as appropriate.
- 3.2.4 The design and layout provides for ease of movement between the indoor and outdoor environments. Children/young people are consulted about the design and layout of the environment to ensure it meets their needs and interests.
- 3.2.5 The indoor and outdoor environments are flexible and adaptable to support the interests, needs and abilities of all children/young people.
- 3.2.6 The indoor environment provides a range of areas where more than one activity, by an individual child/young person or a group of children/young people, can take place, supporting their choice and interests.
- 3.2.7 The outdoor space provides opportunities where children/young people can take an appropriate level of risk, supporting the development of autonomy, self-reliance and well-being. (6.2.6)
- 3.2.8 The outdoor space (where possible) embraces areas of nature and the natural environment, shade and activity areas, promoting children/young people's interests in their natural environment.
- 3.2.9 Careful consideration of use is given to other non-activity areas including lobby / entrance hall, storage facilities, toilets, kitchen and food preparation and dining areas.
- 3.2.10 Suitable number of accessible, separate toilet facilities are provided with access to a gender-neutral toilet for transgender children/young people. Girl's toilets should include the provision of sanitary disposal units in at least one cubicle. (5.1.8)
- 3.2.11 Designated areas for staff and parents are available, i.e. staff room, staff toilets, office space and parents' meeting area (where possible).

3.3 Safety

Buildings, outdoor and indoor spaces, furniture, equipment, facilities and resources are safe, well maintained and fit for purpose.

- 3.3.1 Health and safety policies and procedures include the security of all stakeholders in the service as well as the buildings and contents.
- 3.3.2 Risk assessments are regularly undertaken and documented to identify, reduce and eliminate any hazards associated with the service, either on site, or when engaging in outings. (4.3)
- 3.3.3 There is a system in place to manage and monitor access to the service, including maintaining a record of all visitors to the service.
- 3.3.4 All children/young people attending the service are appropriately supervised, with an adult in the room/area with groups of children/young people at all times. (1.7.3)
- 3.3.5 Off site activities are planned in advance, taking account of health and safety requirements and with due regard to the age/stage and needs of children/young people, including:
 - Insurance
 - Parental consent
 - Parent/guardian contact details as well as emergency contact details
 - Supervision: adult/child ratios as determined by Regulations and by the service's insurance policy
 - Children's records: register, medical requirements, food allergies and other relevant details
 - Transport: type of transport to be used
 - First Aid: first aid kit and person/s who is first aid trained



3.4 Environmentalism

The service takes an active role in caring for both indoor and outdoor environments and contributes to a sustainable future.

- 3.4.1 The principles of conservation (reduce, reuse, recycle) are observed and evident throughout the service.
- 3.4.2 The service promotes environmental awareness through activities with children/young people. (6.5.8)
- 3.4.3 Staff act as good role models in promoting and protecting the environment.



Guideline 4.

Health, Well-being and Safety

Management and staff provide and maintain a safe, physically and psychologically, healthy environment for children and young people, staff, parents, visitors and volunteers.

4.1 Compliance with Legislation and Regulation

All staff employed within the service address health, hygiene and safety issues.

- 4.1.1 The service has written policies and procedures taking account of legislative requirements that safeguard the health and safety of all those participating in the service, including children/young people, staff, parents, visitors and volunteers.
- 4.1.2 Staff promote and support children/young people to develop good habits with regard to hygiene and safety.
- 4.1.3 There is adequate insurance cover for children/young people attending the service.
- 4.1.4 There is adequate motor insurance for collections and the driver holds a valid driving licence, the vehicle holds a current NCT certificate and is roadworthy, and all children/young people are provided with seat belts and booster seats if necessary.

4.2 Child Protection and Welfare

Child Protection and welfare is central to all practices within the service. In line with legislation the service has a child safeguarding statement child protection and welfare policy and procedure and Child Safeguarding Statement.

- 4.2.1 All staff have a comprehensive understanding of, and abide by, the Children First Act, 2015 and National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017).
- 4.2.2 All staff have undertaken, and have access to on-going, training in relation to child protection and welfare. Training is refreshed every three years.

- 4.2.3 All staff understand their role and responsibility in meeting children/ young people's needs, and are vigilant in responding to, and following up on any concerns about a child/young person's welfare. The Child Protection and Welfare Policy clearly outlines the process for reporting child protection and welfare concerns (e.g., neglect or abuse) and dealing with disclosures in accordance with The Children First Act (2015).
- 4.2.4 A Designated Liaison Person and a Deputy Liaison Person are appointed.
- 4.2.5 The Child Protection and Welfare Policy is clearly communicated to parents/guardians and available to all stakeholders. (2.4.4)

4.3 Risk Assessment

Risk assessments are undertaken on a regular basis, the findings are recorded and any issues arising from the assessments are addressed. Hazards are clearly identified and managed. The service has a named person with overall responsibility to report directly to management.

- 4.3.1 The Risk Assessment Policy clearly states the person responsible, timing, frequency and plan of action for undertaking risk assessments.
- 4.3.2 All staff are actively involved and trained in identifying and managing risks and hazards. Where risks are identified, staff report them to management and take practical steps to manage them. Regular risk assessments are undertaken with regards to the following areas, including, but not limited to:
- Physical environment
 - Environmental, for example weather conditions
 - Activities
 - Equipment
 - Outings
 - Transport issues
 - Infection prevention and control

- 4.3.3 In line with Section 20 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, a safety statement is prepared, signed and displayed in a prominent place within the service. This identifies the hazards, assesses the risks, and identifies the controls to be put in place, the person/s responsible and the resources necessary to secure the safety of persons at work. (3.3.2)
- 4.3.4 Management/manager has an ongoing responsibility to ensure all relevant persons are aware of, and understand the Safety Statement.
- 4.3.5 The Safety Statement is reviewed at least annually or more often as the need arises.

4.4 Fire Safety

The organisation and implementation of effective fire safety is an ongoing issue to be addressed by the management and all staff in the service.

- 4.4.1 The service has written plans, policies and procedures for fire and other emergencies.
- 4.4.2 A designated fire officer is in place.
- 4.4.3 All staff and volunteers are trained in fire safety procedures.
- 4.4.4 Monthly fire drills take place with all children/young people and adults in the building. These are recorded and evaluated by management and staff.
- 4.4.5 All staff, children/young people, volunteers and parents are aware of, and understand the fire safety procedures.
- 4.4.6 Emergency procedures are displayed in a prominent place in the service, and the designated safe assembly areas are clearly signed. These signs are accessible/readable by all (available in different languages/braille etc.)
- 4.4.7 A register of all fire safety equipment is maintained.
- 4.4.8 All fire safety equipment is serviced at least annually, or to a frequency specified by manufacturer, and a record of the service is maintained.

4.5 Food Safety

The purchase, storage and preparation of food is in accordance with the national food regulations (see the website of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland). The service is registered with the HSE Environmental Health Department if providing food.

- 4.5.1 All staff handling food have training in the management and implementation of HACCP systems.
- 4.5.2 The service has comprehensive policies and procedures for the:
 - Receipt of food products from food suppliers
 - Purchase and transport of food
 - Storing and protecting food from contamination
 - Handling of food, preparation, including cooking, food processing, cooling and reheating food
 - Serving food

4.6 Accidents, Emergencies and Illness

There are comprehensive policies and procedures to deal with emergencies including children/young people or staff who become ill while in the service.

- 4.6.1 Plans are developed, practised and implemented to manage accidents and incidents effectively.
- 4.6.2 The service complies with Regulations in relation to First Aid training.
- 4.6.3 All staff have access to first aid training and there is a clear policy & procedure in place to up-date training.
- 4.6.4 Written policies and procedures are in place for managing children/young people who are unwell including:
 - Information for parents/guardians of their responsibilities for sick children/young people
 - Contacting parents/guardians if a child/young person is unwell or has an accident while attending the service

- Arrangements to care for a child/young person who becomes unwell or has an accident in the service
- Parental/guardian written consent to treatment, including administration of medication, seeking medical attention, etc.
- Parents/guardians understand their responsibilities should a child/young person become unwell or have an accident
- Records of treatment/medication administered

4.6.5 There is a fully stocked, in-date first aid box, appropriate to the number of children/young people and staff in the building. The first aid box is reviewed and updated regularly. A checklist of all contents is contained in the first aid box.

4.6.6 All accidents and incidents are dealt with in accordance with the accident and incident policy, recorded and shared with parents.

4.7 Health and Welfare

The service supports all aspects of children/young people's health and well-being. Children/young people are encouraged to take increasing responsibility for their own physical health and wellbeing. (4.9)

4.7.1 The service has a policy and guidelines for the exclusion of children and staff who have infectious diseases.

4.7.2 Information is available for staff, children/young people and parents/guardians concerning infectious illness/diseases, immunisation recommendations and exclusion periods.

4.7.3 The service has a clear policy and procedure for the administration of medication.

4.7.4 There is a procedure for communicating with the relevant authorities as well as parents/guardians if there is an outbreak of an infectious disease.

4.7.5 Professional advice and instruction is acted upon immediately, for example, closing the service in the event of an infectious illness.



4.8 Supervision of Children and Young People

It is the responsibility of the management to ensure appropriate staffing ratios are in place (1.7.3). The implementation of a key person approach ensures one staff member is accountable for every child (5.5).

- 4.8.1 Staff position themselves at a reasonable distance, but still have an overall view of the children/young people they are responsible for, so they can offer assistance and support as needed.
- 4.8.2 Staff are skilled at adjusting their levels of supervision depending on the area within the service and the skills, age mix, dynamics and size of the group of children/young people being supervised.
- 4.8.3 The environment, equipment, furniture and activities are arranged to ensure effective supervision while also allowing children/young people access to private and quiet spaces depending on their age and needs.

4.9 Children and Young People's Involvement in Health & Safety

The service supports the development of children/young people's understanding of health and safety by consistently setting good examples, offering clear explanations and modelling and teaching them about health and safety practices.

- 4.9.1 Staff role-model health and safety practices including good hygiene and self-care.
- 4.9.2 Children/young people are encouraged to learn and practise personal care routines, such as managing body odour, taking care of skin and hair, etc.
- 4.9.3 Children/young people are encouraged and supported to help each other, cooperate, and to take increasing responsibility for personal health, safety and well-being.
- 4.9.4 Children/young people are encouraged to discuss any concerns with staff members.
- 4.9.5 Children/young people are encouraged to be involved in health and safety practices e.g. reviewing and updating first aid kits. (4.6.5)

- 4.9.6 Children/young people are encouraged and supported to tidy away after themselves, take responsibility for personal belongings, and be involved in preparing meals in the service where appropriate, setting tables, engaging in tasks in the service, etc.

4.10 Well-being of Children and Young People

Children/young people feel welcome, secure and valued. There is a shared understanding of values and respect for all (children/young people and adults) within the service.

- 4.10.1 A code of behaviour is developed in partnership with the children/young people and parents/guardians, outlining strategies for supporting respectful interactions between individuals and groups. (5.6.5)
- 4.10.2 The service provides opportunities and experiences that help to build children/young people's confidence, increase motivation and help them to develop positive dispositions.
- 4.10.3 Information material is available to children and young people on mental health and wellbeing, sources of support, etc and staff are aware of the material available.
- 4.10.4 The service has an anti-bullying policy and procedures, with input from children/young people and parents/guardians, in place to prevent and raise awareness of bullying among the children/young people in the service and to investigate and deal with bullying. (5.8) (7.2.2)
- 4.10.5 The service adopts and supports an anti-bias approach that respects and acknowledges the diversity of the children/young people, parents/guardians and families attending. (1.1.1)
- 4.10.6 Children/young people are enabled to express their views and voice their opinions, where they choose to do so, in a respectful manner.
- 4.10.7 Staff communicate respectfully and appropriately with all children/young people, each other, parents/guardians, families, and other stakeholders using the service.
- 4.10.8 The dignity and privacy of children/young people is respected at all times.

- 4.10.9 Staff build positive relationships with all children/young people, parents/guardians, families and each other.

4.11 Food and Nutrition

The service provides appropriate food and nutrition, and promotes positive habits and attitudes to healthy eating and physical activity as part of a healthy lifestyle.

- 4.11.1 The healthy eating policy ensures a wide variety of well-balanced and nutritious meals, snacks and drinks of adequate quantity are provided.
- 4.11.2 A hot nutritious meal is provided for all children/young people who are in the service for a period longer than one hour, if needed.
- 4.11.3 Before-school services provide a nutritious breakfast, if needed.
- 4.11.4 Children/young people have access to food at different times during the day, for example, fruit bowl. Potable water is freely available at all times.
- 4.11.5 Children/young people have time and space to sit and enjoy their meals and snack times in the service.
- 4.11.6 Meal and snack times are seen as social occasions where children/young people and staff share positive dining experiences including preparation and table setting, taking time to interact, catch up, share stories and interests, etc.
- 4.11.7 Children's/young people's individual needs are taken into account, such as specific dietary, religious or cultural needs.

4.12 Health Promoting Activities

Healthy eating and health promoting activities are featured through a range of activities, which could include discussion, play, stories, music, poems, visits, cooking/baking/preparing food, research projects, newsletters, etc.

- 4.12.1 Staff support, consult and engage with parents/guardians regarding positive health promotion messages.
- 4.12.2 The service works with parents/guardians to support children/young people in adopting lifelong healthy eating attitudes and behaviours.

4.12.3 The service incorporates health promoting activities throughout their programme, for example, Dental Health Foundation, Healthy Ireland Smart Start.

4.13 Internet, Digital Media, and Mobile Technology

A safe and supportive internet environment is provided in the service. Children/young people are supported in developing awareness and responsibility, in relation to the appropriate use of the internet, digital media and mobile phones. Children/young people and parents/guardians are involved in developing policies and procedures and codes of practice regarding social media, mobile phones/tablets and screen time.

4.13.1 Staff and children/young people can access the internet in a safe manner.

4.13.2 A mobile phone policy is in place for both staff and children/young people.

4.13.3 A quality of screen time policy including, computer games, and television use is in place.

4.13.4 Parents/guardians, children/young people are consulted and involved about what digital and social media their child/young person has access to when in the service.

4.13.5 Staff create awareness and provide information in relation to cyberbullying and E-Bullying. (5.8.2)

4.13.6 All policies and procedures relating to children/young person's use of the internet, digital media and mobile phones are agreed with and shared with parents/guardians and children/young people.

Guideline 5.

Nurturing Relationships and Supportive Interactions

All children and young people attending the service feel welcome, secure and valued. Staff build warm, positive, collaborative relationships that support children's/young people's social skills, self-esteem, well-being and identity.

5.1 Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion

All children/young people feel valued and are free from discrimination and prejudice. Staff plan and create opportunities to help children/young people learn about equality, diversity, fairness and respect for others through their play, activities and interactions.

- 5.1.1 The service has a comprehensive Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy supporting the participation of all children/young people. This includes children/young people from identified minorities, regardless of their cultural background, ability or disability.
- 5.1.2 The staff promote culturally responsive and inclusive practices. Diversity, equality and inclusion underpin all aspects of practice within the service.
- 5.1.3 Positive attitudes are developed and encouraged. Staff challenge inappropriate practices and attitudes.
- 5.1.4 The staff incorporate content and materials reflective of the communities' languages and cultures for children/young people with English as an additional language, ensuring that all children/young people have equal opportunities to engage in one-to-one and small group conversations with staff.
- 5.1.5 Management and staff encourage respect for individual children's/young people's differences, and enable them to develop an understanding of themselves as being significant, respected and having a sense of belonging.
- 5.1.6 The values and beliefs of the children, parents/guardians and their families are respected and valued.

- 5.1.7 The service is committed to providing accessible services to children and young people with disabilities.
- 5.1.8 The service is committed to providing safe, accessible services to children and young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+).

5.2 Nurturing Relationships

The setting supports children and young people's social and emotional development and staff foster practices and activities that build pro-social skills and, establish a safe and positive climate that actively promotes healthy and inclusive relationships.

- 5.2.1 Positive and responsive relationships are consistently promoted between staff and children/young people, children/young people and their peers, staff and colleagues, and with other programme partners including families and the community.
- 5.2.2 Staff nurture peer relationships to actively support children and young people's overall growth and development.

5.3 Supportive Interactions

Fostering positive adult – child/young people and peer interactions, connections and relationships with their wider socio-cultural environment, is central to the role of staff in school age settings.

- 5.3.1 Staff are approachable, engaged and interested, and they act respectfully towards children and young people.
- 5.3.2 Staff are welcoming, listen actively, model positive behaviour and maintain a positive tone of voice in all interactions with children/young people, parents/guardians etc.
- 5.3.3 Staff interact in a supportive and encouraging manner to support children and young people's learning and development.
- 5.3.4 Staff allow for joint participation in conversations with children and young people.
- 5.3.5 Staff use positive interactions with children and young people, which include open-ended questions, and acknowledging and extending



interaction strategies to support their learning and development.

- 5.3.6 Staff support positive peer-to-peer interactions.
- 5.3.7 Staff role-model positive social skills with all individuals in the environment and reinforce positive social interactions.
- 5.3.8 Staff direct positive attention to all children and young people and provide 1:1 support and guidance.
- 5.3.9 Staff are aware of the different personalities within the group and anticipate situations before they arise.
- 5.3.10 Staff accommodate unexpected changes that may occur throughout the day, and adjust activities and the schedule to reflect the children's and young people's emerging needs.
- 5.3.11 Staff display empathy, understanding and support in their interactions towards individual's feelings and assist children and young people in understanding and processing their own emotions.
- 5.3.12 Staff consistently follow through with behaviour guidance strategies.

5.4 Developing Relationships with New Children/Young People

The transitions policy and procedures specify ways for staff to support new children/young people to settle in, helping them to develop positive relationships with adults and other children/young people.

- 5.4.1 A system is in place to enable children/young people and parents to visit the service prior to their start date so they can get to know staff, their key person, other children/young people, the service layout and its operation.
- 5.4.2 Staff use the settling in period to develop relationships with the children/young people, getting to know their names, their interests, likes and dislikes.
- 5.4.3 Staff engage with parents/guardians and develop positive relationships with families. Opportunities are created to discuss interests and concerns.
- 5.4.4 Staff provide an emotionally safe environment where children/young people feel safe and secure.

5.5 Key Person Approach

The service operates a key person approach. The key person builds a unique relationship with each child/young person for whom they are responsible, supporting transitions, and is a link between the service, the child/young person and their parents/guardians.

- 5.5.1 Parents/guardians are informed about the key person approach (how it works, the benefits, and the role and responsibilities of the key person).
- 5.5.2 The key person, parents/guardians and children work together to share information, for example about the child's/young person's personality/dispositions, interests, needs, likes and dislikes, preferred play/recreational activities, culture and languages spoken at home.
- 5.5.3 The key person uses the information gathered, together with their observations, conversations and their learning about the personality/dispositions of each of their key children/young people, to enable them to provide more meaningful support for individual children/young people as necessary.
- 5.5.4 The key person approach provides opportunities for staff to plan small group activities for children based on their knowledge of the individual child's interest and developmental needs.
- 5.5.5 The key person supports children/young people as they navigate transitions between settings e.g. from early childhood to primary school, and from school to school-aged childcare settings, and to post-primary school.
- 5.5.6 Staff are trained in the key person approach and have a clear understanding of its complexity and what is involved.
- 5.5.7 Staff engage in both formal and informal processes to share information on children's learning and development with parents/guardians and families.

5.6 Listening to, Hearing and Responding to the Voice of the Child

Management, staff and children/young people work together to develop policies, and procedures, make decisions, and agree about other issues that impact upon the children/young people.

- 5.6.1 A variety of consultation methods are used to ensure that all children/young people have the opportunity to express their opinions specifically about their play, hobbies, interests, likes and dislikes, and also to raise any issues and concerns.
- 5.6.2 Children and young people's ideas and opinions are listened to and acted upon. A Code of Behaviour is developed in partnership with children/young people, which encourages development of children's/young people's self-esteem, well-being and positive relationships with others.
- 5.6.3 Staff actively listen to children and young people and are conversational partners.
- 5.6.4 Adults support and facilitate children/young people in their emotional and social development, understanding how these are foundational in mental well-being.
- 5.6.5 Children and young people are involved in discussing and negotiating an agreed code of behaviour. (4.10.1)
- 5.6.6 Experiences and routines are organised to maximise opportunities for children and young people to voice their opinions and suggestions.

5.7 Responding to Children's and Young People's Behaviour

Children and young people are supported to engage in regulating their behaviour and resolving conflicts. Strategies are in place to ensure there is positive support for, and cooperation between children/young people.

- 5.7.1 Staff are proactive in responding to positive and pro-social behaviours and model these behaviours in their interactions with children/young people.
- 5.7.2 Staff ensure prevention strategies are in place to minimise conflicts and promote and develop social and emotional skills.
- 5.7.3 Staff encourage and facilitate children/young people to resolve any interpersonal conflicts that may arise, to help them learn and practise appropriate problem solving strategies.
- 5.7.4 Staff plan individual intervention plans for children/young people with persistent challenging behaviour by supporting developmentally

appropriate skills, such as active listening, cooperation, conflict resolution and opportunities for children/young people to act as peer supports and mentors.

- 5.7.5 Staff ensure that the environment is conducive to supporting children/young people develop positive relationships with peers.
- 5.7.6 Staff give children/young people opportunities to develop leadership and decision-making skills.
- 5.7.7 Staff focus on the developmental needs of children/young people by nurturing autonomy with support and guidance, and offer challenges children and young people can rise to.
- 5.7.8 Staff are supported in managing children/young people's behaviour through support, supervision and training where appropriate.

5.8 Bullying Prevention Strategy

Staff understand and recognise the different forms of bullying behaviours that may occur. They work together to develop and maintain a shared vision of a positive emotional environment.

- 5.8.1 The service has a clear policy and procedures to promote positive behaviour so that children/young people, parents/guardians and staff know that certain behaviours, e.g. bullying, are not tolerated. The policy should reflect the age and stage of children's/young people's development and include procedures to be followed. These procedures should involve due process and fair hearing. (4.10.4)
- 5.8.2 The management/manager creates awareness, provides information and affords opportunities for discussions with staff and children/young people on the dangers of bullying, including cyberbullying and e-bullying.
- 5.8.3 Parents/guardians are supported to engage in bullying prevention initiatives to help/support them talk to their children/young people about bullying, empowering them to develop social skills for preventing, identifying and reporting any bullying behaviour.
- 5.8.4 Empathy, kindness and compassion for others is encouraged and modelled by the adults in the setting.

Guideline 6.

Programme of Activities

The service provides a wide range of play, rest and recreation activities to meet children and young people's individual and collective needs and interests. Staff work collaboratively with children and young people to develop a programme that is rich in experiences and opportunities that support the holistic development of all children and young people.

6.1 Planning for Play and Recreation

The service provides a well-balanced, inclusive programme of activities for play, rest and recreational opportunities to support children's and young people's health, well-being, learning and development.

- 6.1.1 All stakeholders are actively involved in planning experiences and activities that provide a balance between unstructured and structured time, where children/young people are free to select activities of their choice and to play alone or with other children/young people.
- 6.1.2 Consultation with children/young people happens on an ongoing basis to allow them to actively contribute as participants and developers of the school age programme, so that it is based upon their needs, likes and interests.
- 6.1.3 Children/young people are encouraged to plan, evaluate and help with implementing activities.
- 6.1.4 Parents/guardians are invited and encouraged to share their expertise, hobbies and interests with the children/young people in the service.
- 6.1.5 Plans are based on consultation, and are inclusive of the needs, likes and interests of individual children/young people and groups of children/young people.
- 6.1.6 Programme plans are regularly reviewed and modified as necessary, to ensure they are meeting the interests and needs of all children/young people.
- 6.1.7 Planning is sufficiently flexible to allow children/young people to take part and choose what they would like to do and is adaptable to meet their changing needs.

6.2 Programme of Activities

The service has a strong focus on play to support children/young people's holistic development and provides a broad range of activities and opportunities to support the needs and interests of all children/young people attending.

- 6.2.1 There is a daily and weekly routine, which is flexible and meets the needs of all children/young people attending the school age service.
- 6.2.2 The programme of activities is based upon the services' ethos of inclusion, accommodating and reflecting the diverse nature of the families and children/young people attending.
- 6.2.3 The cultural background of the children/young people in the service is positively represented in the environment, through pictures, books, music, activities, resources, food, etc.
- 6.2.4 The children/young people attending the service are given the opportunity to learn about their family differences and cultures through play, research projects, drama and cooking for example.
- 6.2.5 The programme of activities takes into consideration the individual interests and abilities of the children/young people and the information gathered from parents.
- 6.2.6 The programme of activities offers children/young people opportunities to take risk and challenges them to explore new learning and develop new interests. (3.2.7)
- 6.2.7 The programme of activities offers opportunities for children/young people to be exposed to the arts, for example: dance, movement, drama, storytelling, puppetry, music, sound, painting, drawing, malleable materials, junk art, sculpture, 3D, textiles, fabric, photography, animation, natural materials.
- 6.2.8 All children/young people have autonomy in the environment (indoor and outdoor) with choice and freedom to move about freely within the service.

6.3 Play

The service provides a wide range of play activities and opportunities to support children's and young people's holistic development including well-being, communication and language skills, and their physical, social, emotional and cognitive development.

- 6.3.1 There are opportunities within the programme to take part in a variety of play experiences including engagement in the arts and creative pursuits, physical activities, games with rules, technology, science, nature and project based activities.
- 6.3.2 The programme offers a variety of experiences and opportunities to encourage the development of new talents, skills, interests and hobbies.
- 6.3.3 Staff understand and appreciate the value of play for children/young people of all ages and continually monitor the quality of the play opportunities.
- 6.3.4 Staff inspire the children/young people to explore the natural environment, by experiencing outdoor play and learning, developing a greater knowledge and understanding of nature, including horticulture, e.g. gardening and growing activities and caring for the environment.
- 6.3.5 The space and layout of both the indoor and outdoor environments allows children/young people to use their initiative, explore and develop their interests.
- 6.3.6 Opportunities are created to broaden experiences and interests through organised visits to recording studios, local radio stations, museums, art galleries etc.



6.3.7 The service offers a programme of activities, opportunities and experiences that caters for children/young people of all ages and abilities to include:

- **Everyday opportunities** to cover a wide range of activities that are always available for children/young people to explore, experiment or simply relax.
- **Experiential or project-based learning opportunities** to give children/young people a chance to develop hobbies, skills and interests and be excited/enthusiastic about learning.
- **Community service learning experiences** to provide various opportunities to prepare and engage children/young people in a range of projects within their community.

6.4 Rest and Relaxation

Opportunities and spaces for children/young people to rest, relax and enjoy quiet private time are a key aspect of service provision.

6.4.1 Both children/young people and staff understand the importance of taking time to rest and relax. Comfortable furniture, e.g. sofas, bean bags, large story cushions, and other soft furnishings are provided.

6.4.2 Developing relaxation techniques such as deep breathing and stretching exercises, yoga and mindfulness are encouraged and taught by staff and/or other suitably trained people, invited to the service by management.

6.4.3 Opportunities and spaces are created for children/young people to relax and enjoy private/personal time. (3.2.2)

6.4.4 There are areas for individual children/young people to take time for themselves and social areas for them to talk quietly with friends or staff. (3.2.1)

6.5 Resources and Equipment

A wide range of age-appropriate resources and materials are available, taking into consideration the mixed ages of children/young people attending the service.

- 6.5.1 The equipment, furniture and resources in the environment are accessible, well maintained and appropriate to the ages of the children/young people attending.
- 6.5.2 There are lots of natural and open-ended materials that allow children/young people to engage in different types of play experiences.
- 6.5.3 The equipment and resources are accessible to children/young people of all abilities.
- 6.5.4 The resources and equipment reflect the diversity of children/young people, including ability and gender.
- 6.5.5 There is a range of real life materials in the environment such as pots, pans, cups, telephones, bags, clothes, etc. to facilitate pretend play.
- 6.5.6 There is a variety of books covering a wide range of subjects reflecting different themes, cultures, etc. There are also opportunities for children/young people to visit the local library.
- 6.5.7 There is a variety of musical instruments to explore sound and make music. Musical instruments could be brought from home, with parental guidance. There are opportunities for children/young people to visit local recording studios/radio stations etc.
- 6.5.8 Suitable waste materials are gathered to inspire creativity through recycling/upcycling. (3.4.2)
- 6.5.9 There are opportunities to use technology such as computers, cameras, tablets, etc in line with internet and screen use policies. (4.13.)
- 6.5.10 There is a wide variety of additional resources and equipment to offer challenge and stimulate children/young people's exploration, thinking and curiosity.
- 6.5.11 Children/young people are consulted and involved in purchasing new materials or equipment.

6.6 Supporting Children and Young People's Homework

There is no requirement for school age childcare settings to provide homework support. If the setting provides homework support this should be in agreement with children and parents/guardians.

The homework policy ensures that there is consultation with children, their parents/guardians and schools to help support children's learning by providing fun and enjoyable activities that complement the primary school curriculum. (7.2.2) (7.1.5)

- 6.6.1 Staff foster positive attitudes towards homework and encourage a positive outlook for learning, bolstering children's confidence in their ability.
- 6.6.2 Staff use fun and exciting activities to support homework e.g. quizzes, stories, art, discussion, games, etc. if instigated by the children/young people.
- 6.6.3 Staff ensure there is a supportive atmosphere when children/young people are engaged in their homework by encouraging peer support and shared learning.
- 6.6.4 The service provides support, suitable space and a maximum time allocation for children to spend on their homework. (2.5.1)
- 6.6.5 The homework policy is developed and agreed with parents, which includes parental responsibility for reading, checking and signing their child's homework.



Guideline 7.

Collaborative Partnerships with Parents, Families and Communities

Collaborative and respectful partnerships and links with children and young people, parents, families, schools and communities are central to service provision.

7.1 Partnerships with Parents and Families

The management/manager works closely with parents/guardians and values and encourages parental involvement. The service has a system in place to provide information to parents/guardians on their child's learning, development and well-being, etc. and involvement in supporting the service within the community.

- 7.1.1 The service has an effective enrolment and orientation process for parents/guardians and families.
- 7.1.2 Parental involvement is central to the success of the service. Parental involvement is actively encouraged, and staff develop and maintain positive and responsive relationships with parents/guardians and families.
- 7.1.3 Parents/guardians contribute to, and are aware of and understand key policies, procedures and information about the service.
- 7.1.4 There is a policy to provide parents/guardians with information about their children. Staff ensure there are opportunities for formal and informal information sharing about children/young people with their parents/guardians at the end of each day, as necessary and appropriate.
- 7.1.5 Parents/guardians are consulted about the level of homework support provided and are aware of the service's homework support policy. (6.6)
- 7.1.6 All staff familiarise themselves with the parents' and families' cultural and religious backgrounds and value and respect them.
- 7.1.7 Written information including policies and procedures is translated into different languages for all families attending.

7.1.8 Parents'/guardians' views and opinions are sought and considered when evaluating the school age programme, and parents/guardians are subsequently provided with regular up-dates following evaluation of the programme.

7.1.9 There is an information board and/or on-line communication, which provides regular current information on, for example, community events, policy updates, outings, parental information sessions and other information relevant to parents/families.

7.2 Partnerships with Schools

The service and schools work together, as far as possible, to provide children/young people with smooth transitions between both settings.

7.2.1 Effective relationships are built and fostered with schools that the children/young people attend and, also with schools in the area that do not currently have any children attending the service.

7.2.2 The service works in partnership with the schools in the local area and collaborates in various ways, for example by:

- Informing them of the service, its ethos, aims, objectives and programme of activities
- Sharing information/reports on activities and events going on in the service
- Meeting and establishing relationships with school staff
- Inviting school personnel to family or community celebrations held by the service
- Attending school activities
- Exchanging newsletters
- Obtaining the school's holiday schedule as soon as it is available
- Agreeing a joint strategy for the prevention of bullying (5.8) (4.10.4)
- Discussing the homework support policy of the service in collaboration with the schools and parents (6.6)

- 7.2.3 Transitions for children/young people are supported by sharing relevant information and clarifying responsibilities between the service, parents/guardians and school.
- 7.2.4 Listen to the voices of the children throughout the transition between both settings. Plan and explain the after-school routine e.g. who they will play with, what snack they will have, who will collect them (parent, grandparent, childminder), if they play outside, go to the park etc.

7.3 Partnerships with Communities

The service reflects community values and attitudes, and contributes to, and utilises, community resources.

- 7.3.1 The service has a list of names and contacts in the local area that can enhance the programme of activities, such as libraries, museums, parks, theatres, garden centres, etc.
- 7.3.2 Partnerships are developed with local community groups, community services such as youth groups, local businesses, training agencies, colleges, universities, homes for the elderly and other relevant organisations.
- 7.3.3 There are opportunities for key people from the community to visit the service such as the local Garda, dentist, public health nurse, fire service, gardeners, musicians, artists, athletes.
- 7.3.4 The staff and management are involved with local and/or national professional networks/peer support groups, their City and County Childcare Committee, National Voluntary Childcare Organisations.
- 7.3.5 The staff implement activities that promote and benefit the local community and make children/young people visible as active citizens in the community. (6.3.7)



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Appendix 1

List of Recommended Policies for Services

The service should ensure it complies with regulatory requirements for policies and procedures. In addition, the following is a list of recommended policies and procedures to support good practice:

- Administering Medication Policy
- Admissions and Fees Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Arrivals and Departures Policy
- Child/ Young Person Induction Policy
- Child/ Young Person Protection Policy
- Child/Young Person Collection Policy
- Confidentially Policy
- Dangerous Plants Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Emergency Evacuation/Closure Policy
- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Fire Safety Policy
- Food Safety Policy
- Grievances and Complaints Policy – Staff, Parents and Children
- Health and Safety Policy
- Healthy Eating Policy
- Homework Policy
- Illness and Accidents Policy
- Infection Control Policy
- Interactions Policy
- Involving Parents/Guardians Policy
- Key Person Policy
- Manual Handling Policy
- Missing Child/Young Person Policy

- Mobile Phone Policy
- Outings and Visits Policy
- Pandemic Flu Policy
- Participation Policy
- Partnership Policy
- Photography, Video and Social Media Policy
- Play, Recreation and Rest Policy
- Promoting Positive Behaviour and Relationships Policy
- Risk Assessment Policy
- Safe Recruitment Policy
- Safe Use of Internet Policy
- Safeguarding Children/young people Policy
- School Drop off and School Collection Policy
- Smoking, Alcohol and Drugs Policy
- Staff Absence Policy
- Staff Appraisal, Support and Supervision Policy
- Staff Disciplinary Policy
- Staff Induction and Development Policy
- Staff Recruitment Policy
- Staff Training and CPD Policy
- Student Induction Policy
- Student Work Placement Policy
- Suspensions and Exclusions Policy
- Transitions Policy
- Uncollected Children Policy
- Volunteer policy
- Waiting List policy
- Whistleblowing Policy

This list is not exhaustive and it is possible that some policies link with others



Appendix 2

Membership of School Age Childcare Standards Working Group

- Barnardos
- Childcare Committees Ireland
- Childminding Ireland
- Children's Rights Alliance
- Department of Children and Youth Affairs (Chair)
- Department of Education and Skills
- Early Childhood Ireland
- Irish Primary Principals Network
- National Childhood Network
- National Parents Council - Primary
- PLÉ
- Pobal/Better Start – National Early Years Quality Development Service
- Quality Development of Out of School Services Network
- School Age Provider Representative
- Tusla

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