



**County Wicklow Public Participation Network**  
**Seminar Report**  
**Why Early Years Learning Matters**  
**The Well, Main Street, Bray**  
**April 2016**

County Wicklow Public Participation Network  
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## Introducing County Wicklow Public Participation Network (PPN)

Co Wicklow PPN is a diverse network of 142 community groups and voluntary organisations working at local level throughout Co Wicklow.

PPNs were set up under government legislation, and through the Local Government Act 2014 in particular, to provide a structure through which the community voice and valuable expertise could be fed into local decision making.

The PPN acts as a channel for two way information between the community and various boards and committees. We do this by organising or facilitating consultations, running seminars, and constantly providing information and seeking feedback and opinion.

At times members of Co Wicklow PPN can nominate community Representatives on to various committees including the Wicklow County Council 5 Strategic Policy Committees (Housing, Economic Development, Community Cultural & Social Development, Planning, and Transport Water & Environmental Services), the Local Community Development Committee, Joint Policing Committee, County Childcare Committee, Children & Young Peoples Services Committee and more.

The Representatives let interested groups know what is coming up at the meetings they attend, bring any issues or input from members to the meetings and then feed-back from the meetings by way of a brief report.

More information about Co Wicklow PPN can be found on our Website:

[www.countywicklowppn.ie](http://www.countywicklowppn.ie) or through our Facebook Page: [www.facebook.com/CWPPN](https://www.facebook.com/CWPPN)

## Why Early Years Learning Matters?

As a method of providing information and gathering feedback the Co Wicklow PPN

Representatives to Wicklow County Childcare Committee and

Co Wicklow Children & Young People's Services Committee

developed a Facebook Page – Wicklow's Children-Wicklow's

Future: [www.facebook.com/WicklowsChildrenWicklowsFuture](https://www.facebook.com/WicklowsChildrenWicklowsFuture).

A lot of interest was generated in relation to articles about pre-

school supports, early childhood development, the importance

of play and preparation for main stream education. This

fostered the development of our first seminar of 2016 – Why

Early Years Learning Matters.

This report includes the presentations from the seminar and

the concerns and suggestions generated by our participant's

survey.

**WHY EARLY YEARS LEARNING MATTERS**  
A Co Wicklow PPN seminar for parents/carers of young children

**When:** Saturday, April 23rd from 10am to 1pm  
(you can register from 9:30am onwards)

**Where:** The Well, Main Street, Bray  
(The old church building opposite the Royal Hotel)

**How much: Just €5!!** (Will go to charity you nominate)  
& includes a light lunch ☺

With Eugene Waters of Wicklow County Childcare Committee on

**THE FREE PRESCHOOL YEARS**  
Plus TWO workshops:

- 1) The Hands on Learning Experience
- 2) The Rich Home Learning Environment

With special input from SPECS Bray  
(Supporting Parents & Early Childhood Services)

**BOOKING IS ESSENTIAL!**  
Book by Wednesday April 20th for catering purposes.

To book, call HELEN on 087 189 5145 or  
email countywicklowppn@gmail.com

## Changing Approaches to Early Years Education

Presented by Miriam O' Regan, Co Wicklow PPN Representative to Wicklow County Childcare Committee

### The Big Picture

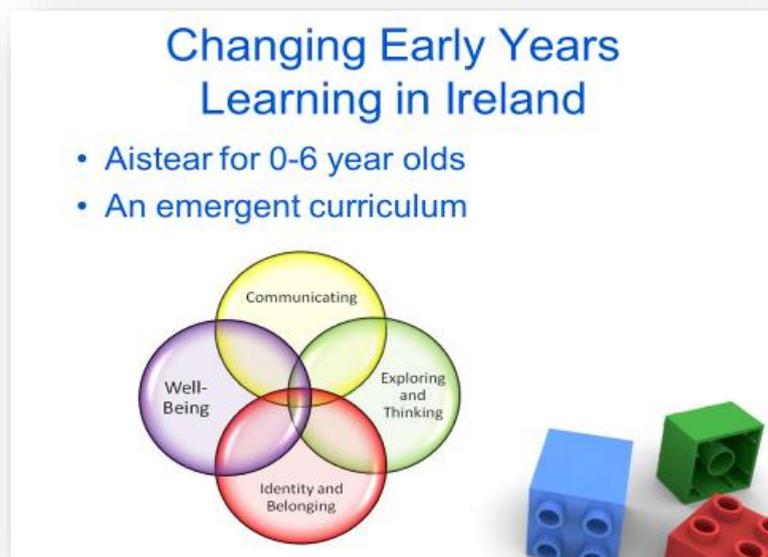
- Hot housing refers to the practice of trying to accelerate the development of children
- Readiness to learn is usually defined as the “level of development at which an individual (of any age) is ready to undertake the learning of specific materials.”

### The Cost of Hothousing

- Stress to the child
- Reduced play time – physical, social and emotional consequences
- Some evidence of psychological damage
- No evidence of long term benefits

### The Rewards of Readiness

- Play is the highest form of research (Einstein)
- Leads to better physical, social & emotional development
- Learning comes much more easily
- Ready learning makes for enthusiastic learners



(Aistear – The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework)

## **The New “Expanded” ECCE Year – What Does It Mean For My Child? Presented by Eugene Waters, Wicklow County Childcare Committee**

### **What is the ECCE Scheme?**

- The ECCE Scheme was introduced in 2010
- Original stated goal of offering universal “pre-school experience” aimed at school readiness
- Also a focus on “labour activation” with a particular focus on women in society (Driven by EU policy of “labour activation” – desire for women to participate in work force)
- Between 2010-2016 the scheme was available to children from a minimum age of 3yrs2months for 38 weeks of the year for 3 hours per day
- 95% of eligible children (c.68k) participate in 4,300 early years settings throughout the country

### **Positive Effects of the Scheme**

- First five years proven to be highly influential on future outcomes later in life
- Helps narrow the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children
- Positive effects on the social and emotional development of the children
- Long term positive effects on health, anti-social behaviour, future earnings, academic attainment etc.
- Value for money investment (€1-€7)

### **A Time of Change and Progress**

- A shift from “childcare” to “early years education”
- Roll out of early years “curriculum”
- Minimum qualifications of childcare workers established
- Recognition of the importance of play to early years education
- Increasingly tighter regulation (and compliance)
- Inspections by POBAL (finance), Tusla (standards) and DES (education)
- Roll out of initiatives and training on Child Protection, Healthy Eating, and Disabilities etc.



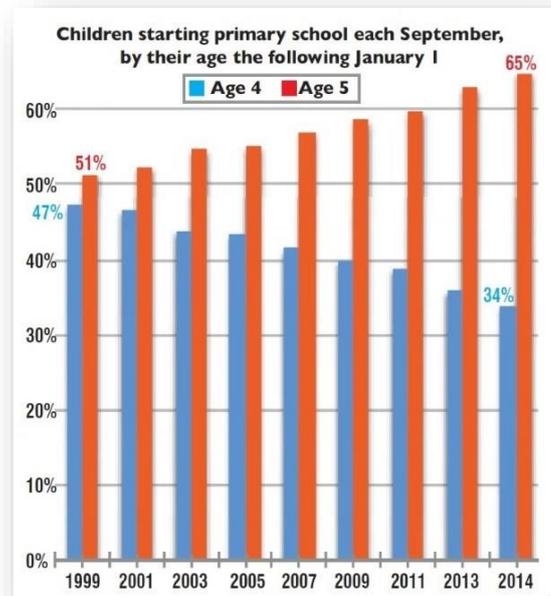
### **The New “Expanded” ECCE Scheme**

- “Expanded” rather than “second year”
- Children (dependent on DOB) will receive between 38 weeks and 88 weeks
- Age range now reduced to 3 years and expanded to 5yrs6months
- Three entry points: September, January, and April
- 60k extra children now eligible
- Services likely to be offering morning and afternoon sessions to cope with demand
- Parents need to book a place early

- If you want and ECCE space in January or April you may need to pay for a space from September until ECCE kicks in

### ECCE Scheme and School Starting Age

- Steady trend in rising school starting age for 15 years
- IF all children take their full ECCE entitlement this will rise from a minimum of 4years9months to 5years8months
- Likely to be at least a year or two for effects to be borne out
- Government has targets around raising school starting age
- May have an effect on class sizes in 2017 and 2018



### Why Start School Later?

- Age range in class is a key factor



- More emotionally ready (massive leaps in development in each of the first 5 years)
  - More physically ready (with knock on effects on sports)
  - More likely to be in top % of academic results
  - Knock on effects of above on self-esteem/identity
  - Older (perhaps wiser) making choices about the future

- Top achieving countries all start school later

### Your Child, Your Choice: Some Things to Consider

- You know your child best
- Weigh up the facts and how they relate to your child and your family's circumstances
- Find out more about the ECCE year (and other schemes available) at WCCC.ie and ask any questions about Early Years on: 0404 64455 or Email: info@wccc.ie

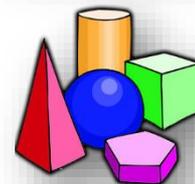
## Hands On Learning Workshop

Facilitated by Margaret Coen, Co Wicklow PPN Representative  
to Wicklow County Childcare Committee and Emma McHugh

### What Does Numeracy Mean?

More than Numbers-

- “Numeracy encompasses the ability to use mathematical understanding and skills to solve problems and meet the demands of day-to-day living in complex social settings. To have this ability, a young person needs to be able to think and communicate quantitatively, to make sense of data, to have a spatial awareness, to understand patterns and sequences, and to recognise situations where mathematical reasoning can be applied to solve problems.”  
(DES, 2011, p. 8)



### Participants were invited to:

- Explore your environments- you have 10 minutes.
- Identify as many patterns as you can in that time.
- Represent/recreate your findings in the materials on the table.



### Powers (2013)

- Pattern recognition is the most important intelligence skill
  - Out of all mental skills, pattern recognition is said to have the highest correlation with general intelligence. Pattern recognition is the ability to recognize order in a chaos. Patterns can be found in ideas, words, symbols, numbers, and images. They can also be found in behaviour, routines, and in nature.  
<http://www.mathrise.com/math/how-learning-patterns-leads-to-brighter-children>



### Early Childhood Ireland 2012

- Pattern is about seeing connections and making links. It can be described as a systematic arrangement of numbers or shapes which follow a given rule
- Patterns in time, events, games and in nature
- Development of ideas about similarities and differences is complementary to understanding about numbers and their shapes and properties
- Enhances experiences of art, music and physical movement
- Understanding patterns and relationships also means understanding rhythm and repetition as well as **ordering** from shortest to longest, smallest to largest, **sorting**, and **categorizing**
- Through understanding patterns, children learn to make **predictions**, to understand what comes next, to make **logical connections**, and to use **reasoning skills**

- For young children identifying and creating patterns is just the beginning of the mastery of life-long mathematical skills

### What Educators Can Do – This Means Parents

- Help children to recognize patterns all around them and point them out - in clothes, in music, in the garden.
- Language - Think about the language you use with children when describing and creating patterns:
  - before, after, follow, next, start, finish, between, copy, same, different, middle, again, repeat
- Sing songs that rhyme, repeat, or have numbers in them
- Use clapping, drum beats, animal noises, and various sounds to make and explore different rhythms and patterns
- Use a calendar to talk about the date, the day of the week, and the weather. Calendars reinforce counting, sequences, and patterns.
- Create and design patterns using a different textures and materials, paint, glitter, crayons, material, buttons. Use stamps or toys to create patterns i.e., dinosaur feet dipped in paint. String beads into a patterned necklace or for a mobile, kite tail, string curtain. Start sequences for others to copy/continue.
- Mark Making: Describe and make line patterns on paper and in sand, using language such as – lines, loops, straight, thick, thin, zig zag, curve, out, in ,up, down. Do bark and leaf rubbings.
- Block Play: Use blocks, Legos or other small toys to create patterns across the room. Make structures with a pattern in the design and have pictures of buildings with examples of this.
- Sand Patterns: Use rakes, buckets, pebbles, feathers, shells and flags for children to make their own repeating pattern and ask them to describe



- Create different patterns on the icing of cakes and biscuits
- Create movement patterns as you move across the back yard, down the street or through the park
- Recognise, explore and create patterns, shapes and colours, e.g., with leaves, pebbles and 2D shapes; Nature provides patterns in flower petals, colourful gardens,

and even in the coats of animals

- Help children to grow plants in the garden and point out the cyclical pattern of planting, growing, and dying



## The Rich Home Learning Environment

### SPECS (Supporting Parents & Early Childhood Services) facilitated this Play Workshop



SPECS is a new initiative in the greater Bray area which takes an early intervention approach to working with parents to improve outcomes for children. The SPECS initiative works with a range of agencies implementing a number of programmes that have been proven to improve outcomes for children and families.

Child psychology, how I can help them become a more emotionally well rounded person

Early Years services provide care and education to children in the years leading up to starting primary school. This is a crucial time for a child's development and as a result early years services are continuously working to ensure children are receiving the best care and support. There has been an increasing focus in relation to supporting services working with children at this stage. As a result SPECS works with a number of community based early years services in the Bray area to support their continuing development in line with best practice and national policy.

SPECS recognises the crucial role early years services play in the community and works alongside services to further understand and implement national policies including Aistear and Síolta to ensure the best outcomes for children engaged with services are achieved. ([www.specs.com](http://www.specs.com))



The workshop provided lots of cheap and cheerful play ideas to support parents and the developing child

## Seminar Questionnaire

### After today's seminar, what are the benefits of pre-school in your opinion?

- Teaching children at their own pace & starting school later which I think is better
- The benefit is to get kids ready for school
- Getting the child mixing and learning social skills
- (Kids) Less likely to go to jail!
- Can prepare them better for school at the right age
- Socialisation, learning through play, enhance a child's confidence
- Development of child
- The child being more socially able when they start school
- Development/fun/social skills/confidence/understanding readiness
- Having your child ready for school

The educational games & advice was great I think parents would like advice or a class on this

### What is the biggest challenge in accessing child care provision in Co Wicklow?

- Knowing what's available to you & what type of childcare is best for your child
- Places
- Price
- Places, availability
- Spaces
- Variety of different types



### If you were the Minister for Children, what would be your number one priority for childcare provision?

- To make preschool available at reasonable prices
- More places
- More financial support for private providers to reduce parents fees & allow more mothers to return to work
- To standardise and ensure good quality childcare is available to people from all walks of life
- Cost of Childcare
- More affordable for everyone. More capacity
- Special needs being assessed earlier and more help

### If you had one wish for children in Wicklow-what would it be?

- More places for kids to mix with other kids
- All be well cared for and happy
- Safe areas in the community to play
- Equal opportunity
- All could find a pre-school very close to home
- More services for special or additional needs children

