

The Childcare Partnership Plan 2025 - 2028

Children have the right to play, to achieve,
be healthy and be unique



November 2025

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Foreword

The early years of a child's life are crucial not only for their personal development but for the wellbeing and prosperity of our communities as a whole. As we look ahead to the future, the Childcare Partnership Plan 2025-2028 represents our members shared contribution towards a high quality, accessible and inclusive childcare system that supports every child to thrive and every family to flourish.

This plan has been shaped through meaningful collaborations and actions across our CCP Membership bringing together the voices of parents, providers and practitioners. It reflects our collective commitment to breaking down barriers, improving quality and creating a system that works for all.

Over the next three years, we will focus on:

- Providing quality information for parents and others about the availability of Early Learning and Childcare services.
- Supporting access and social inclusion of children, families and communities across the Early Learning and Childcare sector.
- Improving the overall quality of Early Learning and Childcare sector.

We are also prioritising innovation, sustainability and equity, recognising that a truly effective childcare system must meet the diverse needs of our families and communities.

The Childcare Partnership Plan 2025-2028 lays out our commitment to the sector. A commitment to children that their early experiences will be rich and nurturing. A commitment to parents that information on childcare will be there when it's needed. And a commitment to practitioners that their vital work will be respected and empowered.

Tracey Sproule

Interim Programme Manager

Social Care and Children's Directorate

Strategic Planning & Performance Group

Background

The Childcare Partnerships were first established in April 2000 through the Northern Ireland Childcare Strategy, “Children First” (1999). The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) had lead responsibility for the delivery of this strategy and it was recognised that successful implementation of the strategy would depend on a range of professionals and agencies from these sectors working together.

This led to the establishment of four Childcare Partnerships (CCPs) initially, with representation from statutory, voluntary, community and independent sectors.

In addition, a close working relationship was developed with the Preschool Education Advisory Group in each Education and Library Board area to ensure consistency of approach and development. The Childcare Partnerships also took responsibility for the development of Sure Start Projects in their respective areas.

Children First established a set of principles for Early Years Development and Family Support:

- Social Inclusion
- Quality
- Affordability
- Access
- Information
- Partnership

The four former legacy Health and Social Services Boards at that time provided a lead to the CCP's. In 2009 a Regional Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) was established by Section 7 (1) of the Health and Social Care (Reform) Act (Northern Ireland) replacing the four Health and Social Services Boards.

While lead Policy responsibility for childcare policy subsequently transferred to the Department of Education (DE), in November 2006 responsibility for the CCP network and childcare regulation, as set out in the Children (NI) Order 1995, remained with the Department of Health.

Following the closure of the Regional HSCB, on 31st March 2022, HSCB functions migrated to the Department of Health and staff management to the Business Services Organisation.

The Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) within the Department of Health (DOH) now currently provides a lead to the Childcare Partnership Team, with arrangements and budgets confirmed on an annual basis.

The five local CCPs agreed to merge into one Regional Childcare Partnership in April 2023.

The CCP team has responsibility for the management of a range of early years budgets funded by both the DOH and DE.

The Childcare Partnership (CCP)

The CCP combines investment, leadership and effective stakeholder engagement to Early Learning and Childcare services. This includes listening to the voices of children, teamwork, and developing effective communication strategies across and within relevant professional boundaries to ensure children and families receive the support they want, need and deserve.

Early childhood experiences have a significant impact on the well-being, learning and development of children. The skills, knowledge, competencies, values and attitudes of the workforce delivering Early Learning and Childcare services is a determining factor in the quality of those experiences.

Our Vision

Our vision is to ensure a vibrant, sustainable Early Learning and Childcare sector that places quality at the heart of every service.

Our Goal

Our goal is to enable Registered Early Learning and Childcare Providers¹ to improve outcomes for all children by delivering a high quality, accessible, trusted and nurturing service for children and families in Northern Ireland.

Our Role

Our role is to highlight key issues, prioritise and promote effective evidence-based practice within the Early Learning and Childcare sector in order to meet current demand and future challenges.

¹ Registered Early Years and Childcare Providers aged 0 to 12 refer to – Day Nurseries; Out of School with Day Nursery; Stand-Alone Creche; Stand Alone Playgroup; Stand-Alone Out of School; Registered Childminder; Approved Home Childcarers; Summer Schemes; 2-3 Year Old Programmes; Irish Medium Immersion.

CCP Membership

The CCP includes representatives from across the Statutory, Voluntary, Community, and Independent Sectors, Membership Agencies, Training, Disability, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME), Irish Medium Immersion, Education and the Trust Early Years teams.

Membership consists of one nominated individual from an organisation/body and is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure there is effective representation. The current list of CCP member organisations can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

CCP Structure

The CCP consists of the Commissioning Lead for Early Years and five Childcare Partnership Managers working across Northern Ireland. This Team is responsible for the oversight of the totality of the work of the Partnership, ensuring effective coordination, implementation, governance and performance management.

The CCP Managers are supported by Business Support Managers, Training and Workforce Development Officers, Information Officers, Administration Support and Sure Start Developmental Programme for 2 to 3 year-old Programme Support Specialists.

For further information on the staff profile please refer to the Family Support NI website - <https://www.familysupportni.gov.uk>

The CCP mandate includes a diverse range of responsibilities which includes specific pieces of work to address emerging needs. The CCP Team utilises Task and Finish Groups to progress these as required. Representation on these groups is drawn from CCP members with the relevant knowledge and expertise to support the development of such pieces of work.

CCP Resources

The CCP has responsibility for a range of Early Years funding schemes which support the Early Learning and Childcare sector. These are available to Providers registered with the local Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) as a childcare setting. Funding schemes include:

- Training & Workforce Development
- Fair Play Grant Scheme
- Regional Small Grants Scheme for Registered Providers
- CCP Grant Funding Scheme for CCP Members
- Bright Start School Age Childcare Grant Scheme (SACC)
- Bright Start Children with Disability Holiday Grants Scheme
- Family Support NI website
- Sure Start Programme

The following table details Department of Health, Early Years Development Fund (EYDF) funding levels from 22/23 to 24/25.

- Expenditure on staffing costs has increased from £544,068 in 22/23 to £602,512 in 24/25.
- There has been an increase in funding for training and workforce development. In 22/23 £194,990 was spent on training. By 24/25 that spend had risen to £251,665.
- The Fair Play Grants Scheme has risen from £394,140 in 23/24 to £670,781 in 24/25.
- In contrast, the Regional Small Grants Scheme for Registered Providers has decreased from £384,076 in 22/23 to £269,756 in 24/25.
- CCP Grant Funding Scheme for CCP Members has risen significantly. In 22/23 expenditure was £363,086, while in 24/25 that had risen to £462,697.

Department of Health				
Budget	Breakdown of Expenditure	Expenditure 22/23	Expenditure 23/24	Expenditure 24/25
EYDF	Staffing – Early Years Team SPPG	£ 544,068	£ 634,523	£ 602,512
EYDF	Training & Workforce Development	£ 194,990	£ 219,247	£ 251,665
EYDF	Fair Play Small Grants Scheme	£ 494,243	£ 394,140	£ 670,781
EYDF	Regional Small Grants Scheme for Registered Providers	£ 384,076	£ 299,469	£ 269,756
EYDF	CCP Grant Funding Scheme for CCP Members	£ 363,086	£ 431,495	£ 462,697

The table below details Department of Education funding levels from 22/23 to 24/25.

- Funding for the Bright Start programme has remained fairly static during this time period.
- In 22/23 the Sure Start Programme was funded £30,572,000; by 24/25 that figure had increased to £33,023,065.

Department of Education			
Budget	Budget 22/23	Budget 23/24	Budget 24/25
Bright Start	£ 970,443	£ 985,000	£ 970,000
Sure Start Programme	£ 30,572,000	£ 30,572,000	£ 33,023,065

Training and Workforce Development Team

The CCP provides free training opportunities for practitioners working within Registered Early Learning and Childcare provision across Northern Ireland with the aim of supporting quality play and learning experiences for children aged 0-12 years.

Registered Early Learning and Childcare provision includes Childminders, Day Care Nurseries, Playgroups, Crèches and Out of School provision. – see [Appendix 2](#) for Provider numbers.

Training needs are established through Provider consultation and by seeking the views of membership organisations and other relevant stakeholders. A formal procurement process is utilised to ensure training is of high quality and is cost effective.

The CCP commissions Core training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training on a three-year basis, based on identified need.

The CCP Training and Workforce Development Team manages the delivery of services around:

- Early identification of need
- Early intervention
- Professional development
- Workforce planning
- Provision of information to providers (ezine)
- Quality assurance and evaluation of the training provided

This leads to improved quality in registered childcare provision and ultimately improves outcomes for children and families.

The key aims and objectives of the CCP Training and Workforce Development Programme are to:

- Maximise career development opportunities and succession planning, and to support retention and new entrants into the Childcare workforce.
- Enable existing staff working within registered childcare provision to meet the requirements of the Minimum Standards for Childminding and Day Care for Children Under Age 12 - DHSS&PS July 2012, amended October 2018.
- Develop staff knowledge and skills, linked to new developments, theories and best practice examples through the delivery of a short seminar and conference programme.
- Build confident leaders and managers to improve the quality of the provision and promote good governance.
- Help sustain services through the delivery of a fully subsidised training programme.
- Monitor and evaluate uptake levels and the impact the training programmes have had on improving early years practice to inform future workforce plans.
- Make the best use of available resources to ensure value for money.

Core Training Programme

The Core Training programme is to support registered childcare providers to meet the Minimum Standards for Childminding and Day Care for Children Under Age 12 (DHSS&PS July 2012, amended October 2018).

The following table shows 225 core training courses were provided between April 2024 and March 2025, with a total of 3286 attendees. The information was sourced from the CCP online booking system.

The core courses include Full and Refresher Safeguarding Children/Child Protection; Designated Child Protection Officer; Full and Refresher Paediatric First Aid; Fire Safety; Level 2 Food Safety; Health & Safety for Childminders; Health & Safety; Risk Assessment and Manual Handling

Core Training Courses from April 2024 to March 2025

			Face to Face Training (Based on location course was delivered)											
			Northern Ireland		Belfast		Northern		South Eastern		Southern			
Course	No. of Courses	No. of Attendees	No. of Courses	No. of Attendees	No. of Courses	No. of Attendees	No. of Courses	No. of Attendees	No. of Courses	No. of Attendees	No. of Courses	No. of Attendees	No. of Courses	No. of Attendees
Designated Child Protection Officer	25	438	5	96	4	67	4	72	5	94	4	51	3	58
Fire Safety and Risk Assessment	20	345	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	345
Health & Safety for Childminders*	6	85	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	85
Health & Safety, Risk Assessment and Manual Handling	21	357	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	357
Level 2 Award in Food Safety in Catering Full Course	20	255	2	30	3	40	4	40	6	81	5	64	0	0
Online Level 2 Food Safety for Catering	1	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	16
Paediatric First Aid Full Course	40	397	8	76	11	106	7	75	5	51	9	89	0	0
Paediatric First Aid Refresher Course	31	358	8	94	6	68	5	59	7	81	5	56	0	0
Safeguarding Children/Child Protection Full Course	38	626	8	143	6	93	7	115	6	101	8	131	3	43
Safeguarding Children/Child Protection Refresher Course	23	409	6	114	4	64	3	59	4	67	5	85	1	20
Totals	225	3286	37	553	34	438	30	420	33	475	36	476	55	924

Source: CCP Online Booking System

*Health & Safety for Childminders - childminders had the option of completing the digital learning course 'Health & Safety in a Childminding Setting' which is hosted on the NISCC Learning Zone. During the period April 2024–March 2025, 402 certificates were issued to those who completed the course.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

CPD training courses promote learning opportunities which support the professional development of Early Learning and Childcare practitioners.

This training centres around a number of themes which are reviewed annually, for example:

- Causes and Symptoms of Anaphylaxis/Using an EpiPen
- Curriculum Development
- Disability & Promoting Inclusion
- Learning through Play
- PHA - Nutrition Matters
- Speech, Language and Communication
- Supporting Emotional Wellbeing
- Supporting Leadership and Management Personal Development

The following table highlights the breakdown of CPD courses by theme, location, delivery method and numbers attending. 149 fully-funded CPD courses were delivered to 2259 childcare staff during the financial year 1st April 2024 – 31st March 2025. The information was sourced from the CCP online booking system.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Training Courses from April 2024 to March 2025

Theme	Course Title	Number of Courses	Delivery Method	Number of Attendees
Causes and Symptoms of Anaphylaxis/Using an EpiPen	Anaphylaxis and EpiPen Training	17	Online	285
Causes and Symptoms of Anaphylaxis/Using an EpiPen Total		17		285
Curriculum Development	Inspiring Little Scientists	1	Face to Face	12
	Music in the Early Years - Extending Learning Follow Up Session	1	Face to Face	9
	Music in the Early Years with Jackie Maguire Early Years Artist at Colourstrings Music with Jackie	3	Face to Face	49
	The Flourishing Child - Exploring Child Development 0 - 4 Years	2	Online	29
Curriculum Development Total		7		99
Disability & Promoting Inclusion	Emotional Wellbeing for Children with Learning Disability	4	Online	70
	Global Development Delay	6	Online	130
	Introduction to Autism Spectrum Conditions	8	Online	155
	Introduction to Learning Disability in the Early Years	3	Online	52
	Making Sense of ADHD in the Early Years	2	Online	38
	Making Sense of Autism in the Early Years	1	Online	22
	Supporting a Child with Learning Disability in an Early Years Setting	4	Online	75
Disability & Promoting Inclusion Total		28		542
Learning through Play	A Summer of Play - Planning for Summer	3	Online	52
	The Healing Power of Play	6	Online	86
Learning through Play Total		9		138
PHA - Nutrition Matters	Nutrition Matters for the Early Years	9	Online	131
PHA - Nutrition Matters Total		9		131

Continued...

Theme	Course Title	Number of Courses	Delivery Method	Number of Attendees
Speech, Language and Communication	Hanen Sharing Sensitive News with Parents	2	Face to Face	14
	Hanen, Language Development: Teacher Talk	9	Online	111
	Makaton Language Programme	9	Online	77
	Speech and Language UK (formerly I CAN): Early Talk 0-5 Years	4	Face to Face	50
Speech, Language and Communication Total		24		252
Supporting Emotional Wellbeing	Attending Child Protection Case Conferences	7	Online	136
	Emotions Matter	1	Face to Face	5
	Engaging Effectively with Parents	2	Online	36
	Safeguarding Children Affected by Parental Substance Misuse	3	Online	43
	Solihull Approach - Train the Trainer	2	Face to Face	11
	Solihull Early Years Approach: Two Day Early Years Foundation Training Programme	8	(5) Face to Face (3) Online	62
	Solihull Plus - Understanding Attachment Seminar	1	Online	8
	Supporting Children - Social and Emotional Behaviour in an Early Years Setting (0-4 Year Olds)	5	Online	83
	Supporting Children Displaying Challenging Behaviour - A Proactive Approach	2	Online	39
	The Impact of Loss and Separation on Children and Families	3	Online	51
	Understanding the Impact of Domestic Abuse	2	Online	41
	What's your Story?	3	(1) Face to Face (2) Online	36
	Working with Children & Young People in Care	5	Online	54
Supporting Emotional Wellbeing Total		44		605

Continued...

Theme	Course Title	Number of Courses	Delivery Method	Number of Attendees
Supporting Leadership and Management Personal Development	Bridge to Management - School Age Childcare Settings	1	Online	12
	Handling Complaints	3	Online	65
	Leading and Managing a Team within an Early Years Setting	1	Online	21
	Managing and Responding to Complaints	1	Online	19
	Managing Performance through Professional Supervision and Appraisal	3	Online	55
	Step up to Leadership & Management - Daycares & Playgroups	2	Online	35
Supporting Leadership and Management Personal Development Total		11		207
Grand Total		149		2259

Source: CCP Online Booking System

NI Qualification Audit – Registered Group Based Childcare

The Department of Health asked the Childcare Partnership team to carry out a Qualification Audit in 2023 for all staff employed in registered group based childcare facilities in Northern Ireland.

The key objectives were to:

- Provide comprehensive information on the qualification levels in group based childcare settings registered with HSC Trusts under the Children Northern Ireland Order (1995).
- Inform the development of Government Policy and in particular the review of the DOH Minimum Standards for Childminding and Day-care for Children under the age of 12 years and inform the forthcoming Early Learning and Childcare Strategy.
- Facilitate the discharge of the Trusts' statutory duties in regard to registration and inspection and Article 20 Reports under the Children Northern Ireland Order.
- Inform the childcare sector of the current level of qualifications in the workforce to facilitate workforce planning going forward.
- Provide the public and in particular families using these services of the qualification levels held within the childcare workforce.

In March 2023 there were 1127 group based Childcare settings listed on the Family Support Northern Ireland (FSNI) Public Register; 721 of these groups (64%) responded to the Qualification Audit. There was a total of 5665 staff reflected in the survey.

36% of organisational responses were from privately owned providers. 63% were non-profit-making providers such as Community-based groups, Sure Starts, Charitable Organisations and Social Enterprises; the remaining 1% listed themselves as other.

To access the full CCP Qualification Audit, Key Findings and Recommendations please select this link [‘Northern Ireland Qualification Audit - Registered Group Based Childcare’](#).

Fair Play Grant Scheme

The CCP promotes inclusive practice across the sector, recognising that all children are different and all are equal.

The Fair Play Grant scheme ensures children with additional needs are included in Early Learning and Childcare services. Funding is available on an annual basis and all registered Early Learning and Childcare group based Providers are eligible to apply for this scheme. Applications are assessed by the CCP Strategic Funding Panel.

Applicants must demonstrate:

- A focus on the individual needs of children accessing quality play and learning experiences in their setting.
- How they support developmental outcomes for children.
- How the setting will evolve as an inclusive environment treating all children as equal and recognising difference, including barriers to participation.

EYDF Regional Small Grant Scheme for registered Providers

The CCP provides short term funding to registered Early Learning and Childcare Providers through the Small Grant Scheme.

The scheme aims to improve the child's holistic development by ensuring quality play experiences. It supports Providers to achieve the very best practice possible to ensure the best outcomes for children.

Applications are invited from registered community / voluntary sector Providers. Applications are assessed by the CCP Strategic Funding Panel. Funding is available on an annual basis. Private providers are not eligible for this Grant Scheme.

Applicants must demonstrate an outcome focus which should consider how the grant investment will improve:

- **Outcomes for Children:** Providers must demonstrate that consideration has been given to the outcomes for the children in the setting now and in the future. Providers should identify all of the areas of child development that will be supported:
 - Physical development
 - Cognitive development
 - Language development
 - Social-emotional development
- **Outcomes for the settings:** Providers must demonstrate that consideration has been given to outcomes for practitioners and practice in the setting, for example:
 - What new skills or practice will be employed
 - What will the shared team learning be

The Scheme offers grants within a range of themes which, over time, have included the following:

- Minor refurbishment
- Outdoor play development
- Sensory resources
- Innovation in early learning and play
- Indoor equipment
- Measures to address fuel poverty

EYDF – CCP Grant Funding Scheme for CCP Members

The objective of this Grant Funding Scheme is to support Childcare Partnership member organisations that are contributing towards the Key Priorities outlined in the Childcare Partnership Plan through an annual application process, which supports activities that will benefit the Early Learning and Childcare sector in Northern Ireland (NI).

Bright Start School Age Childcare Grant Scheme

The Bright Start School Age Childcare Grant Scheme was launched on the 27th March 2014 to address 3 of the 15 Key First Actions of the Executive's Programme for Affordable and Integrated Childcare, namely:

- Targeting provision in disadvantaged areas
- Targeting provision on the School Estate
- Targeting provision in Rural Areas

Bright Start Grant Scheme aims to enable parents, particularly women:

- To enter or remain in the workforce.
- To train for work or to study, thereby contributing to greater economic activity and enhancing gender equality.
- To encourage the promotion of the well-being of children in support of their developmental needs, while recognising the diversity of childcare and offering parents flexibility and choice.

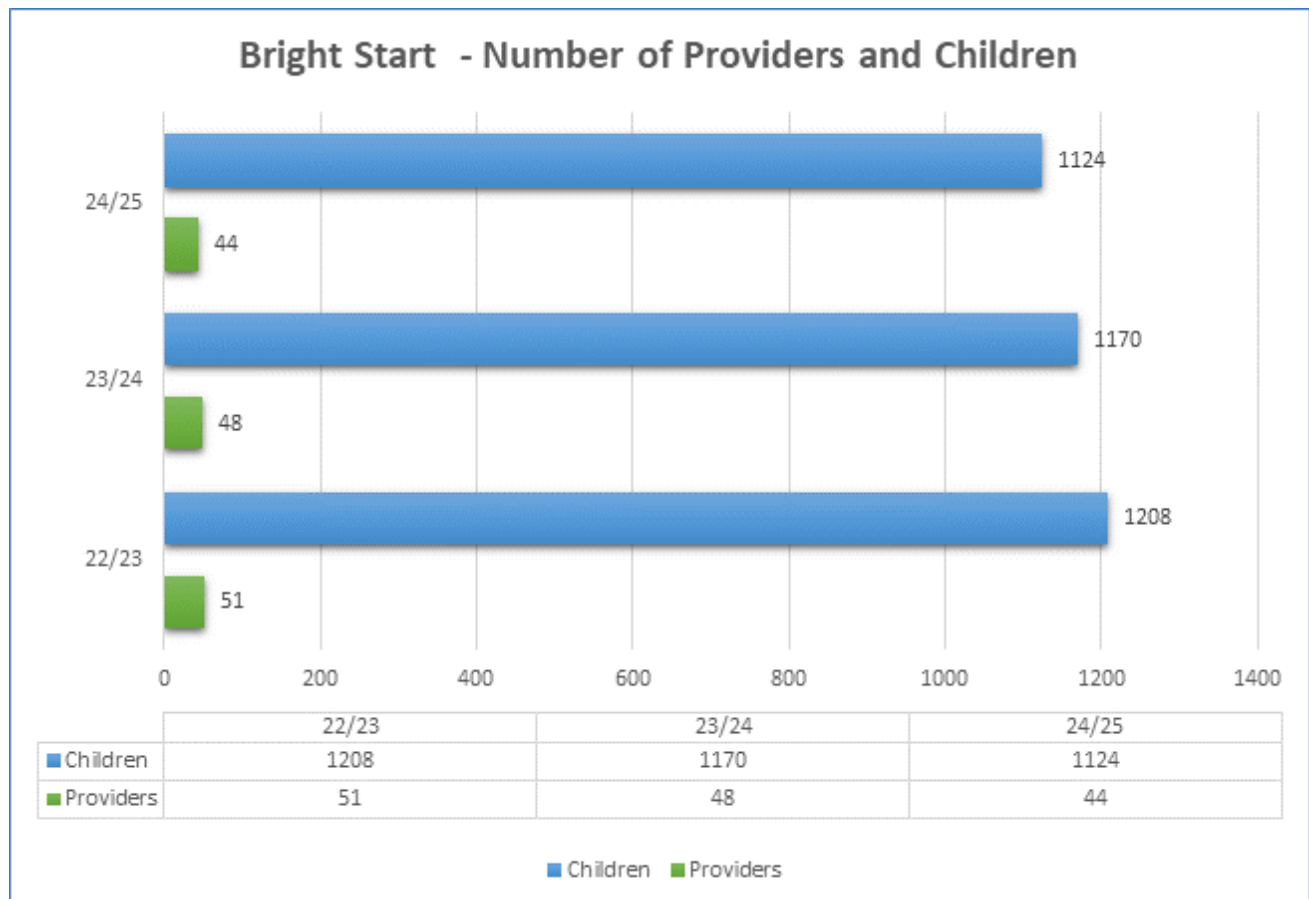
The Bright Start Grant Scheme has funded 98 groups, and has sustained or created over 2000 registered places in disadvantaged areas.

Bright Start has supported 23 projects on the School Estate and 55 projects in rural communities. The funding has enabled 62 capital build projects worth over £1 million and total investment in the Bright Start funded groups has been approximately £9 million to date.



Figure 1: Decorative Image

The graph below outlines the number of providers and children supported by the Bright Start scheme. In 22/23, 51 providers supported 1208 children; In 23/24 48 providers supported 1170 children; In 24/25, 44 providers supported 1124 children.



This investment recognises the critical role that Bright Start Groups play in supporting the development and wellbeing of school age children, particularly in areas that need it most. These groups are embedded within local communities and offer parents a range of diverse and flexible high-quality childcare options that are accessible and affordable.

Bright Start Children with Disabilities Holiday Grant Scheme

Bright Start – the Executive’s Programme for Affordable and Integrated Childcare supports children with a disability need.

Since 2015, the scheme has invested over £1 million, which has supported over 3100 children with additional needs.

The grant supports group-based services designed to promote children’s holistic growth, fostering their personal, social, and emotional development, as well as building their language, communication, and problem-solving skills.

The purpose of this Holiday Grant Scheme is to offer financial support to childcare providers to provide additional childcare (i.e. an extension to the normal service) to facilitate children with a disability accessing services during holiday periods such as Summer, Halloween, Christmas and Half-term.

The funding is intended to provide a group-type service to enable parents to attend training and/or work during the holiday periods. This differs from additional funding allocations provided by the CCP annually, which includes tailored support for children with a disability attending settings.

Applications are assessed by the CCP Strategic Funding Panel and are all subject to funding being available on an annual basis. All successful applicants must adhere to regulatory standards in the delivery of their proposed services.

The graph below outlines the number of providers and children supported by the Bright Start CWD Holiday Grant scheme. In 22/23, 12 providers supported 396 children; In 23/24 19 providers supported 395 children; In 24/25, 23 providers supported 531 children.

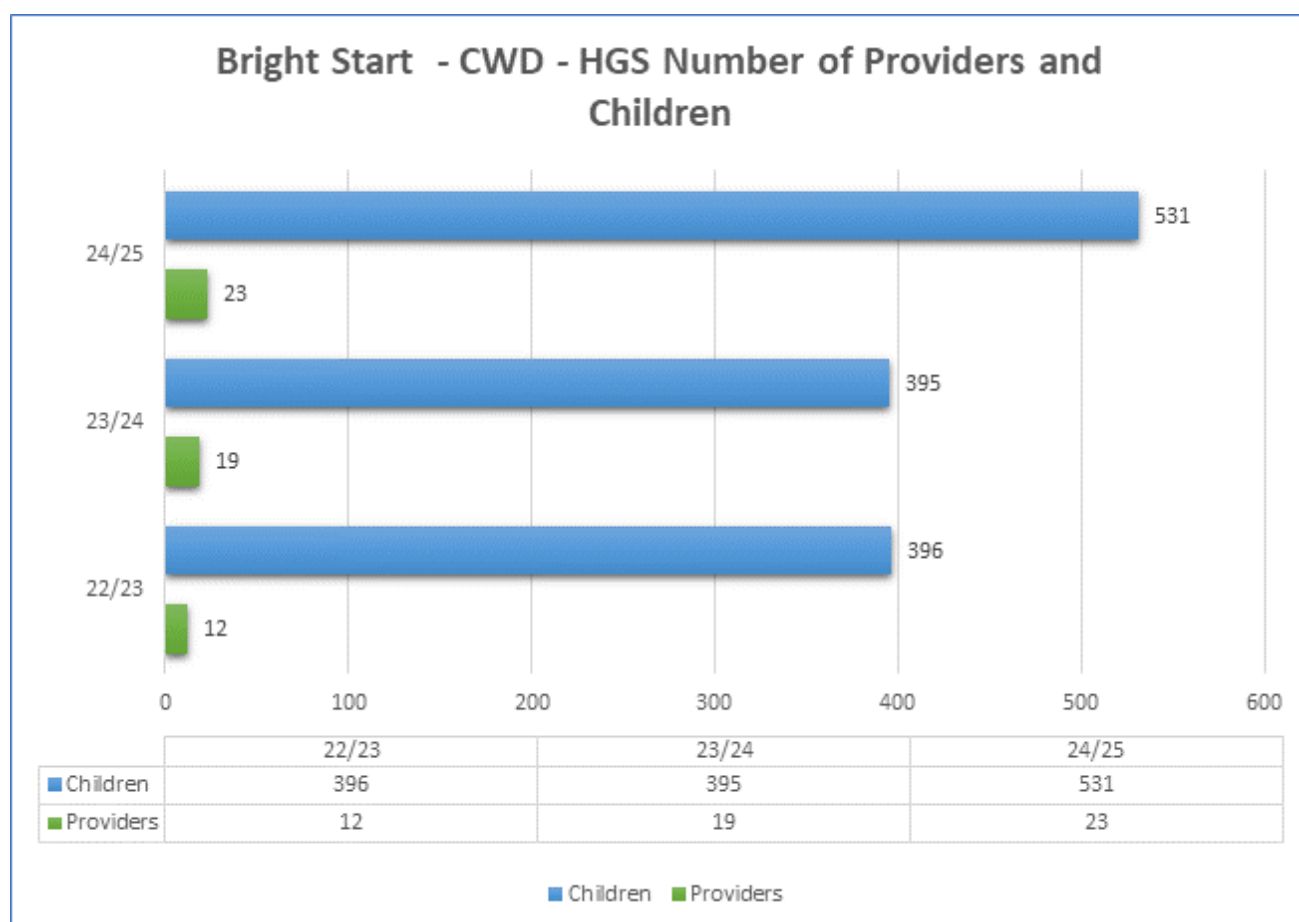




Figure 2: Decorative Image

The Children (NI) Order 1995 states there is legal requirement on Local Authorities to maintain a public register of Early Learning and Childcare Providers that is open to inspection by members of the public.

This public register is hosted on the Family Support NI (FSNI) Website. FSNI was developed in 2009 as one of the recommendations of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Families Matter Strategy, 'Transforming Your Care'. This strategy recommended the development of an information and signposting resource for families, communities and professionals.

The website was designed to create a comprehensive database of family support and childcare services across Northern Ireland. It is updated daily by the FSNI Team.

Information from this database is accessed on a regular basis by the CCP Team:

- To support innovative problem solving and systems development opportunities.
- To help the Partnership fulfil planning, analysis and performance management functions.
- To provide statistics in relation to supply and demand for childcare, for planning purposes within the context of the wider children's services arena.

In 2013, the public list of registered childcare providers was added and a new childcare-specific search was developed as one of the Key Actions of Bright Start, the NI Executive's programme for affordable and integrated childcare.

As the first point of contact for parents searching for childcare this is an important development as it enables parents to search for providers close to their postcode, and filter results to find those with current vacancies and who provide services to meet their childcare needs.

In March 2024, Family Support NI created a Self-Service Portal to enable Childcare Providers to update their own profiles.

Family Support Information on FSNi

Information is available on a wide range of services including Statutory, Community and Voluntary Organisations. This enables families to source information about local services. A full list of Categories can be found at [Appendix 3](#).

The FSNi team:

- Enable parents, carers, young people and front-line staff to access information about relevant services to facilitate support and early prevention services.
- Enable search results to be narrowed by Postcode / Distance as services are geo-mapped.
- Has a facility to translate information on the website into a variety of languages.
- Regularly audit information to ensure it remains useful and up-to-date.

Childcare Information on FSNi

Information is available on all registered Early Learning and Childcare Providers. A full list of Childcare Categories can be found at [Appendix 4](#).

The FSNi team:

- Receive regular updates from the five HSCT Early Years Teams about New Registrations/De-Registrations and any changes to contact details.
- Work closely with the five HSCT Early Years Teams and Registered Childcare Providers to ensure this information is kept up-to-date and useful for parents looking for childcare.
- Ensure information on FSNi is updated daily and shared with HMRC via a secure upload to facilitate the payment of Tax-Free Childcare.

- Provide a conduit (via emails / mailbox) to quickly contact Childcare Providers directly e.g. issue Guidance/Advice/Funding Streams /NI Subsidy /Small Grant and Holiday Grants Schemes.
- Keep information about vacancies/availability and services provided up-to-date and useful.
- Provide a platform for childcare providers to promote their business.
- Promote Government assistance with childcare costs.
- Promote the benefits of Registered Childcare.
- Facilitate student placement information to grow the workforce.
- Promote Registered Childcare providers willing to accept Early Years Student placements / facilitate apprenticeships.

Family Support NI website engagement from 2017 to 2024

The graph below shows a graph reflects the total engagement on the Family Support NI website on an annual basis from 2017 to 2024. The number of hits peaked in 2020 at 513,761. This was during the Covid period, and is most likely due to subsidy schemes and other assistance for families being made available during this time. Overall, the FSNI website has in excess of 450K hits per year.

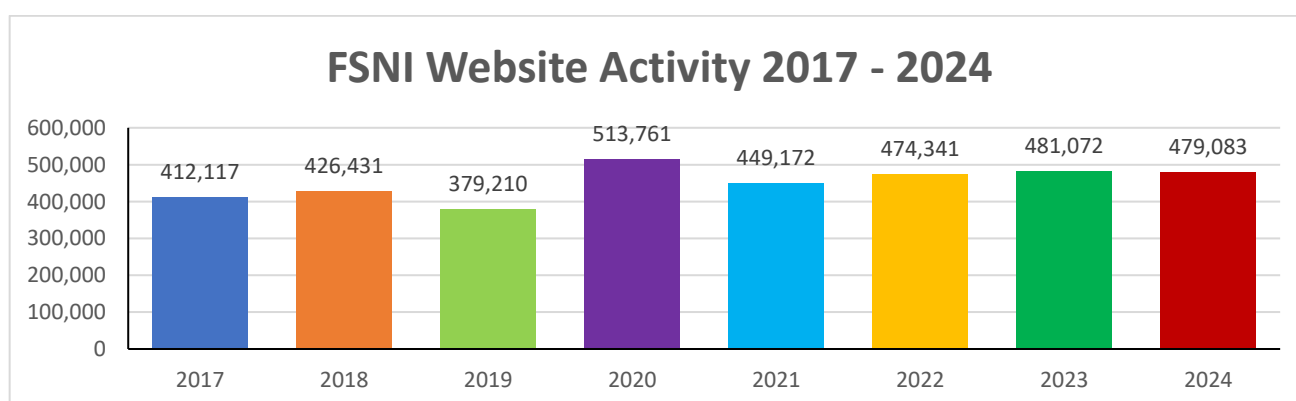


Figure 3: Decorative Image

Sure Start is a programme targeted at parents and children under the age of four. There are 38 Sure Start projects across Northern Ireland. It brings together health, family support and early education services which are designed to support children's learning skills, health and well-being, and social and emotional development.

Sure Start operates the Sure Start Developmental Programme for 2-3 Year Olds which is developed for children in their penultimate pre-school year. It focuses on play in group settings to enhance children's social and emotional development, build on their language and communication skills and encourage imagination through play. There are also a number of Irish Medium Immersion Sure Start Developmental Programme for 2-3 Years Olds.

To find out more about Sure Start please select this link [About Sure Start Services - Family Support Information](#).

Sure Start Policy Outcomes

- Improved language skills
- Early identification of developmental delay
- Improved access to services
- Enhanced parenting skills
- Effectively integrated services



**Partnership working
is at the root of
what makes Sure Start work**

Figure 4: Decorative Image

Moving Forward

Moving forward, the CCP's strategic focus will be guided by three key priorities that aim to enhance outcomes for children, families and communities. These priorities reflect our commitment for equitable access, high quality childcare provision and informed parental engagement.

Key Priorities for 2025 – 2028



Key Priority 1 – INFORMATION – Provide quality information for parents and others about the availability of Early Learning and Childcare services.

1a - Improve Access to Childcare Information

Key Priorities	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Promote the Family Support NI website as an online directory of services for parents, carers, young people and professionals and the Public Childcare Register for NI.○ Update FSNI Website content regularly, with information from Childcare Providers using the self-service Portal.○ Migrate the website/Content Management System to a modern platform.○ To actively engage with Childcare Providers, HSCT Early Years Teams and Providers of Family Support services to keep information on the website accurate and relevant.○ FSNI website will have the facility for members of the public and key stakeholders to contact FSNI by email / telephone with queries for support and signposting to other organisations.○ Develop a profile of Early Learning and Childcare Provision in NI, using data from the Delegated Statutory Function (DSF).○ Provide up-to-date information from the FSNI website to the Department of Education to support effective planning and policy development for the Early Years sector.○ Contribute to the Article 20 Report by supplying key data and information to the HSCT Early Years Teams which support the planning of services for children and families across NI.

Action Steps

To be reviewed annually

Steps can relate to more than one Key Priority

- Deliver clear, accurate and accessible information for parents and other stakeholders about the availability of childcare provision across NI.
- Continue to promote log-ins for Self-service Portal and maintain / increase log-ins to Self Service Portal.
- Improve efficiency of FSNI information management, by moving the current system onto one database which will improve the quality of information.
- Monitor website traffic (Google Analytics) and Maintain hits to the website.
- Using information from DSF and FSNI, analyse data to show the trended change within the Early Year's settings in Northern Ireland.
- Monitor the activity of the FSNI mailbox / telephone and evaluate user engagement by theming the different types of queries received.
- Carry out an annual audit of FSNI information by engaging with Family Support and Childcare Providers to ensure information is accurate and up-to-date.
- Work in collaboration with key stakeholders to increase visibility and increase the number of engagement sessions / presentations to Student Social Workers / Early Years students.
- Increase Childcare Provider and family registrations for Tax Free Childcare/Northern Ireland Childcare Subsidy Scheme (NICSS).
- Provide information from FSNI childcare register to DE on a monthly basis (new / current / deregistration).
- Monitor supply and demand of Early Learning and Childcare Providers (all Trusts) every three years through the Article 20 Report.

Key Priority 1 – INFORMATION – Provide quality information for parents and others about the availability of Early Learning and Childcare services

1b - Enhance User Experience and Accessibility

Key Priorities	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Engage with key stakeholders within the Early Learning and Childcare sector.○ Ensure ongoing website accessibility compliance.○ Inform Students, Allied Health Professionals and Medical and Nursing Professionals studying/working in the Early Years and School Age Childcare sector.

Action Steps	
To be reviewed annually	
	<p>Steps can relate to more than one Key Priority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Carry out Accessibility Audits to ensure statutory requirements are met for the FSNI website.○ Conduct User Satisfaction Surveys which will inform accessibility, function and quality of the FSNI website.○ Work in collaboration with key stakeholders to increase visibility and increase the number of engagement sessions /presentations to Student Social Workers / Early Years students.

Key Priority 1 – INFORMATION – Provide quality information for parents and others about the availability of Early Learning and Childcare services

1c - Promote the Registered Early Learning and Childcare Sector

Key Priorities	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop and distribute a CCP Ezine aimed at early years practitioners and wider stakeholders in the sector. This will share sector updates, highlight best practice, promote training etc. ○ Increase visibility and usage of the FSNI Website within the sector. ○ Produce promotional materials targeted to those working in the Early Learning and Childcare sector and at key stakeholders. ○ Representation of the CCP at relevant events / conferences across NI to raise awareness, share information and engage directly with early years practitioners and stakeholders.

Action Steps	
To be reviewed annually	
	<p>Steps can relate to more than one Key Priority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Design, produce and circulate CCP ezines to relevant stakeholders on a quarterly basis. ○ Produce a range of materials / resources to promote the FSNI Website and the wider Childcare sector. ○ Develop a range of videos in partnership with member agencies promoting the Registered Early Learning and Childcare sector to support career development in this sector. These videos will be available on the FSNI website and shared with partner agencies. ○ Attend Promotional Events / Conferences to promote the work of the Childcare Partnership. ○ Work in collaboration with key stakeholders to increase visibility and increase the number of engagement sessions / presentations to Student Social Workers / Early Years students.

Key Priority 2 – ACCESS – Support access and social inclusion of children, families and communities across the Early Learning and Childcare sector

2a - Promote Inclusion for Children with Additional Needs Including Disabilities

Key Priorities	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Deliver capacity support to the Early Learning and Childcare sector through a range of Fair Play grants which support the inclusion of children with additional needs including disabilities. ○ Support the development and wellbeing of School Age children through the Bright Start Programme. ○ Support children with additional needs, including disabilities to enable children to thrive through inclusive play and learning environments through the Bright Start Children with Disabilities Holiday Grant Scheme. ○ Work in partnership with NICMA to develop a bank of Approved Home Childcarers to facilitate the needs of families with children who have additional needs.

Action Steps	
To be reviewed annually	
	<p>Steps can relate to more than one Key Priority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Fair Play Grant Scheme will be fully applied to early years settings with maximum effect. ○ Deliver play opportunities for disabled children and their siblings through six Saturday Play Clubs throughout the year through the Play for All Project (Barnardos). ○ Promote the uptake of CCP training / resources to support and enhanced learning opportunities for children with disabilities. ○ Strong stakeholder collaboration - work in partnership with parents, children and families for feedback on User engagement through workshops and training and resource delivery.

Action Steps

To be reviewed annually

- Monitoring and evaluation through systematic data collection, stakeholder engagement, and reflective practice:
 - to ensure accountability for funding and value for money
 - to provide evidence of impact
 - to drive continuous improvement and quality
- Feedback from early years staff about inclusive approaches to early years practice and reported positive outcomes for children.
- Work in partnership with NICMA to:
 - assist with the recruitment of a bank of Approved Home Childcarers to meet the needs of families with children who have additional needs.
 - develop a system to monitor the number of children supported and the number of training sessions delivered.

Key Priority 3 – QUALITY – Improve the overall quality of Early Learning and Childcare sector

3a - Build on the Quality in Early Learning and Childcare Workforce

Key Priorities

- Improvement in the overall quality, stability and sustainability of the Early Learning and Childcare sector.
- Improved communication with key stakeholders to provide information on training and funding opportunities available to support workforce development.
- Deliver Early Years development support across the Irish Medium Immersion Developmental Programmes for 2-3 Year Olds within the Sure Start programme and Irish Medium Immersion Early Years providers in Belfast and South Eastern HSC Trust areas, respectively.
- New and existing staff working in the Early Learning and Childcare sector should:
 - have access to learning and development opportunities to support career progression and succession planning.
 - report increased confidence in their abilities leading to expanded responsibilities within their Organisation, promotion or career advancement.
 - engage in further learning and development activities, post training, which will indicate a commitment to professional growth.
- Behavioural change with observable changes in participants' work habits and interactions, contributing to a more collaborative and efficient workplace.
- Sustained learning where participants engage in on-going learning and development activities post training indicating a commitment to professional growth.

Action Steps

To be reviewed annually

Steps can relate to more than one Key Priority

- Carry out training needs analysis on an annual basis to develop a training plan:
 - Hold contract management meetings with Training Providers to ensure value for money and quality assurance.
 - Implement and administer the training plan, using web-based CCP training course system.
- Implement Irish Medium Immersion support for both Developmental Programmes for 2-3 Year olds within the Sure Start programme and Irish Medium Immersion Early Years Providers in Belfast and South Eastern HSC Trust areas including:
 - Delivering targeted professional development to enhance staff capacity, training, and foster meaningful partnerships with parents.
 - Developing curriculum resources to support the delivery of effective Irish Immersion pedagogy.
 - Identifying training needs for Irish Immersion Providers and deliver or facilitate access to training to meet these needs.
- The CCP Training and Workforce team will monitor quality of each course and review as follows:
 - Numbers of courses delivered
 - Tutor feedback and participation rates
 - Participant satisfaction levels through pre and post training assessments
 - Completion rates of training modules
 - Number of practice sessions completed
 - Monitor usage levels of the NISCC Learning Zone
 - Participants can demonstrate increased knowledge and competencies
- Review and update Early Years and Childcare training materials on the NISCC Learning Zone
- Review and update the CCP Qualification Guidance.

Action Steps

To be reviewed annually

- Develop a CCP Seminar/Conference Programme working with a range of agencies to address topical themes.
- Support the Development of a Coaching and Mentoring Programme to strengthen Leadership and Management Pathways.
- Represent the CCP on external workforce forums and a range of other key stakeholder meetings across NI.
- Signpost to external training and funding opportunities.

Key Priority 3 – QUALITY – Improve the overall quality of Early Learning and Childcare sector

3b - Strengthen Early Learning and Childcare Infrastructure through Grants

Key Priorities	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Contribute to strengthening the Infrastructure across and within the Early Learning and Childcare sector.○ Develop and administer the range of funding schemes which support the Early Learning and Childcare sector.○ Commission research to inform practice and raise the profile of the Early Learning and Childcare sector.○ Review the model of pre-registration briefing sessions for prospective childminders in partnership with NICMA.

Action Steps	
To be reviewed annually	
	<p>Steps can relate to more than one Key Priority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Administer the following funding schemes by monitoring activity, quality and finance:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Fair Play Grant Scheme- Regional Small Grants Scheme for Registered Providers- CCP Grant Funding Scheme for CCP Members- Bright Start School Age Childcare Grant Scheme- Bright Start Children with Disability Holiday Grant Scheme○ Commission research on School Age Childcare: Harnessing the Second Window of Opportunity. Making the case to support this critical developmental period through School Age Childcare interventions.○ Review the model of Pre-registration briefing sessions in partnership with NICMA:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Monitor the number of people accessing pre-registration briefing sessions.- Monitor the number of new entrants to the Childminding sector.- Ensure pathways for prospective childminders are streamlined and efficient.

Appendix 1 - CCP Membership Organisations

Altram
Ards Community Network
Ashton Centre
Barnardos
Belfast City Council
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
Derry City & Strabane Council
Dry Arch Centre
Early Years, the Organisation for Young Children
Education Authority (PSEP)
Employers for Childcare
Harpurs Hill (Coleraine SS)
Ionad Uíbh Eachach
Northern Health and Social Care Trust
NICMA
North West College
Public Health Agency
PlayBoard NI
Positive Future
Scoil na Fuiseoige
South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
Sense
Southern Health and Social Care Trust
Sólás
Southern Regional College
Strategic Planning and Performance Group
Ulster Society
Western Health and Social Care Trust
Windsor Women's Centre

Appendix 2 - Early Learning and Childcare Providers registered with HSCT

The figures in the table below highlight the number of services and places as at March 2025.

Sector	Health & Social Care Trust Areas											
	Northern Ireland		Belfast		Northern		South Eastern		Southern		Western	
	Number of Services	Number of Places	Number of Services	Number of Places	Number of Services	Number of Places	Number of Services	Number of Places	Number of Services	Number of Places	Number of Services	Number of Places
Day Nursery	326	17287	100	4566	67	3524	64	3610	56	3402	39	2185
Out of School within Day Nursery	n/a	6447	n/a	1494	n/a	1616	n/a	1591	n/a	1165	n/a	581
Creche	66	1134	12	235	16	253	2	47	6	107	30	492
Playgroup	363	11891	39	1187	99	3596	66	2410	92	2874	67	1824
Stand-Alone Out of School	190	6635	55	1867	39	1421	40	1452	35	1168	21	727
Childminder	1959	11796	196	1207	615	3712	378	2257	356	2112	414	2508
Approved Home Childcarers	161	n/a	74	n/a	43	n/a	24	n/a	14	n/a	6	n/a
Summer Scheme	11	428	8	308	1	24	2	96	0	0	0	0
Two year old Prog.	120	1740	26	360	30	384	10	120	24	408	30	468
Northern Ireland Total	3196	57358	510	11224	910	14530	586	11583	583	11236	607	8785

Source: HSCB DSF/Corporate Parenting Returns

Appendix 3 - Family Support Categories on FSNi website

Adoption, Fostering and Looked After Children
Bereavement
Cancer Support Services
Carers
Child Protection
Counselling
Adoption Fostering & Looked After Children
Bereavement
Cancer Support Services
Carers
Child Protection
Counselling
Disability - Learning Disability, Autism, ADHD
Disability - Physical & Sensory
Domestic/Sexual Abuse
Drug/Alcohol Misuse
Eating Disorders
Educational Support
Employment/Training
Ethnic Minority Support
Family Support
Family Support Hub
Financial/Welfare Advice
Health and Wellbeing
Health Visiting
Housing
LGBT
Mental Health
Parenting Support
Partnership Organisation
Prison Support Services
Self Harm & Suicide
Separating Families
Sure Start
Transition
Youth Offending
Youth Services

Appendix 4 - Childcare Categories on FSNi website
2 Year Old Programme
Approved Home Childcare
Childminder
Creche
Day Nursery
Out of School
Parent & Toddler
Pre-School Playgroup
Statutory Nursery School/Unit
Summer Scheme



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

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Social Care