

Background Note on AIM (Access and Inclusion Model)

The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) was launched in June 2016 to enable the full inclusion and meaningful participation of children with disabilities in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The goal of AIM is to empower early learning and care settings to deliver an inclusive pre-school experience, ensuring that every eligible child can fully participate in the ECCE Programme and reap the benefits of quality early learning and care.

AIM is a child-centred model, involving seven levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted, based on the strengths and needs of the child and the early learning and care setting as follows:



Level 1: An Inclusive Culture: This level is the critical foundation for the model. This sets out that a strong culture of inclusion must be fostered and embedded to support all children’s maximum participation in the ECCE Programme. Under this level, a new Inclusion Charter for the Early Years Sector has been developed. Updated Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Guidelines have been published and a nationwide training programme on these Guidelines is currently being rolled out. A new higher education programme, Leadership for Inclusion for Early Years (LINC), has also been developed and up to 900 early learning and care practitioners graduate from this Programme every year for the past 3 years. These graduates will work as Inclusion Co-ordinators in their early learning and care setting. A set of resources – AIM Inclusive Play – have also been distributed to all rooms delivering the ECCE Programme in early learning and care settings and Universal Design Guidelines for early learning and care settings have been developed. These guidelines were developed by a consortium that included Early Childhood Ireland, Trinity Haus and Mary Immaculate College and work was overseen by the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design at the National Disability Authority.

Level 2: Information for Parents and Practitioners: This level recognises the requirement of parents and early learning and care practitioners to have clear, consistent and up to date information

accessible to them regarding early learning and care services and supports. A dedicated website has been launched under this level and a communications strategy will be finalised shortly.

Level 3: A Qualified and Confident Workforce: This level, in recognising the requirement to continue to develop a qualified workforce that can confidently meet the needs of all children wishing to participate in the ECCE Programme, provides for a multi-annual training programme for early learning and care practitioners. Building on the training supports set out under Level 1, Level 3 includes a range of Continuing Professional Development courses such as Hanen, Lámh and Sensory Processing.

Level 4: Expert Educational Advice and Support: This level provides access to a team of 80 dedicated AIM Early Years Specialists for early learning and care practitioners/providers. As well as mentoring practitioners/providers, this Team also supports providers, parents and children to access additional resources, where necessary.

Level 5: Equipment, Appliances and Minor Alterations Capital Grant: This level provides for access to specialised equipment, appliances, assistive technology and/or minor alterations capital grants for early learning and care settings to ensure children with a disability can participate in the ECCE Programme.

Level 6: Therapeutic Intervention: This level provides for access to therapeutic services where they are critical to enable the child to be enrolled, and fully participate, in the ECCE Programme.

Level 7: Additional Assistance in the Pre-School Room: This level provides additional assistance in the pre-school room where this is critical to ensuring a child's participation in the ECCE Programme. In line with emerging best practice to support the integration and independence of children with a disability, AIM funds additional capitation to the ELC setting, which can be used to:

- a. Reduce the adult to child ratio in the pre-school room by enrolling less children without financial loss or
- b. Increase the adult ratio in the pre-school room by buying in additional assistance.

Accordingly, Level 7 assistance is a shared resource for the early learning and care setting.

The Policy on the Operation of the Access and Inclusion Model can be found at www.aim.gov.ie.

AIM won the 2018 Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Award in the 'Citizen Impact' category. It also won a UN Zero Project Award in 2020. An End of Year One Review of AIM concluded in 2018, which demonstrated AIM is performing well in its primary goal of making settings more inclusive. A Request for Tender to undertake a formal evaluation of AIM was published recently. Subject to the evaluation findings, *First 5* has committed to considering the extension of AIM, for example, to other age groups and/or to children with additional needs other than a disability.

To date, 11,650 children and 3,250 services have benefited from AIM targeted supports. The 2020 AIM budget is €43 million.