

# Updating *Aistear*

## Written submission template for organisations, groups and individuals

This template is intended to help you (and your colleagues) develop a written submission in relation to Updating *Aistear*. Please e-mail your completed submission to [aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie](mailto:aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie)

### **Individual submission details**

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>E-mail</b>	

### **Organisation submission details**

<b>Name</b>	Submission on behalf of the <b>National Childminding Development Officer Team</b>
<b>Position</b>	
<b>Organisation</b>	National Childminding Development Officer Team DECDIY/CCCs
<b>Date</b>	
<b>E-mail</b>	

**Do you consent to this submission being posted online including your name and organisation\*?**

Yes

No

**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

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The remainder of the template includes two sections. Section 1 invites your overall comments and observations on *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. Section 2 is structured according to the Principles, Themes and Guidelines for Good Practice. Each section is briefly summarised as a support for working on the submission.

Please email your submission to [aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie](mailto:aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie)

# Section 1

## **Please outline your overall comments and observations on updating *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework***

This is a timely review in light of the launch of the National Action Plan for Childminding (NAPC) 2021-2028 in April of last year. The NAPC will bring significant changes for the childminding sector namely in terms of training, childminding specific regulation and inspection processes. The development of childminding specific training the 'Foundation Training Programme' is currently underway and there is an opportunity to embed Aistear at the core of this training and in the 'Quality Development Programme' that will be developed in the future.

Childminders have varying levels of knowledge about Aistear and varying levels of engagement with Aistear from those with a Level 8 in Early Childhood Studies to those who have no formal training. Some will be very familiar with Aistear, others may not consider the curriculum framework in a childminding context and some may not have heard of Aistear. It is important that childminders see themselves in the framework, within the accompanying resources (posters, tip sheets, pictures, videos etc) and within the AistearSíolta Practice Guide.

The CMDO team understand that Aistear is at the very essence of childminding. Aistear is clearly evident and at its best in the ordinary every day interactions between a childminder and the children in their care. An emerging and inquiry based curriculum is very evident and happens organically in a childminding setting. The learning that takes place can be easily linked to the themes and learning goals of Aistear.

Aistear recognises the Key Person Approach as central to the provision of high quality care for children. The key person approach emulates the care offered in a childminding setting. Childminding offers families continuity of care and offers children unique opportunities to experience warm, responsive and nurturing relationships.

It is the view of the CMDO team that as Aistear is now being updated there is a great opportunity to make childminding and childminders more visible within the framework. As the NCCA states "A curriculum framework sets out a clear vision and the principles for learning and development. It highlights what is important and why, it provides a description of what should be prioritised." Learning and development is more than academic learning. We understand that the Aistear curriculum framework demonstrates this. However, it also needs to demonstrate that the meaningful real life learning and development experiences offered in a childminding setting, which underpin all the principles of Aistear, are as important as those offered in other settings.

The updated framework will need to clearly demonstrate to childminders, parents and children that the everyday interactions, life learning experiences, activities and routines within the home and wider community provide unique opportunities for “learning and development”.

Moving forward and in light of the launch of the NAPC there is now a real opportunity to support childminders to embrace Aistear.

The role of a childminders and the uniqueness of a childminding setting needs to be recognised throughout. The importance of the “continuity of care” offered by a childminder needs to be included somewhere and/or throughout Aistear, children often stay with the same childminder from birth through primary school, lifelong relationships are established, this is a unique feature of the childminding relationship.

Would it be possible to add a fourth category for mixed ages;

Babies (birth to 18<sup>th</sup> months)

Toddlers (12 months to 3 years)

Young children (2 ½ to 6 years)

Mixed ages (birth to 6 years +) more reflective of a childminding setting.

While recognising that Aistear is birth to 6 years, childminders care for children up to 12 years and over. The type of activities encouraged in Aistear can be and are applicable to all ages. The updating of the Aistear framework has the potential to recognise the unique learning opportunities provided to children in a mixed age group. In a childminding setting there is an abundance of opportunities for younger children to learn from their older peers and for older children to develop their skills and dispositions such as empathy.

Further consideration needs to be given to how the NCCA promote Aistear with childminders and how supports/resources accompanying Aistear apply to childminders and to childminding settings.

To conclude, the CMDO team reiterate that Aistear is at the very essence of childminding, that it is in the ordinary every day interactions between a childminder and the children. In order for childminders to recognise the connection between the service they provide and Aistear, the framework must reflect childminding settings. We need to demonstrate to childminders how relevant Aistear is to their everyday activities and interactions, and to highlight to childminders that what they are currently doing daily is Aistear in practice at it's very best. We need to support childminders to make the connection between the learning that takes place in their homes and the themes and learning goals.

## Section 2

### Principles of *Aistear*

Aistear is based on 12 Principles of early learning and development. Each principle is presented using a short statement. This is followed by an explanation of the Principle from the child's perspective. This explanation highlights the adult's role in supporting children's early learning and development. The Principles can be accessed [here](#).

**Please give your feedback in relation to updating the Principles of *Aistear*. Please indicate what is working well with the principles and what might need to be enhanced or updated.**

What is workin well –

Still relevant today, the principles are very comprehensive and have stood the test of time, a testament to how well developed they are.

What might need to be enhanced or updated –

2<sup>nd</sup> Principle - "Nurturing equality, diversity and **inclusion** is important in early childhood. Promoting equality is about creating a fairer society in which everyone can participate equally with the opportunity to fulfil his/her potential. Diversity is about welcoming and valuing individual and group differences, and understanding and celebrating difference as part of life."

Add – inclusion to this principle.

10<sup>th</sup> Principle - "Relevant and meaningful experiences make learning more enjoyable and positive for children. On-going assessment of what children do, say and make, and reflection on these experiences helps practitioners to plan more developmentally appropriate and meaningful learning experiences for children. This also enables them to improve their practice. Assessment is about building a picture of children's individual strengths, interests, abilities, and needs and using this to support and plan for their future learning and development."

Assessment – we need to define what this looks like in a childminding setting/suggest another term. When speaking to childminders directly, maybe the word ASSESSMENT could be expanded/supported by terms such as capture and/or communicate.

Children learn many different things at the same time. What they learn is connected to where, how and with whom they learn. Add examples of benefit of mixed age groups.

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# Section 3

## Themes of *Aistear*

*Aistear*: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework presents children’s learning and development using four Themes. These are:

1. Well-being
2. Identity and Belonging
3. Communicating
4. Exploring and Thinking.

The themes describe what children learn—the dispositions, attitudes and values, skills, knowledge, and understanding. Each theme begins with a short overview of its importance for children as young learners. The theme is then presented using four aims. Each aim is divided into six learning goals. *Aistear*’s Themes can be accessed

<https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Early-Childhood/Principles-and-Themes/>

**Please give your overall feedback in relation to the themes of *Aistear*. Please indicate what is working well with the themes and what might need to be enhanced or updated.**

What is working well –

The 4 themes are still relevant today.

What might need to be enhanced or updated –

1. Well-being - is it possible to add emotional intelligence to the aim and learning goal to equip children with these tools. Learning goal 2 e.g. emotions
2. Identity and Belonging - very evident in a childminders setting ie involved in a community, the continuity of care, children caring for each other in a mixed aged environment etc
3. Communicating – Provide resources to support childminders to communicate with parents that the learning goals are being met through real life activities provided in their childminding setting
4. Exploring and Thinking – it is important that a childminders home reflects a home setting, that playrooms aren’t set up like pre-school rooms with designated areas

Supporting resources and training materials need to be reflective of a childminding setting, to ensure that they support childminders to demonstrate how children learn through real life experiences. By encompassing this childminders, parents and children can see the value of these rich experiences and acknowledge these as vital to

children’s learning and development. This is worthy of further discussion, posters, flyers, videos, tip sheets etc will need to be specifically developed for childminders. Practical examples of what the themes might look like in a childminders home, adapt and amend the Sample Learning Record Forms to reflect a childminding setting. Consideration needs to be given to mixed age groups and what a sample learning record might look like when working with mixed age groups (at the same time). Sample learning opportunities need to be representative of a childminding setting

We need to ask the question “Do childminders need to complete Learning Record forms?” It would be the view of the CMDO team that they are not applicable to a home from home setting. As a childminder works singlehandedly caring for children of mixed ages childminders are mindful of the varying ages, stages and abilities of individual children. Children may be experiencing Aistear in more formal settings in the course of the day i.e. in pre-school or school before attending the childminding setting.

How children learn—the dispositions, attitudes and values, skills, knowledge, and understanding, needs to be highlighted more. How this learning takes place in an informal way through ordinary day to day life learning experiences, activities and routines in the childminders home.

In relation to ‘planning’ for children’s learning and development a more informal, less onerous approach needs to be taken as to how this might look in a childminding setting. Childminders tend to follow the emergent interest of the children as opposed to engaging in more formal ‘planning’.

Images of a childminding setting should be continually reflected in all Aistear resources i.e. lone worker and mixed age needs to be reflected.

# Section 4

## Guidelines for Good Practice

*Aistear* has four sets of guidelines, focusing on different aspects of practice:

1. Building partnerships between parents and practitioners
2. Learning and developing through interactions
3. Learning and developing through play
4. Supporting learning and development through assessment

These describe how the adult can support children's learning and development across *Aistear's* principles and themes. *Aistear's* Guidelines for Good Practice can be accessed [here](#)

**Please give your overall feedback in relation to updating *Aistear's* Guidelines for Good Practice. Please indicate what is working well with the guidelines and what might need to be enhanced or updated.**

What is workin well –

1. Building partnerships between parents and practitioners
2. Learning and developing through interactions
3. Learning and developing through play
4. Supporting learning and development through assessment

What might need to be enhanced or updated –

It is the view of the CMDO team that a Childminders version of the *Aistear's* Guidelines for Good Practice needs to be developed.

Childminders would find a 118 page document daunting, particularly as so many childminders have yet to engage with *Aistear*.

It is implicit to acknowledge that through real life learning experiences happening daily in childminding settings, that childminders are intuitively providing *Aistear* to children and their families. It is important to consider this as many childminders are informally offering *Aistear*. By implementing the *Aistear* curriculum framework in line with the updated guidelines, we anticipate that this will not be an onerous or time consuming task for childminders.

1. Building partnerships between parents and childminders (remove practitioners)

This section could be greatly reduced and made more applicable to a childminding setting.

“Definition of partnership”, “Partnership in action” applicable to childminding

2. Learning and developing through interactions

Most of this section is not applicable to childminding. However “Children learning together”, “How can I support interactions between children” is applicable to childminding setting.

3. Learning and developing through play

Most of this section is relevant to childminders, new Learning experiences would need to be developed to apply to childminding settings.

4. Supporting learning and development through assessment

It is the view of the CMDO team is that ‘Assessment’ is not required in a childminding setting. Childminders need to be supported in sharing their life learning experiences and informal observations with parents. This can be done through WhatsApp photographs sent to parents during the course of day or by providing daily diaries where ‘what we did today’ can be shared with parents. We need to be mindful that childminders work alone and that any form of documentation on childrens learning and development needs to be kept to a minimum.

## Data Protection

The NCCA fully respects your right to privacy. Any personal information which you volunteer to the NCCA will be treated with the highest standards of security and confidentiality, strictly in accordance with the Data Protection Acts. If you require further information related to data protection please visit <https://www.ncca.ie/en/privacy-statement> or you can contact the NCCA's Data Protection Officer at [dpo@ncca.ie](mailto:dpo@ncca.ie).