



Free Pre-School Scheme starts in January 2010

The free Pre-School Year Scheme in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) starts in January 2010. The scheme is being introduced by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA), with the local work being done by the City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs).

Children in the pre-school year, who were born between 2 February 2005 and 30 June 2006, will be eligible for the scheme from January next. This is a new scheme which was announced in April of this year. As it was not possible to have arrangements in place by September of this year, the first year of the scheme will be shorter than in future years, starting in January rather than September.

Parents of children in this age range can avail of the pre-school year by enrolling their child in a local participating pre-school service. Almost all pre-school services in the country are participating in the scheme and many of these are advertising that they will have places available. If a parent has not yet enrolled a child in this age range for a Pre-School Year place, they should do so now. If a parent is unsure of how to go about doing this, s/he should contact the local City or County Childcare Committee for information.

Parents of children who were born between 2 February 2006 and 30 June 2007 will be eligible for the next free Pre-School Year in September 2010, provided they did not register to start the scheme this January. Again, they should avail of the pre-school year by enrolling their child in a local participating pre-school service during 2010. **PLEASE NOTE FOR YOUR CHILD TO AVAIL OF THE ECCE SCHEME PARENTS MUST REGISTER THEIR CHILD WITH THE SERVICE OF YOUR CHOICE PRIOR TO THE 11TH OF JANUARY 2010**

Playschool services: Where the free Pre-School Year is provided in a playschool, it will generally last for 3 hours a day, 5 days a week over the primary school year (38 weeks). The service will be paid in full by the OMCYA for each pre-school place and parents of children in this age range will not have to make any payment to the service.

Creche places: Where the free Pre-School Year is provided in a crèche, it will generally consist of a daily session of 2 hours 15 minutes duration, 5 days a week over the full year (50 weeks). The service will be paid €48.50 per week by the OMCYA for each pre-school place. Parents of participating children who are paying for full or part-time daycare must be given a reduction in their daycare fees of €48.50 per week by the crèche.

Additional services: Playschools and crèches can offer additional services to parents for whom charges will be made, however, these can only be offered on an optional basis and parents who do not want to avail of such services must still be provided with a full Pre-School Year service in early learning for their children. Additional services would include extra hours, meals, special outings, special classes etc. If parents are unsure about how this works, their local Childcare Committee will be able to answer their queries. Additional charges in such cases for extras must be optional for a service to comply with the rules of the scheme, and if a parent feels that this rule is being broken, they can approach their CCC in confidence, who will take the matter up with the service, and with the OMCYA if necessary.

Further Information please contact Louth CCC at 041 6859912