

What is *Aistear*?

Aistear is a **curriculum framework** for children from **birth to six years** in Ireland. It describes the types of learning that are important for children in their early years. As a curriculum framework, *Aistear* can work as a **guide** for primary schools and teachers in planning practical learning programmes for children in infant classes. In this way, you can use *Aistear* together with the Infant Curriculum to plan fun and challenging experiences for the children in your classroom.



How can *Aistear* help me as an infant teacher?

There are lots of great examples, exciting ideas and practical suggestions in *Aistear* to help you as you work with the Infant Curriculum. Many of these have come from infant teachers around the country.



One of the biggest differences between *Aistear* and the Infant Curriculum is **play**. *Aistear* shows how important play is for young children's early learning and development and offers lots of ideas for different types of play as well as giving examples of how you might use play in your classroom. For example, the Framework has a sample daily plan for a junior and senior infant classroom (*User guide*, pages 17–18) and a long list of low-cost and free resources for play (*Guidelines for good practice*, pages 103–106).

Aistear also has examples of how you might use different assessment methods to gather evidence of children's learning in order to help them with the next steps, as well as practical ideas for working with parents.

Where can I find *Aistear* and what else is in it?

Aistear is available at www.ncca.ie/earlylearning. There are some CD and print copies and you can find out more about these by contacting your local Education Centre.

Aistear has four elements:

- *Principles and themes*
- *Guidelines for good practice*
- *User guide*
- *Key messages from the research papers.*

The *Principles and themes* and the *Guidelines for good practice* are the most important of these.

Principles and themes

The Framework has 12 **principles**. You'll recognise most of these, as many are similar to the principles in the Primary School Curriculum. There are some new ones too such as **learning through play**.

Aistear uses **themes** instead of subjects to outline what children should learn during their early childhood. The themes are

- *Well-being* (pages 16–23)
- *Identity and Belonging* (pages 25–32)
- *Communicating* (pages 34–41)
- *Exploring and Thinking* (pages 43–52).

The themes connect to each other and link to the subjects in the Infant Curriculum.

Guidelines for good practice

Aistear also has **guidelines** that look at

- building partnerships between parents and practitioners (pages 6–25)
- learning and developing through interactions (pages 26–51)
- learning and developing through play (pages 52–70)
- supporting learning and development through assessment (pages 71–102).

The guidelines include 21 examples of good practice in infant classrooms. These are called **learning experiences** and they highlight your important role as a teacher in helping young children to progress in their learning. See *Learning experience 48b* which shows how Múinteoir Síle uses pretend play to develop the children's literacy and numeracy skills.





Learning experience 48b: The farmer's market

Theme: *Identity and Belonging*, Aim 4 and Learning goal 3

Age group: Young children

Setting: Infant class (primary school in the Gaeltacht)

During a series of drama lessons a group of children in junior and senior infants and their teacher, Múinteoir Síle, set up a market stall in the pretend play area. Many of the children visit the local farmer's market on Saturday mornings with their parents and mention it during news-time. Múinteoir Síle gets play props, including writing materials and money, empty food containers, and jars. She clears the display table and uses this as a counter. The children take on different roles and ask Múinteoir Síle to be a customer. Over the next few days they bring 1, 2, 5, and 10 cent coins to school for buying the produce. The play develops during the week as groups of children set up more specialised stalls. Space in the classroom for stalls begins to pose a problem. Múinteoir Síle suggests that they could rearrange the tables and chairs to make room. Excitedly, the children help her do this. Planning permission to extend the market is now in place! More and more stalls begin to appear as children make produce from play-dough and bring empty food cartons from home. They set up a stall selling their own paintings and the flowers they are growing. They bring old toys and books from home and sell them to each other. They take turns playing customers and stall owners. Múinteoir Síle helps them to make signs for the different stalls. Some children make signs that show the price of their merchandise.

Múinteoir Síle sends a note home telling parents what the children are doing and invites them to visit the children's market when they drop off or collect the children. She videos some of the play episodes. On another day she uses the market to pose a problem for the children; she wonders aloud how she can use the coins she has to pay for a 5c plant (junior infants) or a 10c plant (senior infants). With each child handling, observing and exploring real coins (1c, 2c, 5c, and 10c), she encourages the children to explore the combinations they could use to pay for the plants.



Reflection: How can I use pretend play to a greater extent to develop children's literacy and numeracy skills?

Who else is Aistear for?

Aistear can also be used in

- sessional services such as Early Start Units, pre-schools, playgroups, and naíonraí (A number of settings taking part in the Pre-school Year Initiative are starting to use Aistear along with *Síolta, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* (2006) in their work with children.)
- full- and part-time daycare settings such as crèches and nurseries
- childminding settings.

Aistear also has lots of ideas and suggestions for parents to help them support their children's early learning and development at home.



What's the Aistear Toolkit?

The Aistear Toolkit has lots of resources to help you learn more about the Framework and see how it might help you in your infant classroom. For example, you might like to check out the eight-minute presentation with audio which gives a short overview of Aistear, or listen to the podcasts on play, or perhaps browse the tip sheets on play for parents. Over time, the Toolkit will include video clips, samples of children's 'work' and play resources. You will find the Toolkit at www.ncca.ie/aisteartoolkit.

Where can I find out more about Aistear?

Each full-time Education Centre has a number of Aistear Tutors. Working with their Centres, the Tutors organise information sessions and workshops on Aistear for teachers and principals who would like to find out more about the Framework and see how it might help them in their work with junior and senior infants. To find out more about these events, contact your local Education Centre.