



*Developing and co-ordinating early  
childhood education in Ireland*



## Chairperson's Foreword

This year was a very productive year for the CECDE. Drawing on research, practice and consultations the Centre provided the sector with the excellent National Quality Framework – *Síolta* - which has been widely welcomed both at home and abroad. The team have also designed workshops so that the Framework is implemented carefully in practice and in line with the principles which underpin it. These have been very well received.

This year also saw the launch of the Research Series. These publications - six full research reports available on [www.cecde.ie](http://www.cecde.ie) and executive summaries from the CECDE itself - reflect another role the Centre has fulfilled, that of encouraging and disseminating high quality research relevant to the early childhood sector in Ireland. Alongside these research projects the CECDE has also supported four post-graduate students who are supervised by the colleges associated with the Centre - St. Patrick's College and the Dublin Institute of Technology. It is hoped that such initiatives can be continued so that this field of educational research can grow.

The CECDE and *Síolta* websites, as well as the newsletter 'Alana', continue to be important communication tools for

the Centre and are a rich resource for practitioners, researchers and others interested in early childhood.

With the publication of the DEIS report [Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools] the CECDE have been asked by the Department of Education and Science to become directly involved in supporting the implementation of the early childhood dimension. Despite short time frames the CECDE have been quick to respond and we look forward to exciting initiatives in this area over the coming years.

As ever the whole CECDE team deserves our praise and thanks for the work done and the Director and Assistant Director are to be congratulated on supporting and maintaining such a high level of high quality work. I would like to thank my colleagues on the management board for their work and engagement over the year and look forward to the challenges of another activity-rich year ahead.

  
Nóirín Hayes



## Director's Introduction

2006 was a very important and productive year for the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education with many of our activities coming to fruition.

On May 30th the Minister for Children, Brian Lenihan T.D. launched *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education in Ireland. The publication of *Síolta* is an unprecedented milestone in the development of early childhood care and education in Ireland and will guide and influence not just practice but also training and policy for a long time to come. For the first time, there is a nationally agreed definition of quality in services for young children, crossing the divide between 'care' and 'education' and covering a range of very diverse settings.

Following the launch of *Síolta* we were quite overwhelmed by the huge demand from across the early childhood field and were very busy engaging on *Síolta* with many providers, teachers and practitioners. This intensive period of engagement led to the development of an introductory workshop model. We expect to implement this model in cooperation with FÁS early in 2007.

In September 2006 the CECDE published a set of five major

research reports addressing the needs of young children experiencing educational disadvantage and children who have special needs. These publications were very popular with researchers, trainers and practitioners alike.



But our research activities have always been underpinned by the desire to improve practice and to influence policy. Throughout 2006, the CECDE has continued to provide advice and assistance to the Government, in particular to the Department of Education and Science and the Office of the Minister for Children. We have contributed at the highest level to the development of early childhood care and education in Ireland and assisted the sector with information and advice.

Finally, I would like to thank the Board and staff of the CECDE as well as the many partners in our Consultative Committee for their great commitment and support.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heino Schonfeld".

Heino Schonfeld

## About Us

In October 2002 the Minister for Education and Science launched the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE).

The **aim** of the CECDE is to develop and co-ordinate early childhood education in pursuance of the objectives of the White Paper 'Ready to Learn' and to advise the Department of Education and Science on policy issues in this area. The Centre's brief covers children from birth to 6 years of age in a wide variety of settings, including families, nurseries, crèches, playgroups, child minders, preschools and the infant classes of primary schools.

The main **objectives** of the Centre are:

- To develop a quality framework for early childhood education;
- To develop targeted interventions on a pilot basis for children who are educationally disadvantaged and children with special needs; and
- To prepare the groundwork for the establishment of an Early Childhood Education Agency as envisaged by the White Paper.

Within this context, the **functions** of the Centre are:

- To develop early education quality standards in relation to all aspects of early childhood education including equipment and material, staff qualifications, training, learning objectives, teaching methodologies, curriculum and related areas;
- To develop a support framework to encourage compliance with quality standards by early education providers;
- To co-ordinate and enhance early education provision, including parental involvement, with a particular focus on disadvantaged and special needs groups;
- To undertake and/or commission research and development through which best practice in curriculum, teaching methodology and parent involvement may be implemented and evaluated.

## *Síolta*, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education

On May 30th 2006, following over three years of development and extensive consultation, the Minister for Children, Mr. Brian Lenihan TD launched *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework for early Childhood Education.

*Síolta* is the Irish word for seeds and we chose it for what it says about the potential of childhood and of this Framework to grow and succeed.

This Framework is the result of three years of consultation and research in partnership with a wide variety of people interested in promoting the welfare and well-being of young children in Ireland. It is intended to provide support and guidance for all those working with, and on behalf of, children. It aims to improve the quality of their early childhood experiences.

Throughout the year 2006 we disseminated and promoted *Síolta* nationwide and the demand from providers, practitioners and trainers for the framework far exceeded our expectations.



## The Development of a Model to Engage with Practice

Following the launch of *Síolta*, the CECDE focused on engaging with practitioners to support them in enhancing the quality of their practice through the national standards contained in *Síolta*. To this end, the CECDE developed a workshop model through which to offer practitioners a 'hands-on' experience of reflecting on their own practice, with their peers in the context of the provisions of *Síolta*.

Following a period of almost six months in which workshops on a number of different Standards were conducted, the CECDE reviewed the process. Demand for the workshops had far exceeded expectations and there was a continuous stream of requests for more workshops. Having established that demand existed, achieved the initial objective of disseminating *Síolta* and demonstrating its potential as a resource for practitioners, the CECDE decided to move onto the next phase of dissemination and to share the model with the wider ECCE sector.

In cooperation with and supported by FÁS, the national training agency, the CECDE developed a range of supporting materials and we anticipate to begin the roll-out of introductory workshops on the *Síolta* standards in spring 2007.

## DEIS – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

In May 2005 the Department of Education and Science published the 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools' (DEIS) action plan. DEIS provides for:

- A standardised system for identifying and regularly reviewing levels of disadvantage;
- A new integrated School Support Programme (SSP) which will bring together and build upon the existing educational disadvantage schemes and programmes;
- Targeted early childhood education provision as a key element of this action plan.

The CECDE assisted the Department of Education and Science (DES) in the design of and preparation for the early childhood education strand of the programme. We submitted a substantial Proposal for an early education strategy as part of DEIS Initiative to the DES in May 2006. Following a comprehensive survey of Band 1 Urban DEIS schools with an intake of Junior Infants a further report was submitted in October 2006.

Finally, in December 2006 the CECDE submitted a discussion document on the possible parameters for selection of schools to be involved in the initial examination and early provision of services under the Early Education strand of DEIS.

## Research

Research underpins all of our work and many of the actions described elsewhere in this report are related to our research activities.

- In 2006, we developed a second three-year research strategy which included a number of research briefs. The briefs have been submitted to, and are currently being considered by, the Department of Education and Science.
- In September 2006, the executive summaries of five major targeted research projects were published; the full text of the reports is available on our web site [www.cecde.ie](http://www.cecde.ie). The following is a comprehensive list of the research projects completed:
  - *Synergy - An Exploration of High Quality Early Intervention for Children with Special Needs in Diverse Rural Settings*
  - *In-Career Development Programme for Staff and Management of Traveller Pre-schools*
  - *Early Assessment and Intervention in Educational Disadvantage*
  - *In Search of Quality: Multiple Perspectives*
  - *Early Years Provision for Children from Birth to Six Years with Special Needs in Two Geographical Areas in Ireland*

A series of seminars on the findings of these reports were held in Dublin, Galway and Cork during autumn 2006.

- Four PhD students continued to be grant-aided during their third year of study in 2006.



## Policy Advice and Consultation

One of the functions of the CECDE is to provide advice to the Department of Education and Science on policy issues related to early childhood education and development. With the establishment of the Office of the Minister for Children (OMC) and the co-location of the Early Years Education Policy Unit in that Office, we are now also providing policy advice to the OMC.

- The CECDE met with the Minister for Children and staff of the OMC, including the Director General, on several occasions during the past year.
- Formal links with the Office of the Ombudsman for Children were established and the Ombudsman, Emily Logan visited the Centre for a discussion on common issues in December 2006.
- Representatives of the CECDE met with senior personnel of the Health Services Executive (HSE) and provided advice on the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations and related issues, such as the standardisation of inspections and publication of inspection reports.
- The CECDE advised the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science on the implications of *Síolta* in the context of schools and other matters relating to early childhood education.
- We participated in the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) Value for Money Review at Steering Group level. This important review is continuing into the next year.
- Another most important area of policy development is the work on the National Childcare Training Strategy and the CECDE has assisted the Early Years Education Policy Unit in the preparation for this work.
- The CECDE continued to be represented on a number of important national bodies, such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the National Coordinating Childcare Committee (NCCC).
- Representatives of the Centre contributed to the development of the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme consisting of three distinct programmes in disadvantaged areas of Dublin namely, Childhood

Development Initiative Tallaght, Youngballymun, and Preparing for Life Northside Partnership.

- The CECDE continued and developed close working relationships with the national voluntary childcare organisations (NVCOs) and teacher organisations, particularly the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO).
- During the second half of the year we conducted a very successful consultation process with parents in preparation of the publication 'Síolta – A Guide for Parents'.



## Information, Communication and Dissemination

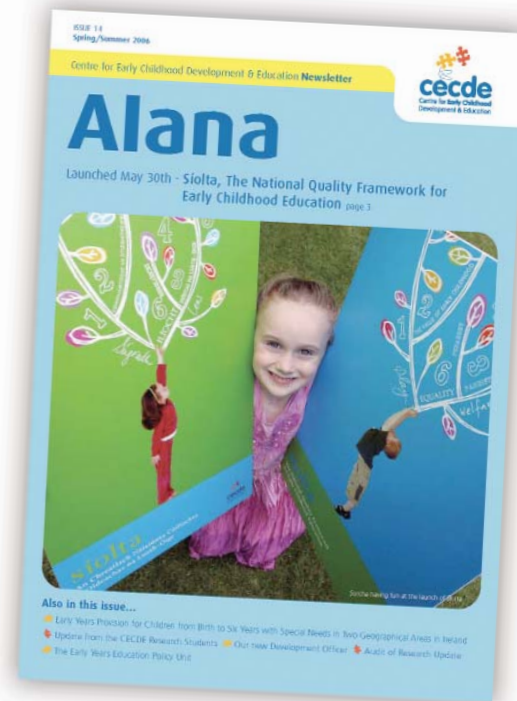
Throughout the year, large numbers of the *Siolta* documentation were disseminated with demand equally strong across the various settings. The strong demand led to the need for a full reprint of the materials in the autumn of 2006.

The *Siolta* materials were also accessed on the dedicated website with an average of about 2000 visits per month in 2006. In addition, *Siolta* materials were also distributed on CD – ROM.

Following requests from groups and networks across the country, CECD staff facilitated a large number of introductory *Siolta* workshops and presentations.

The executive summaries of five major research reports were distributed in hard copies with the full report published on the website. Seminars in Dublin, Galway and Cork supported this process.

The CECD published and distributed 3 issues of its newsletter 'Alana' in 2006.



The information, archive and library service expanded further throughout the year and supported practitioners, policy makers and researchers with requests for information and resources.

The CECDE maintained two distinct websites:

- [www.cecde.ie](http://www.cecde.ie) is the general corporate site and attracted an average of over 1500 visits per months. The site is regularly updated and hosts all our publications in electronic format.
- [www.siolta.ie](http://www.siolta.ie) is a site dedicated to *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and hosts all *Síolta* documentation and additional relevant material. This site attracted on average over 2000 visits per month in 2006.

## Appendix 1: Governance

The **CECDE Steering Committee** met on two occasions in 2006: 30th January and 13th June. The committee has the following members:

- Brian Power (Chair) – Department of Education and Science
- Pádraig Mac Fhlannchadha – Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science
- Dr. John Donovan – Dublin Institute of Technology
- Anne McGough – CECDE
- Dr. Nóirín Hayes – CECDE
- Lesley Abbott – Manchester Metropolitan University

The **CECDE Board of Management** had the following members in 2006:

- Anne McGough - St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra
- Dr. Elizabeth Dunphy - St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra
- Martin Ward - St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra
- Dr. Nóirín Hayes – Dublin Institute of Technology
- Dr. Máire Mhic Mhathúna - Dublin Institute of Technology
- Siobhán Bradley - Dublin Institute of Technology

The Board met regularly on the following dates in 2006:

### 2006 Board Meetings

18th January  
22nd February  
15th March  
26th April  
25th May  
22nd June  
13th July  
12th September  
8th November  
6th December

### Chair

Dr Elizabeth Dunphy  
Dr Elizabeth Dunphy  
Dr Elizabeth Dunphy  
Dr Elizabeth Dunphy  
Dr Elizabeth Dunphy  
Dr Elizabeth Dunphy  
Dr Máire Mhic Mhathúna  
Dr Máire Mhic Mhathúna  
Dr Máire Mhic Mhathúna  
Dr Máire Mhic Mhathúna

## Appendix 2: Audited accounts 2006

PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS 

### Income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31 December 2006

	Year ended 31.12.2006	Year ended 31.12.2005		Year ended 31.12.2006	Year ended 31.12.2005
	€	€		€	€
<b>INCOME</b>			<b>EXPENDITURE cont'd</b>		
Grants	<u>986,374</u>	<u>905,492</u>	Attendance at conferences	14,582	3,219
<b>Total Income</b>	<b><u>986,374</u></b>	<b><u>905,492</u></b>	Travel	27,735	11,022
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>			Entertainment	1,128	647
CECDE Staff	570,857	466,910	Meetings and hospitalities	4,037	3,587
Scholarships	73,025	35,850	Consumables	1,845	2,832
Student fees	50	7,240	Computer Consultancy	7,047	-
Dissemination	211,613	110,611	Computer equipment	802	4,193
Translation	2,802	21,148	Light and heat	1,210	1,289
Professional fees	3,442	85,256	Rent	32,559	32,559
Advertising	1,108	35,397	Security	7,141	7,141
Books	4,025	4,168	Contract cleaning	4,427	4,249
Stationery	14,875	11,313	Insurance	2,860	3,168
Telephone	7,172	6,576	Management services – DIT and SPD	51,172	51,172
Subscriptions	275	4,335	Miscellaneous expenditure	610	1,190
Postage	13,673	5,560	<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b><u>1,060,373</u></b>	<b><u>920,632</u></b>
Training Costs	600	-	<b>(Deficit)/surplus for the year</b>	<b><u>(73,999)</u></b>	<b><u>(15,140)</u></b>

## Early Childhood Targeted Projects

### Income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31 December 2006

	Year ended 31.12.2006	Year ended 31.12.2005
	€	€
<b>INCOME</b>		
Grants	0	595,605
<b>Total Income</b>	<u>0</u>	<u>595,605</u>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>		
CECDE Staff	0	44,845
Professional fees	10,000	392,345
Printing	0	1,366
Attendance at conferences	0	1,228
Travel	0	953
Equipment & Furnishings	0	0
Entertainment	0	0
Sundry	0	173
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<u>10,000</u>	<u>440,910</u>
<b>(Deficit)/Surplus for the year</b>	<u>(10,000)</u>	<u>154,695</u>