

Applications for Overage Exemptions No Longer Accepted for ECCE Programme from 2018/19 Programme Year

Background

The free pre-school year provided under the ECCE Programme was introduced by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in 2010. The objective of this Programme is to make early learning in a formal setting available to eligible children before they commence primary school. When first introduced, the ECCE Programme was delivered over 38 weeks in a given ECCE Programme Year and children were required to be between the ages of 3 years and 2 months and 4 years and 7 months on September 1st in the year they enrolled. Children with a disability could apply for an exemption from this upper age limit for the ECCE Programme (although it remained preferable that these children transitioned to primary school along with the same age peer group).

The application process for an exemption from the upper age limit for the ECCE Programme was introduced within a context where:

- The ECCE Programme was one year only; and
- Where the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)¹ had yet to be introduced.

Update

Given, the extension of the ECCE Programme in 2016/17; (and the further extension of the Programme to two full years from September 2018), and the introduction of AIM in June 2016, it is clear that an application process for an exemption from the upper age limit for the ECCE Programme is no longer required.

The guiding principle with regard to a child's participation in pre-school and primary school is the best interests of the child. In keeping with this best interest principle:

- children should participate in inclusive mainstream settings (both pre-school and primary) (unless there is a compelling argument for a specialist setting), and
- children should transition from pre-school to primary school with their peers with appropriate supports provided by the relevant primary school, the NCSE and other bodies as required.

On this basis, no applications for overage exemption will be accepted for the ECCE Programme from the 2018/19 Programme Year.

From 2018/19, any concerns with regard to a child's transition to primary school should be referred to the AIM application process.

The AIM Early Years Specialists will work with the parents (and guardians), providers, Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) and others (as appropriate) to support the child's transition to primary school.

Parents (and guardians) and providers are therefore advised to engage with the AIM process early and in the normal way where a concern in relation to a child's transition to primary school is identified.

¹ AIM is a model of supports designed to ensure that children with disabilities can access the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. Its goal is to empower service providers 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 years care and education.