



# Early Childhood Ireland



## Budget 2023 Time for Transformation

Last year's Budget announcement marked a turning point in the State's approach to the Early Years and School Age Care sector, and the introduction of Core Funding represented a statement of intent that the delivery of a sustainable service for children, staff, parents, and providers, is a key priority. The government has also committed to at least double public funding by 2028.

### A Coherent Plan for Children

Building on these vital commitments to children and their families, Budget 2023 is the moment when government must announce an ambitious 5-year public investment plan. Clear annual funding targets and the key priorities for each year should be included. Ireland has lagged at the bottom of international public investment tables for decades. Government promises to transform our Early Years and School Age Care system are long overdue but very welcome. The legacy of under-investment has led to severe impacts. Parents pay the highest fees from take-home pay in the European Union. Overly dependent on these fees, providers have operated precariously in a complex and fragile funding model. The average pay and conditions of staff in the sector remain poor, leading to continuing challenges in staff recruitment and retention, which in turn impacts on the consistent provision of high-quality care and education to our youngest citizens. A coherent multi-annual plan will offer certainty to families, to the workforce and to operators.

### Immediate Priorities

The plan for 2023 should include the following:

- An increase in *Core Funding* which takes account of both inflation and any agreed sector pay scales
- Increases in the *National Childcare Scheme*, encompassing universal and targeted subsidies and a national communications plan to promote the scheme to parents
- In consultation with Early Childhood Ireland's members, and other stakeholders, an extension of the *Access and Inclusion Model*, beyond the ECCE scheme
- Implementation of the first phase of the *National Childminding Action Plan* and of *Nurturing Skills* – the sector's workforce plan

### For Every Child

The plans for each year from 2024 - 2027 should renew the above commitments and government should also provide detailed annual targets focussed on guaranteeing access to high-quality Early Years and School Age Care and education to every child in every family and community by 2028.