Irish-medium Education

Early Years Handbook

Special Educational Needs

November 2013
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1. Introduction

This resource is written by practitioners for practitioners currently working in Irish-medium Early Years (IMEY) settings to support access to learning for all children. It adopts an inclusive approach to early identification and effective interventions. The resource should be used in conjunction with recent publications to support children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Early Years.

These include the:


- Department of Education (DE) Extended Early Years SEN Supplement; and
This resource supports a sensitive approach based upon the individual development of the child.
2. Immersion - An Overview

Irish-medium Early Years (IMEY) settings adopt an immersion language model. As all staff in the settings speak in Irish, the children are immersed in the Irish language. A percentage of the children will already be able to express themselves fluently and coherently in Irish before they begin to attend the setting. Staff will encourage and support these children in their use of Irish, as well as plan for their continuous progression. For children in the IMEY setting, understanding, confidence and fluency in Irish will develop as they progress through immersion education.

Language acquisition in the IMEY setting takes place within a focused context whether it is play, stories, songs, practical, or other activities. In advance of creating these learning contexts, staff will thoroughly plan for the language that they wish each child to acquire. Planning and scaffolding the acquisition and consolidation of new language is crucial.

2.1 Planning for language acquisition

By using a practical, activity based approach, the child becomes accustomed to the language associated with that activity. The child begins to connect language with the activity, context or concept. Within each new topic, the practitioner will guide the child through the following stages, towards speaking in Irish. Overlapping will occur throughout when:

- encouraging and developing listening and receptive language;
- encouraging the use of single words in Irish;
- encouraging the use of recurrent phrases;
- encouraging and scaffolding phrases into sentences; and
- encouraging and developing one sentence to become a series of sentences.

The child begins to use Irish in practitioner-led contexts progressing to spontaneous use of Irish with adults and peers. This leads to coherent use of Irish as a means of communication.
Best practice in IMEY education involves staff adopting a sensitive approach towards all efforts the child makes to speak Irish. Staff should have a clear knowledge of the child’s ongoing receptive and expressive language development in Irish. Realistically high expectations of the child’s ability to speak Irish, coupled with praise and ongoing positive reinforcement are imperative.

Planning for language acquisition involves a balanced, yet flexible approach. Effective language planning involves:

- planning for the functional language objectives of each child;
- planning for targeted language;
- planning for topic language;
- planning for exposure to rich language (saibhreas na Gaeilge); and
- allowing for spontaneous language development, which will be personal to each child.

Whilst language planning should be comprehensive, it should not be restrictive. Using Irish in authentic learning contexts facilitates exposure to, for example, a wide variety of nouns, adjectives and verbs. Staff plan for this breadth of language in accordance with the developmental progression of the child. It is important to allow for lots of repetition and reinforcement in a supportive environment.

### 2.2 Creating a language rich environment

Staff in IMEY settings should make effective use of the learning environment to enhance the development of language. Multisensory displays provide opportunities to reinforce and consolidate new language, enabling children to see, to touch, to hear and ultimately, to converse in Irish. These displays include authentic and natural materials and objects, as well as associated books. Clear labelling of displays encourages reading and writing. Examples of multisensory displays include:

- a nature table
- a thematic table
- puppets and characters arising from big books
- prop boxes
- feely bags.

Staff should ensure that every learning activity is a language opportunity.
2.3 Modelling

Modelling by adults or peers encourages children to speak in Irish. Staff should ensure that they also model a higher level of language to promote language extension and learning. In addition to modelling the language when introducing new words, the rule of thumb (four comments to one question) can aid the child in this language acquisition.

For example, if a child is playing in the home corner and staff have planned to introduce the word 'doirteal', it is important to give the child experience of using the sink whilst hearing the word many times.

“Tá an doirteal mór. Tá an doirteal bán. Tá pláta sa doirteal. Tá cupán sa doirteal. Seo é an... doirteal.”

Positive modelling of language eg modelling the correct phrase in response to a child making an error is managed sensitively. For example, if a child is asked, ‘Ar mhaith leat súgradh?’ and responds with ‘Tá’, the staff respond by modelling the correct structure using ‘Ba mhaith...’

There may be occasions when, despite repeated modelling errors persist, eg ‘Tá mála nua ag mise.’ In these instances it is important to explicitly teach the phrases in the correct word order and grammatical structure eg ‘Tá mála nua agamsa.’ This can be presented through role-play, circle time, games and practical activities or by utilising real-life situations.
3. Transition/Settling-in/Working with Parents

The settling-in period is an influential time for children in an IMEY setting. Consideration may need to be given to the time, support and resources in response to children’s needs. Different settings adopt different admissions time frames and start dates. It is important to reflect on the needs of the children each year and to recognise the potential need to amend the settling-in process annually. Some examples of settling-in include employing a phased entry according to:

- children identified as having special educational needs;
- age - youngest children may start first and older children phased in later, or vice versa; and
- prior exposure to the Irish language

3.1 Flexibility

The process of effective transition is managed in a timely way. Adopting a flexible approach of admissions and ensuring open and honest communication encourages the development of secure relationships between children, staff and parents. An example of this could include the use of Transition books¹ and visits prior to the child starting the setting. For some children a phased entry into the pre-school setting may be applicable dependent on their needs.

¹ Transition books contain key information and pictures regarding the child’s future classroom, teachers and surroundings to reduce anxiety and create familiarity to enable secure attachments.
For example the setting may:

- build up the number of sessions the child attends in one week,
- extend the length of the day as each week progresses

By evaluating information from settling in questionnaires from parents, staff can review the effectiveness of the transition process to inform future planning on an annual basis.

### 3.2 Ethos

The child and parent should be addressed in a manner that promotes positive, affirmative communication from the onset. Parents and the child should be greeted into the setting with a welcoming ‘Dia Duit’ or ‘Maidin Mhaith’. Positive encounters such as these, and the habitual use of Irish with the parents, demonstrate an encouraging, enthusiastic approach to the use of the Irish language which creates positive experiences for the child.

### 3.3 Management of transitions (family/outside agencies)

In order to be effective, the management of transitions requires appropriate ongoing communication between parents, staff and outside agencies, all working together to meet the needs of the child.

Staff in IMEY settings will have established links with the setting’s own Management Committee or Board of Governors and with a range of outside agencies including: Sure Start; early years’ advisors; Altram; Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta; FONT and the Early Years Organisation.

In addition, IMEY settings access support from a variety of sources including their local Education and Library Board, educational psychologists and multi-agency support teams. Schools may also be supported by their local learning communities including neighbouring Irish-medium settings.

To ensure a smooth transition for children, an overview of Irish-medium Education (IME) and immersion needs to be communicated to parents and outside agencies at the earliest opportunity.
3.4 Parents/staff role in supporting the child

Parents and staff are required to work in partnership. Outlined below are some useful strategies on how this may be achieved.

**Before enrolment**

Provide clear information to parents on how they can support positive transition by giving them information about the setting. This may include:

- assigning a key worker;
- explaining the daily routine;
- explaining the settling-in procedures;
- providing an opportunity for a visit to the setting;
- using a parent questionnaire to determine the child’s likes/dislikes, anxieties, behaviour patterns and any other information; and
- offering electronic materials and reference to useful Irish-medium Education (IME) TV programmes for young children. Free Ipad apps are available from TG4 in App store: CÚLACAINT 1, CÚLACAINT 2 and Olly an Veain Bheag Bhán (also on Android [https://play.google.com/store](https://play.google.com/store))
Throughout the year

- Regular newsletters are distributed to parents to inform them of forthcoming activities and events and how they can support their child’s learning.
- Thematic books may be made available to parents with photographs and text in Irish to encourage parental involvement.
- Daily encounters (drop off and pick up) are fully utilized to give parents an overview of how the day went for the child.
- Children’s contributions are sought and valued.

Open and honest relationships

Good communication is central to working with parents and children. It involves listening, questioning, understanding and responding to what is being communicated. A key part of effective communication is building trust between the child, parents, outside agencies and staff. Communication is not just about the way we speak but the manner of speaking, body language and the effectiveness of how we listen.

Staff create an appropriate environment for good communication by informal encounters and formal meetings with parents, developing a two-way communication system.

Frequent encounters with parents give opportunities to extend relationships whereby staff and parents can listen and discuss effectively the child’s experiences and progression. It is important to identify opportunities to celebrate and share the child's experiences of the setting, with various events such as concerts, fun days, assemblies, a graduation event or a sports day.

Sharing information

Sharing information in a timely and accurate way is essential. Staff should work collectively to share information for the well-being of the child, including information relating to specific needs. Meetings prior to transition allow staff and outside agencies to share information about the child. It is important to build trust from the outset with parents and all agencies involved, by clarifying issues and procedures surrounding sensitivity, confidentiality and information sharing. It is crucial that there is open communication between staff, parents and outside agencies, which is based on shared understanding and mutual respect.
Staff should work to ensure that parents feel involved and included in every aspect of their child’s life in the setting. This can be done by providing information about their child’s progress and by providing advice, strategies and resources to support his/her development at home.

*(see also DE Extended Early Years Supplement - Chapter 2 - Transitions pages 7-11)*
4. Valuing the Identity of the Child

Article 8 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child requires an undertaking to respect the identity of each child. A respectful nurturing of the child’s identity is of utmost importance. A robust profile of this identity should be acquired, respected and nurtured by staff, specifically in relation to the following areas:

- the identity of the child as an individual;
- the identity of the child as a member of his family;
- the identity of the child as a member of the Irish-medium setting; and
- the identity of the child as a member of the Irish-speaking community.

4.1 The child as an individual

The child’s name is central to an ever-developing appreciation of self. A consistent approach should be adopted in both the child’s home and in the Irish-medium setting, so that the child recognises and responds to his or her name, supporting settling-in and attention and listening skills. Agreement may need to be sought between parents and staff on the spelling and pronunciation of the child’s name. Furthermore, when addressing someone in Irish some names change. Where necessary, and in terms that the child understands, time should be taken to explain that when someone is addressed in Irish their name may change. Through eye contact at the child’s eye level, staff should patiently support each child becoming accustomed to such changes. This may need to be explained to parents who are unfamiliar with the Irish language.

4.2 The child as a member of a family

Each family is different. In Irish-medium settings, the language dynamic of each family varies. Staff should be aware of the language base of the child’s family. Furthermore, it is important to take into consideration the range of people involved in the child’s daily life, eg child-minders, grandparents, and the language bases that they may have. A child in the Irish-medium setting may come from one or other of the following language backgrounds:

- all Irish-speaking;
- mainly Irish-speaking;
- mainly English-speaking;
- all English-speaking;
- all other language-speaking; or
- mainly other language-speaking.
It is important that staff become aware of these key people in the child’s life. The child’s concept of their identity as a member of a family should be enhanced through providing opportunities to discuss family and home life experiences. In providing opportunities to make connections between home and school life in this way, the child’s family’s identity is reaffirmed.

4.3 The child as a member of the school

Every child is unique. Each child is a valued member of the class and of the school/setting. Each child has his/her own strengths and interests. These strengths and interests are utilised initially as the focus for settling in, and then for supporting the child in engaging with the curriculum. Displays within the school/setting may show each child’s photograph, symbol or name. Examples of work, stories that the child has created and comments made, should also be clearly visible and labelled within the setting.

Opportunities are facilitated for each child to speak and be listened to by both staff and peers alike. These skills may need to be taught by staff through ongoing modelling and explicit teaching.

4.4 The child as a member of the Irish-speaking community

Each child in an Irish-medium school/setting is an important member of the Irish-speaking community. In addition to exposure to Irish at home, within the wider family and in the Early Years setting, the child may take part in other clubs and activities in Irish, eg drama clubs, music lessons, after-school groups. Again, staff should encourage the child to talk about these activities, to share the experiences they bring, further connecting the child’s life inside and outside of the school/setting and developing an appreciation of the Irish-speaking community.
5. Focus on Skill Development

Staff should utilise the knowledge they have gained about the child's language background, interests, achievements and strengths, to plan for the ongoing development of skills. Staff should build upon this knowledge and facilitate progression through the use of:

- observations; and
- motivators.

5.1 Observations

As staff work with the child in a wide range of learning contexts, they should monitor how the child is progressing, including through observing each child at play, undertaking activities and communicating within the setting. Observations are either: planned or spontaneous.

A planned observation is one which a member of staff prepares in advance to undertake. It is a written record of a snapshot of a part of the child's day. It records exactly what the child is doing and exactly what the child is saying during that time. It takes note of how and with whom the child is interacting during the activity. Key information about the child's concentration, communication skills, preferences and progression should be evident from such an observation. Subsequent reflection by staff upon this short record should direct current provision and activities to extend the child's language and learning and future planning to develop a specific skill either related or unrelated to the focus of the observation.

A spontaneous observation is not planned. Frequently a child may say or do something, which gives a clear insight into their knowledge, perception and thinking about an area of learning. These happenings should be recorded and utilised by staff to reaffirm the child’s range of achievement and highlight opportunities for further learning within the setting.

An organised record of observations provides staff with a profile of the child’s ongoing development and progression.
5.2 Motivators

Identifying the child's pattern of behaviours allows staff to gain an understanding of their interests and style of learning. This also helps to build relationships with the child. By providing the child with age-appropriate toys and developmentally appropriate activities, staff are able to observe and support learning. The child engages in activities either intrinsically (because the child wants to) or extrinsically (because someone else wants the child to undertake the activity). There needs to be a balance of practitioner-led and child-led activities. Within the setting, the child will exhibit preferences towards certain activities. When the child experiences success in a preferred activity, practitioners should harness this motivation to transfer learning to other areas of the curriculum.

Example - Seán’s Schema

Seán was observed dropping objects from tables and climbing up and down from the furniture indoors. As this pattern of behaviour was potentially dangerous to Seán and others, and preventing him from participating in planned activities, staff utilised his trajectory schema (pattern of behaviour) to channel his motivation of how people and objects move, to access a broader and more balanced range of activities within the setting. These activities included:

- Chasing and catching bubbles outdoors
- Splatting wet sponges at target outdoors
- Dribbling runny paint from a dropper at easel inside
- Dribbling coloured water from droppers down mirrors inside
- Using different sizes and weights of balls for throwing, spinning or rolling inside and out
- Throwing bean bags into hoops inside and out.

Once motivated Seán was able to follow the rules and routines of the setting (eg safe feet and hands) and engaged more positively with both staff and peers alike. Staff were also able to extend his learning by eg using the hoops to enable Seán to sort by colour, shape, size and kind whilst dropping beanbags etc safely.
Staff can extend the child’s persistence and learning within an activity by knowing exactly what the child’s level of attainment within that activity is, and by increasing or decreasing the challenge slightly. Staff allow the child space and time to complete the activity, providing support only when it is needed. The child is asked to evaluate their performance and success with the activity either verbally or by utilising verbal prompt eg thumbs up thumbs down, traffic lights.

Each child has regular opportunities to develop skills in relation to the following:

- physical skills;
- communication skills; and
- developing appreciation of their own needs and the needs of others
5.3 Physical skills

All children should be given opportunities to be involved in indoor and outdoor activities that develop gross motor skills and fine motor skills. Consistent engagement in this type of play strengthens the muscles the child needs to increase successful control over both gross and fine movements.

Some opportunities for gross motor skill development are provided through activities involving:

- bikes and vehicles;
- large blocks;
- soft play in hall;
- balancing;
- throwing at targets; and
- catching.

Some opportunities for fine motor skill development are provided through activities involving:

- painting;
- cutting;
- sticking;
- moulding;
- drawing;
- small world;
- small construction; and
- threading beads.
To give effective support to a child in developing these skills the staff should:

- reflect upon the child's interests and incorporate them in the activity;
- model the skill for the child;
- engage the child in play commentary regarding the necessary sequence of movements; and
- use opportunities from other play to develop similar muscle group, sense of balance and sequence of movement.
- offer a range of equipment and resources to facilitate differentiation eg double-handed scissors to support fine motor development.

If areas of concern are identified through observations, these should be discussed with parents at the earliest opportunity. Staff should take note of any relevant information, which the parent provides regarding the concern. They should also inform the parent about the strategies being used within the setting to help the child progress. In some cases, staff and parents will have to discuss and avail of further support.

5.4 Communication skills

“Communication is the foundation life skill, the basis on which children learn, achieve and make friends.” (Virginia Beardshaw, ICAN, 2008)

Communication skills are central to the development of each child's learning. Being able to communicate, organise and process language is essential in the development of thinking skills and promoting autonomous learning. As the child progresses through the IMEY setting, these skills are developed within practical activities, investigations and opportunities for play.

The child comes to the setting already on the continuum of communication development. Staff should constantly model, scaffold and nurture emergent independence of communication skills in Irish. In doing so, they help the child not only to develop the ability to undertake the skill but also to learn the language needed to explain how to perform the skill. Opportunities should be provided through play, investigations and practical activities for the child to enhance skills to:

- develop and sustain attention;
- persist with a task until completion;
- take turns, share and co-operate;
- develop aural and visual memory;
- develop attention and listening skills;
- recognise and discuss patterns and relationships within the environment;
- make simple predictions, give conclusions and justify opinions;
- ask questions;
- sequence events;
- develop confidence in their own ability;
- learn from modelling;
- use a range of methods to record information;
- use ideas; and
- locate information.

Upon reflection of observations and of the child’s interests, staff should choose one skill, which the child needs support in developing, for example, taking turns or developing visual memory and the context in which this is to be done. Within the chosen activity, staff should model this skill orally using a register of Irish, which:

- is both developmentally appropriate for that child; and
- contains the key language of the skill.

By taking time to think aloud in this way, staff create the expectation that thinking time and thought processing are vital parts of developing the skill. As the child tries out the skill initially, staff will scaffold the child’s thinking process where necessary, giving commentary as they go along. Staff and the child discuss together how the child feels about the skill and progression made, and recap on aspects of the modelling and scaffolding that the child felt most useful. This feedback provides staff with a keen insight into the strategies which the child finds most reaffirming, and should be noted and used to guide further skill development for that child.

*(see also DE Extended Early Years SEN Supplement - Chapter 4 - Communication - pages 23-39)*
5.5 Developing appreciation of own needs and those of others

The child continues to develop an awareness of both their own needs and those of others. Having positive behaviour reminders displayed pictorially within the setting is an example of how desired behaviour can be nurtured and reinforced regularly. Stories, role play, working with puppets, circle time and real life occurrences are key opportunities to encourage the child to reflect upon both a variety of behaviours and the range of feelings they cause. Again it is imperative that staff always present these activities using a developmentally appropriate register of Irish, and that the names of these feelings are supported by the use of suitable resources such as pictures and puppets.
As is the case with other skills, the child will observe and listen to the practitioner modelling how to recognise different feelings and remembering how to behave appropriately in response to those feelings. Skills which staff should model are how to:

- join in;
- develop sensitivity and an appreciation of how their own actions may affect others;
- collaborate - listen and share opinions;
- share memories and experiences;
- play;
- value their own and others’ identity and individuality; and
- learn from their own and others’ ideas.
6. Early Identification of Special Educational Needs

All practitioners are responsible for the early identification of special educational needs. Early identification and effective intervention are essential in supporting the child. Practitioners also need to build their capacity to meet needs through discussion, resources, training and agreed practice.

Early identification involves:

- observations;
- discussions with child;
- discussions with parents;
- liaison with relevant outside agencies;
- gathering and sharing of information eg settling-in questionnaire and transition forms; and
- analysis of relevant information eg attendance and date of birth.

Effective intervention is a cyclical, collaborative process involving:

- identifying the strengths of the child;
- using the child’s strengths as building blocks for development;
- addressing specific needs to help the child cope and ensuring assistance at the point of need;
- developmentally appropriate input from the child;
- input from parents; and
- input from relevant outside agencies (where necessary).
An Education Plan should identify:

- appropriate targets, reflecting the child's learning profile and current performance;
- appropriate strategies and resources, for use in the setting and at home; and
- target skills, to be modelled and scaffolded.

Effective implementation of Education Plans involves ongoing:

- monitoring and observation of development;
- reflection of effectiveness of intervention strategies;
- interaction with the child;
- communication with the home and relevant outside agencies; and
- celebration of progress.

Education Plans are reviewed through:

- collaborative evaluation of progress;
- decision-making regarding further intervention; and
- agreement of new targets, where appropriate.
7. Play

Play in an Irish-medium setting should be a rich and exciting experience. When children are provided with developmentally appropriate learning opportunities, this promotes the development of the whole child including the acquisition and enrichment of Irish.

Children tend to feel more relaxed and happier when at play. Therefore, play provides one of the most unique opportunities for the development of cross-curricular and thinking skills in an Irish-medium setting. During play, children should be immersed in Irish in an enjoyable and authentic manner. Play is used to build relationships, confidence and trust. This is particularly important for children who may not be familiar with the language of the setting. By playing with children, we become familiar with their individual patterns of behaviour, learning styles and motivators. This allows practitioners to tailor their interventions accordingly. Well-developed play entry skills eg OWLING (Observe, Wait, Listen, Imitate, New behaviours, Grow) help practitioners decide when it is appropriate or inappropriate to intervene in children’s play.

(see also DE Extended Early Years Supplement - Chapter 3 - Play and communication p13-21, for suggestions on play entry skills and strategies)
When playing, it is important to ensure that language and skills are developed in meaningful contexts. Children should also be supported by adults who model language and skills effectively, and who provide repetition and play commentary. This ensures that children are able to make sense of the world around them and extend their language and holistic development.

7.1 Play commentary

Play commentary involves discussing play with the child to share and extend learning experiences. Play commentary is used to model and scaffold language, skills and behaviour. It promotes understanding and communication in meaningful situations.

When commenting on a child’s play it is important to:

- Use appropriate language and supportive gesture;
- Tune into cues, tone of voice and body language of the child;
- Use short, simple statements to describe actions and sensations;
- Allow for spontaneous language and language enrichment;
- Extend language by using words that describe the child’s experience; and
- Use a tone of voice and body language that is friendly, encouraging and enthusiastic.

7.2 Suggested tips for good practice

- Promote communication at every opportunity.
- Ensure breadth of provision by providing opportunities for cross-curricular learning during play.
- Plan for language development but also allow for spontaneous language development.
- Use information from observations to enrich play provision.
- Provide differentiated play opportunities and learning targets.
- Use the child’s interests to engage him/her.
- Create meaningful contexts for play, with authentic resources where possible.
- Provide a range of support, differentiated to meet the needs of each child.
Play provides significant opportunities to promote all literacy skills. For example, playing in the café may involve listening to customers or to the waiter, talking when taking part in role-play, understanding what is being said, reading the menu or ‘writing’ the order. Children in IMEY settings are in the emergent writing stage, varying from mark-making to attempting to write key words.

Play is a springboard for all-round development in the early years. As well as opportunities for literacy development, play is also a vehicle for the promotion of:

- numeracy skills eg using 3D shapes to build;
- personal and social education eg turn-taking during games;
- physical development eg fine and gross motor skills;
- the Arts eg exploring texture, pattern, line and shape through junk-art;
- ‘The World Around Us’ eg sorting at the nature table; and
- cross-curricular skills including ICT eg moving Bee-bot around a map of the woods.
It is important to understand the developmental continuum of language. Children need to be able to listen in order to speak, to read and to write. Opportunities should be given to encourage all aspects of literacy.

Play, as with any other activity in an educational setting, operates at different levels for different children. Language skills and other skills promoted through play may need to be differentiated. Differentiated play opportunities may also be beneficial, although high expectations are important at all times.

When children are at play in Irish-medium settings, it is important that all adults consistently model and use Irish in meaningful contexts. The role of the adult in play is most effective when planned and evaluated according to children's development. Interactions between adults and children during play can promote learning opportunities and build confidence in children, as well as encouraging the use of Irish.

(see also DE Extended Early Years Supplement - Chapter 3 - Play - pages 13-23)
8. Behaviour

Clear guidelines to promote positive behaviour are essential. Guidelines should be agreed and implemented consistently by all practitioners in the IMEY setting. Sharing guidelines with parents will ensure clarity of approach and help to achieve continuity between home and setting. Children’s voice and input should be encouraged.

Effective practitioners should explore the causes and triggers of the behaviour. When deciding on the best approach to promote desirable behaviour, staff should also follow consistently their guidelines and approach in issuing consequences with regards to the child’s behaviour. Targets should be set, communicated and evaluated by staff, parents and children. In the immersion setting, knowledge of the child’s language and communication profile informs practitioners with regards to the levels of the child’s understanding.

8.1 Promoting positive behaviour

IMEY practitioners should focus on the personal, social and emotional development of the children in their care. Positive relationships and the development of trust create a secure environment, in which children learn to self-manage their behaviour, feel secure and are willing to ask for help when it is needed. Some useful strategies for promoting positive behaviour include:

- visual strategies;
- stories;
sensory strategies; and

positive feedback.

8.2 Visual strategies

These might include:

- the use of visual aids, expressive speech, natural gesture, body language and facial expressions;
- clear and consistent rules and expectations;
- clear and consistent classroom routines;
- behaviour reminder cards - smaller versions of classroom behaviour reminder cards may be used for individual children, perhaps in the form of a keyring;
- visual representations of rules and routines to aid understanding and act as reminders of positive behaviour;
- a Loud-o-meter to act as a visual aid to promote discussion about how high or low appropriate noise levels in classrooms should be; and
- ‘countdown’ and timers to help with time management and allow for tangible conclusions to activities.
8.3 Stories

These might include:

- traditional fairy tales to help teach right and wrong in an enjoyable way;
- social stories to promote positive behaviour - such stories can be easily made to discuss desirable behaviour, e.g. using Microsoft Word and Clipart/images/photographs or the Special Stories and Story Creator app for iPhones and iPads; and
- the use of puppets to act out and explore behaviour and emotions.

8.4 Sensory strategies

These might include:

- a sensory box or a sensory table which may be attractive to children with social and emotional difficulties - sensory items may include play-dough, feathers, pebbles, percussion instruments, sandpaper/emery board, a snow-globe, a car air-freshener, fresh flowers etc.; NB: Items must be risk-assessed and health and safety regulations followed.
catering for children’s interests - for example, if a child is particularly interested in dinosaurs, an interest box including dinosaurs and other objects of interest may be beneficial in motivating the child and encouraging positive behaviour; and

observing the child and his/her reactions to materials, choices they make and their approach to activities - this can inform staff about the child’s likes and dislikes and possible sensory needs.

8.5 Positive feedback

Examples might include the use of:

- reward systems for desirable behaviour, for example, a star for good listening, a point for the best line in the playground, or a certificate for being a good friend - this should act as positive reinforcement; and

- a behaviour diary, to encourage communication between home and school should help to inform all concerned about issues during the school day or at home.

Promoting positive behaviour in an Irish-medium setting involves taking account of the child’s performance and using this knowledge to inform planning, timing and pace of learning. These are important and should indicate the best support strategies to implement and use.

(see also DE Extended Early Years Supplement - Chapter 5 - Behaviour - pages 41-51)
9. Characteristics of Good Practice

The following points are suggested as characteristics of good practice in IMEY settings:

- the ethos of the setting reflects an inclusive child-centred approach based on positive relationships at all levels; accommodation and resources are welcoming, sufficient and clearly set out for a range of activities including quiet space and chill out support;

- the child shows enjoyment in his/her learning and achievement;

- the roles and responsibilities of staff are clearly defined, agreed and monitored;

- practitioners’ expectations of the child are realistically high and based on recognition of their strength as well as their need;

- practitioners identify, as soon as possible, the educational needs of the individual child and include the child and his/her parents in this process;

- practitioners provide immediate and appropriate intervention and support for the child identified as having a special educational need;

- practitioners maintain regular contact with parents;

- through effective observation, a language profile is created for each child as part of effective transition;

- practitioners work closely with other agencies;

- there are regular reviews to ensure that the child is benefiting from the programme of support;

- practitioners continue to monitor the child’s progress in line with their ability and stage of development through use of good planning and record keeping; and

- practitioners are regularly provided with effective ongoing training linked to areas identified by the setting.

(For details of useful publications and websites see DE Extended Early Years SEN Supplement page 53)

(For details of useful contacts see DE Extended Early Years SEN Supplement pages 63-65)
Acknowledgements

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