

PRESS RELEASE



An Roinn Leanaí, Míchumais agus Comhionannais

Department of Children, Disability and Equality

January 2026

Minister Foley announces new €135 million programme of State-led early learning and childcare services

Minister for Children, Disability and Equality Norma Foley has announced that €135 million will be made available for State-led services providing high-quality, accessible early learning and childcare.

The process will begin in 2026 with the acquisition of buildings in what will be a groundbreaking initiative for the Department of Children, Disability and Equality.

Capital funding will be used to acquire and/or fit out the building, depending on requirements. The Department will work with not-for-profit providers to design and open services, and these providers will run the services.

Up to eight buildings will be selected for investment this year with each one providing more than 100 places. The state-led initiative will provide thousands of places up to 2030 using the €135 million provided in the National Development Plan.

Launching the programme, Minister Foley said:

“The State will be stepping in to create high-quality, accessible services where they are most needed. This is a groundbreaking move by Government to support children and families.”

The Department will begin by assessing sites and buildings which align with the goals of the programme and, where required, will seek expressions of interest from operators to deliver these State-led services.

Minister Foley added that the Department of Children, Disability and Equality was in discussions with local authorities and State agencies, including the Land Development Agency, about the potential for acquiring buildings.

“Advanced discussions are ongoing with Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council in relation to the early learning and care facility at the Shanganagh Castle Estate, and a range of other projects are also being considered.

“The programme will commence immediately, with up to eight services being funded this year. The level of investment will ramp up over the lifetime of the Government. I look

forward to working with not-for-profit operators to deliver high quality State-led early learning and childcare. This state-led initiative will complement the work of existing private and community early learning and childcare providers, with the support of record levels of Core Funding.”

The initial approach being taken in the programme in 2026 is on purchasing and refurbishment of buildings because this will be faster than securing planning permission to construct new buildings on green field sites. However, the option of building new facilities will also be considered as the state-led programme progresses.

Having accessible, affordable and high-quality childcare in local neighbourhoods supports families and strengthens community bonds.

There will be a particular focus in the new state-led facilities on providing places for 1–3-year-old children because this is where the need is greatest.

The aim of delivering additional supply in suitable locations will include both rural areas and urban areas which are not well served at the moment.

Additional supply in areas of disadvantage is another priority because early learning can have very positive impacts on children at risk of disadvantage.

Another factor to consider is the need to rebalance supply in some areas where there is a high concentration of private supply, but very low levels of community childcare.

Other measures being pursued to increase the supply of places include a new round of Building Blocks scheme in 2026, which will fund extensions to existing early learning and childcare services.

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