



Commitment for Change

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Pre-School Education
for One Year for Our Children


Labour

Commitment for Change 2

Pre-school education for one year for our children

This election is going to be about the quality of life of hard working families in communities all over Ireland. The Labour party is committed to a dynamic economy which continues to generate prosperity for all our people. It is time now to deliver on the opportunities that this prosperity provides us with - and to do that we need to make a change.

I am determined that any programme for government involving the Labour party will include this commitment and I am further determined that this commitment will be delivered on within five years in government.

I have been all over the country meeting people in the last few months. Everywhere I go, I hear stories, of people who tell me about the progress they have made in their own lives, but who hope for a better future. They tell me about the stresses and strains of modern life, and how a change could make a huge difference to their quality of life. I hear stories from parents, telling me about the challenge of balancing their careers with the pressures of caring for their children, of the pressures of managing on a tight budget to provide all that they can for their children. To help those parents, I will deliver one year of free pre-school education when I am in government. People can be sure that the quality of life of hardworking families will be at the top of the agenda for me, and the Labour party, in government.



Pat Rabbitte

Commitment for Change 2

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Cost

€180 million per year.

Time for Delivery

It will take five years to roll out.

Rationale

In our communities, parents everywhere understand instinctively how important it is that their children get the right start. One thing we know, both from those parental instincts and from international research, is that the earlier you begin education the better the long term effects. The pre-school years are vital in terms of learning and personal development. Childhood, and especially early childhood, is a precious time of life. Anyone who is a parent knows too well how quickly those precious years pass by - everyone wants to make the most of them and get the most for their kids. The opportunities for our children are indeed great - and we welcome and celebrate that. But Labour is focused on tomorrow and on how much better these opportunities could be.

We have been listening to parents and we understand the pressures that are on them to do the best they can for their children. Balancing all these commitments and pressures is a huge task, and we believe that providing free pre-school education for one year would make a major impact on the quality of life of parents and their children.

Structured play and early education are important elements in developing a child's capacity to interact with others, and to learn how to learn. Pre-school education is also a fundamental element in tackling educational disadvantage, which can often be detected in children of pre-school age. Pre-school education can help to tackle these disadvantages at the youngest possible age, at a fraction of the cost to society, and to the child themselves, of subsequent interventions. The return on investment, socially and economically, is enormous. There is ample evidence that childcare and early education costs pay for themselves as much as seven times over (a 700% return). There is much evidence to show that pre-school education is the key to tackling our high rate of school drop out. Other benefits include reductions in juvenile crime, higher attendance in college and higher earnings in later life.

Less than one out of four of Irish children aged between three and four are currently in structured pre-school education. This contrasts with our European partners where at least two in every three children of that age enjoy such education.

As the OECD has stated: "Given the impact that early childhood education and care has on building a strong foundation for lifelong learning and on ensuring equitable access to learning later, pre-primary education is very important."

Implementation

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Implementation

Labour in government will therefore provide one year of free pre-school education, amounting to five half days per week per child. This is a major project and will require a great deal of effort - we believe it to be an investment in tomorrow rather than a cost today.

It is a major project, involving building new facilities, converting existing ones, and training and deploying a significant number of staff. We would see it as essential to work through existing providers, so as, as far as possible, to knit pre-school education into the broader childcare infrastructure.

For more information, please contact

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