



National Foundation for Educational Research

International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks

Thematic Probe: Early Years Education

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Important note to readers

The data provided in this initial thematic probe is sourced from the information available via the QCA-sponsored International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks (*INCA*) Archive, online at <http://www.inca.org.uk>

In accordance with our contract with QCA, where data is not readily available via the *INCA* website, or via the data recently collated for inclusion on the website, additional research has *not* been carried out to provide such information. There are consequently some omissions in the data which follows. However, all individual country Archives available via the *INCA* website have a 'Sources' section. These provide access to additional sources of information, including useful website addresses in the relevant countries.

The *INCA* Archive provides information on Australia (Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania), Canada (Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, Saskatchewan), England, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the USA (Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin).¹

This thematic probe relates to all of the above countries, *excluding* England, and aims, where possible, and given the contract limitations mentioned above, to provide data on the following aspects of early years education:

1. **Curriculum Organisation**
 - Define early years settings, to include all providers of funded places
 - How long are the funded sessions?
 - Is there an early years curriculum?
 - If so, what are the principles underpinning this curriculum?
 - Is there balance across the curriculum?
 - Are children grouped in any particular way during each session?
 - At what age do children transfer to compulsory education?
2. **Assessment Arrangements**
 - What are the forms of assessment that take place?
 - Are these assessments used to identify special educational needs?
 - What arrangements are made for children identified as having a special educational need?
 - Are records passed on to the children's next setting?
3. **Quality Assurance**
 - What systems and procedures are in place for funded settings?
4. **Staffing and Ratios**
 - What is the average size of the group?
 - What is the pupil : practitioner ratio?
 - Do all staff have an early years qualification?

¹ Individual country Archives for Wales and Northern Ireland are expected to be added to the website shortly. National overview information is provided where possible. For the federal countries of Australia, Canada, and the USA, information is provided specifically for the states mentioned in parentheses.

Australia

It should be noted that education in Australia is a matter for the State and Territory authorities. Where possible, national overview information is provided below, in addition to information specific to the *INCA* States/Territories of Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania.

Curriculum Organisation

Define early years settings, to include all providers of funded places

National

Nationally, it has been generally agreed that the term 'pre-school' should be used to refer to educational programmes offered in the two years before compulsory education begins. This usually involves a one-year 'pre-school' or 'kindergarten' programme for three- to four-year-olds or four- to five-year-olds, followed by a one year 'Preparatory Year' for four- to five-year-olds or five- to six-year-olds (the age ranges vary dependent on the specific State/Territory, and the age when compulsory education begins in that State/Territory).

The Preparatory Year - the year before Year 1/compulsory education - is known by different names, dependent on the State/Territory. The terms 'Preparatory', 'Kindergarten', 'Transition', 'Reception' and 'Pre-Primary' are all used. In most States, except Queensland and Western Australia, this Preparatory Year, although optional for children, is generally regarded as part of the primary school structure.

Pre-school programmes are provided in public and private institutions. Although attendance is optional, parents are generally encouraged to enrol their children.

Queensland

In Queensland, two years of state-funded, part-time early years education is provided from the beginning of the year after which children become four (school years in Australia begin in January). The second year of this provision (children aged five to six years) is known as the 'Preparatory Year'. Alternatives to state-funded provision include non-state schools, community kindergartens and childcare centres.

Tasmania

Early childhood education in Tasmania is provided within a four-year framework:

- pre-compulsory kindergarten (children aged four to five);
- pre-compulsory Preparatory Year (aged five to six);
- Year 1 (compulsory, children aged six to seven); and
- Year 2 (compulsory, aged seven to eight).

The compulsory age for starting school is six years. Provision below the age of six is not compulsory. In addition to the core kindergarten programme for four- to five-year-

olds, schools may offer some timetable sessions and special programmes for pre-kindergarten age children (younger than four). Programmes for pre-kindergarten-age children include sessions for parents or carers and their children; early start, early school or early intervention programmes specially designed for children identified as 'at risk'; and home-based programmes in which teachers visit homes to report, plan further progress, or to provide special assistance to children and their parents.

Before commencing Year 1 (compulsory primary education, at age six), most children attend kindergarten part-time for one year, followed by one full-time pre-compulsory 'Preparatory Year'. To attend kindergarten, a child must have attained the age of four years on or by 31 December in the year prior to admission to the core kindergarten programme (for children aged four to five). (The school year begins in January/February.) Flexibility to enrol children of pre-kindergarten age in the core kindergarten programme is only permitted in the case of children from families who have moved to Tasmania and who have already been enrolled in publicly-funded provision in another State or Territory. The minimum age of entry to the Preparatory Year (for children aged five to six years) is five years on or by 31 December in the year prior to entry.

Victoria

Early childhood education in Victoria is generally known as 'pre-school kindergarten' and caters for children in the three to five age range. Primary education in Victoria commences at around age five (children generally begin school between the ages of four-and-a-half and five-and-a-half) with the first Year/Grade (Year 0) being known as 'Prep', an abbreviation of 'Preparatory Year'. This is followed by Year/Grade 1, age five plus. Although not compulsory, the Preparatory Year is almost universally undertaken.

How long are the funded sessions?

Queensland

The funded sessions in Queensland (for children from the beginning/January of the year after which they become four) last for two-and-a-half hours daily, that is five half-day sessions each week. Alternatively, some children may attend five full-day sessions per fortnight.

Tasmania

In Tasmania, pre-kindergarten sessions for parents or carers of children younger than four are usually offered once per week for approximately one to two hours. Early start, early school or early intervention programmes specially designed for children identified as 'at risk' are also usually offered for one session per week.

Kindergarten children (aged four to five years) were previously offered provision of 10 hours per week; this has recently been increased to 20 hours.

Victoria

In Victoria, pre-school/kindergarten for three- to four-year-olds (prior to commencement of the Preparatory Year) is provided for four half-day sessions per week.

Is there an early years curriculum?

Queensland - Pre-school curriculum guidelines

In Queensland, there are Pre-School Curriculum Guidelines which are based on five Foundation Learning Areas. These aim to provide a framework for exploring and reflecting on the content component of the pre-school curriculum, in conjunction with other components (e.g. analysis of how children learn). Each Foundation Learning Area is described in terms of understandings and dispositions (or habits of mind), learning processes, teaching strategies and learning outcomes. The Foundation Learning Areas that extend children's understandings of themselves, others and the world are:

- sense of self and others;
- health and physical understanding;
- social living and learning;
- cultural understanding;
- understanding environments.

The Flying Start programme - Tasmania

In Tasmania, a programme entitled the 'Flying Start Programme' was introduced in 1997. This includes all children from kindergarten to Year 2 (aged around four to seven years), including those who have not made significant progress, and those who are deemed capable of higher achievements. The programme, which provides a continuum of learning, focussing on literacy, numeracy and social skills, also emphasises the cross-curricular dimension and the need for parents, carers and educators of kindergarten and Preparatory Year students (aged four to five and five to six respectively) to have an understanding of, and expectations for, children in every stage of their development.

The *INCA* website notes that a review of early years education commenced in Tasmania in August 1998. Details of this review and its results are available at <http://connections.education.tas.gov.au/Nav/Strategy.asp?ID=00000005>

If so, what are the principles underpinning this curriculum?

See above in addition.

National

Generally, pre-school programmes are planned to reflect children's interests and their intellectual, social, emotional and physical needs. Learning is integrated across the development needs, with flexible learning experiences recognising individual children's learning styles, prior experiences and differing rates of development.

In the Preparatory Year (the non-compulsory year before the start of compulsory education in Year 1 of primary school), the focus is on the overall development of the child and the curriculum is linked to the primary curriculum. Learning experiences are based on the skills children bring to school and are built around literacy, mathematics, physical skills and personal and social skills in preparation for Year 1 of primary school.

Queensland

The key components of the Queensland Pre-School Curriculum Guidelines are based on the principles of the early childhood curriculum which acknowledges the individuality of children with regard to their unique psychological state, their development, their family and cultural experiences and their skills and interests, as follows:

- understanding children (balanced programme, fair and equitable practices, understanding individual social and cultural contexts...);
- building partnerships (involving children in planning, collaborating with children, parents, colleagues and other professionals, effective communication);
- establishing a flexible learning environment (providing choice, encouraging negotiation, managing time appropriately, providing a resource-rich learning environment);
- supporting play (valuing play and first-hand experiences, enabling quality interactions);
- exploring content (providing challenge, focusing on individual and group learning outcomes, providing relevant content and promoting continuity of experience).

The competencies and lifeskills integrated in the Pre-School Curriculum Guidelines are:

- literacy;
- numeracy;
- creativity;
- collaborative skills; and
- skills for planning, gathering and organising ideas and learning.

Tasmania

In the pre-compulsory kindergarten year for children aged four to five, and the Preparatory Year for five- to six-year-olds in Tasmania, the objective is for children to acquire learning skills and to be inducted into the culture of the classroom and school.

The underlying principles for the Tasmanian early learner are as follows:

- *Motor skill and language development.* Children in the early childhood years are characterised by the rapid development of the muscular system leading to finer coordination and balance, and of language development and the skills of communication.

- *Growing independence.* Children beginning their schooling have a developing awareness of themselves as members of families and of communities. They are confident, for the most part, in their own abilities, with an ongoing reliance on adults for physical and emotional support, approval and security.
- *Individual differences.* Each child brings to a learning situation an exclusive set of capabilities and dispositions. These attitudes and values, concepts and skills are recognised and valued. They form the basis for teaching and learning, as ideas and understandings are challenged and developed through interaction with teachers and peers.
- *Learning through the senses.* Young children come to know their world through the senses - touching, smelling, listening, tasting and observing. They experiment and manipulate things, learning to observe, classify, discriminate and predict. They create, explore, draw, read and construct, modelling much of their behaviour on those around them.
- *Learning through first hand experience.* Active, first-hand experiences play a major role in young children's learning. They gain more from these experiences when they are encouraged to talk about them, examine some of their preconceptions and form new concepts as a result of this process.
- *Developing creativity.* Children need to be supported and encouraged in their own creative approach to learning, with provision being made for them to construct their own play and participate in activities purely for enjoyment. They develop ideas, theories and strategies through their play, conversations and imagination, exploring, interacting, and responding to the social influences that surround them. Children's play promotes their developing ability to discriminate between fantasy and reality, and supports movement from an egocentric perspective of the world to an awareness of the world beyond the self. They use their creativity to challenge concepts and perceptions, making intuitive leaps as they cut across established patterns of language and thought.

Is there balance across the curriculum?

See above in addition.

In **Queensland**, the pre-school curriculum involves planned learning opportunities that develop children's individual knowledge, skills and abilities and their future educational progress. Involvement with adults, other children and equipment supports children's physical, cognitive, social and emotional development and learning.

Are children grouped in any particular way during each session?

Organisation of teaching groups/classes in early years education in Australia is generally determined by age.

At what age do children transfer to compulsory education?

Compulsory education in Australia begins at different ages in different States/Territories, with minimum ages for admission to primary schools ranging from four-and-a-half to six years.

Queensland

In Queensland, children usually commence compulsory education at age six.

Tasmania

In Tasmania, children transfer from the Preparatory Year to Year 1 of compulsory education at age six. This is the minimum age of entry. (Prior to the Preparatory Year for children aged five to six, some children also attend kindergarten at age four to five.)

Victoria

In Victoria, children generally transfer to compulsory education at around age five; they can attend publicly-funded schools if they reach the age of five by 30 April in the year they wish to enrol. (The school year commences in January/February.) A child who becomes five after 30 April cannot be admitted to a publicly-funded school without the prior approval of the regional General Manager for Schools. Only in exceptional circumstances is approval given for early age entry. In instances where it appears that certain children might have some difficulties adapting from pre-compulsory to compulsory school, they may start primary school later, and spend an extra year in pre-school/kindergarten provision

Assessment Arrangements

What are the forms of assessment that take place?

In most States and Territories in Australia, there is no formal assessment of children's educational achievement prior to compulsory school entry.

Queensland

Assessment in early years education in Queensland is ongoing teacher assessment, focusing on what the child can do, rather than on what the child is not yet able to do. The Pre-school Curriculum Guidelines (see above) list a range of tools which teachers can use to build a picture of children's learning and development. They include anecdotal notes; audio/video tapes; checklists; developmental continua; discussions with children and their comments and reflections on learning; information from other services and professionals; notes from discussions with parents, caregivers or home tutors; photographs; reflective diary notes; running records; samples of children's self-chosen work; and time sampling.

Tasmania

Tasmania does have a more formal system of early years assessment - the 'Kindergarten Development Check'. Children in kindergarten are usually aged four to five and the Kindergarten Development Check is used to observe and check all children by the end of the first term. It monitors four features of children's development which are indicated on a checklist. These are:

- gross motor/locomotor skills;
- manipulative and fine motor skills;
- personal/social behaviour; and
- listening, speaking and understanding skills.

Victoria

In Victoria, the only *assessment* which takes place takes the form of informal monitoring and an informal discussion with parents regarding the child's readiness for school, particularly if their birth date is close to the cut-off date for primary school entry.

Are these assessments used to identify special educational needs?

What arrangements are made for children identified as having a special educational need?

Tasmania

In Tasmania, the information gathered via the Kindergarten Development Check forms the basis of teacher decisions to continue with a 'normal' (standard) programme of education, or to plan for specific intervention. Should a teacher identify individual children who require specific intervention, he/she designs a programme to provide further experience in the relevant areas. This initial programme would normally last for eight weeks. At the end of this period, the children would be monitored again, using the Kindergarten Development Check. Where necessary, the findings of this second check, would form the basis of a specific educational plan for some children, designed by the teacher, in conjunction with parents and other professionals, as appropriate

Victoria

In instances where monitoring of children in early years provision reveals that certain children might have some difficulties adapting from early years provision to compulsory school, such children may start primary school later and spend an extra year in early years provision.

Are records passed on to the children's next setting?

Tasmania

In Tasmania, a student's 'Record of Development' grows over time from kindergarten (aged four to five years) to Year 12 (aged 17 to 18 years). This Record is jointly owned by the school and the student and goes with the student from school to school. It contains samples of work which might be chosen by either a teacher or a student or both together. It could also contain copies of recent reports by teachers to parents, and/or details of the attainment of intended outcomes of education. It is meant to be used by students, teachers and parents and forms a cumulative 'history and portrait' of the student.

Victoria

In Victoria, some information may be passed - informally - from a child's early years teacher to the primary school.

Quality Assurance

What systems and procedures are in place for funded settings?

Unfortunately, there is no specific data available via the *INCA* Archive.

Staffing and Ratios

What is the average size of the group?

In the Preparatory Year in **Tasmania**, children aged five to six years, the recommended appropriate group size is 25.

What is the pupil:practitioner ratio?

Pre-school groups of up to 25 children in **Queensland** are taught by one teacher assisted by a full-time teacher aide.

In **Tasmania**, the maximum number of children for a full-time teacher taking two kindergarten groups (children aged four to five) is 46, that is 23 children per group. The maximum number of children for a 0.5 (half-time) teacher taking one kindergarten group is 25. This maximum is set to reflect an Australia-wide standard for early years education.

Do all staff have an early years qualification?

Those early years teachers who are qualified generally have a qualification such as the Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies, with a zero to five or a zero to eight age range focus. They are generalists in the sense that they are qualified across a particular age range, rather than in a specific subject.

Unfortunately, there is no further information available via the *INCA* Archive.

Canada

It should be noted that the Constitution Act gives exclusive authority to each province in Canada to make laws in relation to education. In other words, in Canada, there is no federal education system; in accordance with the Constitution, responsibility for education is vested in the (ten) provinces and (two) territories. Each province (or territory) controls all aspects of the education system up to the end of secondary school (high school). Some general overview information is provided below in addition to data specific to the INCA territories/provinces of Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario and Saskatchewan.

Curriculum Organisation

Define early years settings, to include all providers of funded places

Typically, compulsory education in Canada begins at age six or seven (and lasts for about ten years), with most provinces also offering one or two years of publicly-funded early years education (beginning at ages four, five or six, dependent on the province) as an option. Early years programmes involving younger children are typically not part of the public school system.

Publicly-funded early years education is most often offered in 'kindergarten classes', provided, in most provinces, in publicly-funded compulsory phase elementary schools (primary schools).

Alberta

Alberta operates a publicly-supported programme called 'Early Childhood Services' (ECS), which integrates educational, health, social and recreational services and enrolls children as young as three-and-a-half years old. ECS programmes are voluntary programmes for children, which may be offered by school boards, private schools and private ECS operators.

In addition, kindergarten classes are provided for children in the one year prior to entry to Grade 1 - the first year of compulsory education.

British Columbia

In British Columbia, children spend their first four years of school in the primary programme which includes kindergarten to Grade 3. Children must be five years old by 31 December to enter kindergarten which, although voluntary in principle, is regarded as the first year of school. The overwhelming majority of children therefore attend.

Ontario

In Ontario, compulsory level elementary schools (primary schools) provide junior kindergarten classes for four-year-olds, and kindergarten classes for children aged five.

In some territories/provinces, as an alternative to publicly-funded programmes, pre-Grade/Year 1 classes may be offered in privately-operated schools under varying degrees of provincial supervision.

How long are the funded sessions?

Alberta

Prior to August/September 2000 (the start of the school year), publicly-funded kindergarten classes in Alberta (children aged five to six years) offered 400 instructional hours per year. With the start of the 2000 school year, the number of hours of state-funded kindergarten was increased from 400 to 475 hours per student. This means kindergarten children now attend school for full half-days during the school year.

Ontario

In Ontario, typical senior kindergarten school days (children aged around five) are from 9:00 am to 3:30 pm, although many schools offer integrated day care which extends the day from 8 am to 6 pm.

Is there an early years curriculum?

Most individual states/provinces in Canada have a curriculum framework for all phases of education, from the kindergarten year(s) (one or two years depending on the state/territory) to Grade 12 (aged 18/19).

Under the Western Canadian Protocol, the four Western Canadian provinces and three northern territories have recently established a common kindergarten to Grade/Year 12 curriculum, with the aim of providing continuity of educational provision across the age range and across the territories. In this way, the provinces hope, for example, to ensure that there are fewer problems should children transfer from the education system in one province to another. This process of curricular reform commenced in the 1993/94 academic year, and specific territories were responsible for specific curricular areas, for example, Alberta for mathematics, Manitoba for the English language arts. The programme is outcomes based.

Alberta

In Alberta, there is a Kindergarten Programme Statement. This describes the learning achievement that helps prepare children for entry into Grade 1 (compulsory education) and aims to provide them with a foundation for later success. The statement is the basis for all early childhood services (ECS) programmes funded by the province.

In British Columbia, the Primary Programme: Framework for Teaching has been developed by the Ministry as a resource for primary teachers and is a guide to effective practice for kindergarten (children aged five onwards) to Grade 3. This document can be downloaded at http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/primary_program

If so, what are the principles underpinning this curriculum?

Alberta

The rationale behind kindergarten education in Alberta is that:

- young children learn best when the curriculum programme meets their developmental needs;
- young children develop knowledge, skills and attitudes that prepare them for later learning;
- young children with special needs, through early intervention strategies, develop knowledge, skills and attitudes that prepare them for later learning;
- young children build a common set of experiences through interaction with others;
- parents have the opportunity for meaningful involvement in the education of their young children; and
- coordinated community services meet the needs of young children and their families.

British Columbia

The curriculum for the kindergarten and primary years (education becomes compulsory at age seven) is designed to:

- support the development of children aesthetically, socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically;
- foster the development of imagination;
- encourage children to share, cooperate, develop friendships, and appreciate their own and others' abilities and cultural identity and heritage; and to
- develop traits and attitudes that contribute to career awareness and development, such as taking pride in one's work, working effectively with others and understanding the relationship of work to everyday life.

Each level of the education programme in British Columbia (from kindergarten to Grade 12) has particular emphases, which reflect the range of knowledge, skills and attitudes that students develop during these years. All levels of the programme are, however, developed around a common core of learning to ensure that students learn to read, write and do basic mathematics, solve problems and use computer-based technology. These basic skills are emphasised through studies in:

- English;
- mathematics;
- science;
- social studies;
- fine arts; and
- applied skills

from kindergarten to Grade/Year 12.

This common core of learning, called Foundation Studies, comprising a provincially prescribed curriculum, aims to ensure, ultimately, that all children, not just those planning to go to university, will gain the knowledge, problem-solving skills and communication skills they need to continue learning throughout their lives.

In the kindergarten and primary years, children:

- study all required areas of learning, including language arts (English), social studies, science, mathematics, personal planning, physical education, fine arts and applied skills;
- learn basic skills in oral language, reading, writing and mathematics;
- begin to develop strategies for healthy living, become aware of good nutrition, maintain physical fitness, learn safety procedures and develop an understanding of their personal responsibility to themselves, to others and to the environment; and
- begin to develop critical thinking and decision making and problem solving skills.

During this phase, teachers determine the time allocations for each of the required subject areas (language and citizenship; science, maths and technology; physical education; fine arts; applied skills; and personal planning).

Ontario

The kindergarten programme in Ontario (children commence compulsory education at age six) is designed to help children:

- broaden their base of information;
- form concepts;
- acquire foundation skills and positive attitudes to learning; and
- begin to develop their abilities and talents in a wide range of areas.

The curriculum aims to develop students' skills in literacy (including technological and computer literacy), mathematics and science, as well as promoting their reasoning, creative thinking and enquiry skills. These skills are focused on in the following five areas of learning:

- language;
- mathematics;
- science and technology;
- personal and social development; and
- the arts.

It also aims to prepare students for the curriculum at Grades/Years 1-8 (aged six to 14 years).

Saskatchewan

The provincial Government in Saskatchewan has established a set of goals of education which aim to direct efforts to develop the potential of all students in the province. According to these goals, education should affirm the worth of each individual and lay the foundation for learning throughout life. Within these goals, the following basic skills have been established which, it is intended, education in Saskatchewan should enable all students to master to the best of their abilities:

Saskatchewan basic skills:

- read, write and compute;
- acquire information and meaning through observing, listening, reading and experiencing;
- process information through intellectual and technological means;
- solve problems by applying basic principles and processes of the sciences, arts and humanities; and
- communicate ideas through written and spoken language, mathematical symbols, and aesthetic expression.

Is there balance across the curriculum?

See above in addition.

Alberta

Under the Western Canadian Protocol, in Alberta, there are six learning areas in kindergarten education:

- language arts;
- mathematics;
- community and environmental awareness;
- personal and social responsibility;
- physical skills and well-being; and
- creative and cultural expression.

British Columbia

In British Columbia, the kindergarten to Grade 3 curriculum (for children aged five and upwards) is organised and presented according to five areas of development:

- aesthetic and artistic;
- emotional and social;
- intellectual;
- physical development and well-being; and
- social responsibility.

Are children grouped in any particular way during each session?

Individual teachers determine the best way of grouping students for particular studies.

At what age do children transfer to compulsory education?

Transfer ages vary from province to province/territory to territory.

Alberta

The law requires all children who are six years old on 1 September to attend elementary school. However, school boards may set their own age requirements for entering school. Many boards allow students to enter Grade/Year 1 if they are six years old by March 1 of the following year. Kindergarten entrance is one year less than the age set by the board to enter Grade/Year 1.

British Columbia

Children who reach seven years old by 31 December are admitted to elementary school.

Ontario

In Ontario, those who are six years of age by the first school day in September are admitted to elementary school.

Saskatchewan

Children must receive elementary education on reaching their seventh birthday.

Assessment Arrangements

What are the forms of assessment that take place?

In most provinces individual schools now set, conduct and mark their own assessment tests and examinations, and some provinces have implemented provincial learning assessment programmes which may include kindergarten level education.

British Columbia

In British Columbia, evaluation of performance in kindergarten to Grade/Year 3 classes (children aged six plus to 10 years) is based on evidence of learning, such as collections of children's work, observations of activities and quizzes, and on assessment of progress towards expectations for the age range.

Ontario

The primary method of assessment in kindergarten education (children aged five to six years) is observation, and comments are recorded in anecdotal notes. However, a variety of other methods are employed such as portfolios, checklists, developmental profiles and videotapes. Emphasis is placed upon seeking the child's own views. All forms of assessment at this level are conducted by teachers.

Are these assessments used to identify special educational needs?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

What arrangements are made for children identified as having a special educational need?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Are records passed on to the children's next setting?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Quality Assurance

What systems and procedures are in place for funded settings?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Staffing and Ratios

What is the average size of the group?

British Columbia

The average class size at kindergarten level (children aged six to seven years) is 20.

Unfortunately, no further information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

What is the pupil:practitioner ratio?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Do all staff have an early years qualification?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

France

Curriculum Organisation

Define early years settings, to include all providers of funded places

Nursery schools and infant classes

Pre-compulsory early years education in France is known as 'pre-elementary education' (*enseignement préélémentaire*), to underline that this stage precedes the elementary (compulsory primary) stage, and is in itself part of the education system leading to university. Publicly-funded early years education is provided for all children aged three to six years, whose parents request it. In addition, parents of two-year-old children also have a right to ask for a publicly-funded early years place. Although priority in providing such places is usually given to those living in socially deprived areas, such as those in some inner city, rural or mountainous regions.

Early years education is usually provided either in a nursery school (*école maternelle*) or an infant class (*classe enfantine*) either attached to, or part of, an elementary school (for six- to 11-year-olds) as near as possible to a child's home.

Other forms of provision

Day care facilities also exist for babies to three-year-olds. These are well-developed in terms of ratios and trained staff and are available for the majority of parents. The tax system favours this, as do means-tested charges. Registered childminders (*nourrices*) and municipal or private crèches (where a child can be left for short periods) come under the authority of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Day care is not only used to facilitate the employment of women, but also to help children socialise. Non-working mothers often use municipal or private crèches and childminders as part of early years development.

In some areas, playgroups (*jardins d'enfants*) are also available. These also offer care for two- to six-year-olds, so there is some choice between childcare and education for this age group. The staff ratio is 1:8 and parents pay.

Where early years provision is not offered by one of the forms of day care or childcare listed above, or in a specific nursery school or infant class, alternative forms of provision may be offered in:

- 'Infants sections' which are integrated into elementary schools. These take children aged five and, in some cases, with the permission of the National Education Inspector and where places and teaching organisation allow, children aged four may also be admitted.
- Inter-commune nursery schools. These provide a solution for several communes which join together to provide a sufficient number of children to open a nursery

class. (Communes are the lowest administrative sub-division in France and are responsible for the administration of nursery schools.)

- Half-time classes, offered either as half days or for one day in two. This formula aims to allow children to receive the essential grounding in early education. They spend the rest of the time in the family.
- Peripatetic classes for sparsely populated areas, with scattered housing. Nursery schools and infant classes in rural or mountainous areas are provided with assistance from mobile teams for organisation and academic liaison. A teacher, in a lorry equipped with audio-visual material and teaching documents, makes regular trips around the small, isolated schools in the sector for which it is responsible

How long are the funded sessions?

Where children are in nursery school (*école maternelle*) or in the infant class of an elementary school, they usually attend on a full-time basis, that is for about eight hours a day. Nursery schools in France are mostly open more than seven or eight hours a day, but only in term-time. (Term-time usually consists of 36 weeks of classes throughout the school year.) In some areas of the country, half-time classes are available. Where nursery age children do attend nursery school full-time, many have an afternoon 'siesta' up to the age of six (compulsory school age).

Children in early years education generally have 26 hours of lessons per week.

Is there an early years curriculum?

A national curriculum for early years (known as pre-elementary) education has formally been in place in France since September 1995. This curriculum is nationally determined by the Ministry of Education.

If so, what are the principles underpinning this curriculum?

The general objective of the nursery school is defined as that of developing the potential of all children, in order to "shape their personality, to give them the best possible chance of success in compulsory primary school education and in life, and to prepare them for later learning". This general objective is further divided into three:

- the first is to provide the child with schooling, helping him to realise that school is a place where he can learn;
- the second is to socialise, that is to say, to allow the child to form relationships with others and become sociable; and
- the third is to allow the child to learn and practise, in other words, to develop his capacity to feel, act, think and imagine.

Is there balance across the curriculum?

The above general objectives for the early years curriculum were subsequently further defined into a specific national curriculum for nursery education, which focuses on six main 'areas of activity' (rather than subjects) for children in early years education, as follows:

- living together;
- speaking and building up the language;
- learning about the written word;
- taking action/acting in the world;
- discovering the world; and
- imagining, feeling and creating.

For each of the above, there are series of activities contributing to the child's overall development and preparing him or her for compulsory primary education:

- physical activities to keep the child in good health, increase his/her motor skills and allow him/her to become aware of his body image in space;
- scientific and technical activities to allow the child to state and solve a problem by exploring, discovering and making;
- communication, writing and - in particular - oral/spoken language exercises, which aim to develop mastery of language; and
- artistic and aesthetic activities to develop the child's sensitivity, listening and observation and familiarise him/her with a great variety of art forms and materials.

Games should play an important role in early years education, but not to the exclusion of rigour and effort.

Although it is recommended that children in early years education should receive 26 hours of 'lessons' per week, and that some form of timetable or programme is followed, within this weekly framework, the actual organisation of the timetable is a matter for the individual teacher. It is also recommended that the programme followed should be flexible. As a result, the early years timetable is not usually structured around strict times and structures of subjects, but the individual teacher organises daily activities dependent on the children's needs and the skills to be acquired during each cycle (see below).

Are children grouped in any particular way during each session?

In early years education in France, children are generally divided by age into three sections: 'lower', 'middle' and 'upper'. In other words, the nursery school (*école maternelle*) is divided into three classes - the *petite section maternelle* (PSM) catering for children from two or three to four years old; the *moyenne section maternelle* (MSM), for children aged four to five years; and the *grande section maternelle* (GSM), for children of five to six years of age. However, these divisions are flexible to take into account the different learning rhythms and maturity of each child and the skills he or she has acquired. The teaching team, in consultation with parents, can

choose to place a child in the section which best suits his or her needs, even if it does not precisely correspond to the child's age. The first two classes (PSM and MSM) constitute the first learning cycle of the French education system, while the GSM class, along with the first two years of compulsory primary school (*école élémentaire*), forms the basic learning cycle. (Such multi-year cycles, with objectives to be attained over a period longer than a single school year, have been implemented in response to the desire to adapt schools better to children's needs.)

It is generally considered impractical in early years education to vary teaching programmes according to individual need. The guiding principle is that children are there to learn as a group. Work in groups performing different activities is favoured at this level, so that children are offered a range of varying activities throughout the day.

At what age do children transfer to compulsory education?

Children start compulsory primary education (*école élémentaire*) in the September of the calendar year when they become six.

Assessment Arrangements

What are the forms of assessment that take place?

Although there is no official, formal national system of assessment for children during early years education in France, assessment of performance does commence prior to compulsory education, and is usually based on continuous, attentive observation of the children. In the final year of early years education, children aged five to six years, it is on the basis of a teacher's assessment of a child, that he or she recommends whether a child should move up to primary school (*école élémentaire*) or be kept back within early years education.

It is recommended that assessment at this level is informal. The Government stresses that, whilst nursery education should lay the foundations for oral skills and a progressive introduction to writing, marking and grading of the work of infants in early years education could be premature and harmful.

Are these assessments used to identify special educational needs?

What arrangements are made for children identified as having a special educational need?

A child may remain longer in early years education if their teacher judges that he/she is not ready to progress to compulsory primary education (see above).

Assessment to identify language learning difficulties

Under a new government programme, from September 2001, children in the final year of early years education in France (aged five to six years) are to be screened with a view to identifying, as early as possible in their school career, any language learning difficulties they may have. In addition, follow-up screening will take place during primary education and in the first year of lower secondary education (students aged 11 to 12 years).

Are records passed on to the children's next setting?

Where children have attended nursery school (*école maternelle*) in their place of residence and then proceed to primary school (*école élémentaire*) in that same place of residence, his/her file/record is usually transferred with him/her. This record, which is kept by nursery schools to help them monitor a child's progress, evaluate cross-curricular skills and provide support where it is needed, would note such things as whether a child has acquired specific attainment targets set for each cycle, is in the process of acquiring these, or has not acquired them.

Quality Assurance***What systems and procedures are in place for funded settings?***

As in other forms of education, the control and management of publicly-funded early years education is divided between the national Ministry of Education (central government) and local government, specifically the 'commune' (the lowest form of regional, administrative sub-division) for early years education. The Ministry takes care of training, recruitment, and teachers' pay and defines curricula. The commune looks after school premises and employs auxiliary staff such as specialist infant teaching assistants.

Staffing and Ratios***What is the average size of the group?***

Average class sizes in public- and private-sector early years classes in metropolitan France in 1997/8 were around 26 or below. This figure has remained stable since that time, although there are considerable variations throughout the country.

What is the pupil:practitioner ratio?

There are no recommended sizes for classes in nursery schools in France, except in the case of nursery schools or infant classes in education priority zones (ZEPs)², where the maximum teacher:child ratio is 25.

Elsewhere, the average teacher:child ratio (which can vary significantly from area to area) is around 1:27-30, plus an assistant.

In early years playgroups (*jardins d'enfants*), providing care and education for two- to six-year-olds, and for which parents pay, the staff:child ratio is 1:8.

² Education priority zones (*zones d'éducation prioritaire, ZEPs*) were introduced in 1982 as a means of providing assistance for children living in deprived districts, identified by such factors as the local unemployment rate, parents' qualifications and type of work, numbers on income support and the proportion of immigrant families. They cover around 10 per cent of students in over 530 zones, which are mostly in urban areas, and involve around 6,000 primary schools (children aged six to 11 years), 950 lower secondary comprehensive schools (for all students aged 11 to 15), and 100 "lycées" (for students aged 15+ to 18 years old).

Do all staff have an early years qualification?

Teachers in nursery schools and infant classes in France are generalist class teachers, and belong to the same professional group as teachers in primary schools, who are recruited through a system of competitive examination (*concours*) open to those who already hold a first degree (*licence*). Success in the *concours* is followed by one year's compulsory teacher training in a teacher training institution. In the public sector, nursery school and infant class teachers are civil servants.

Germany

It should be noted that, in Germany, responsibility for education is vested in the regional (*Länder*) authorities. The information provided below aims to provide a general outline of provision across Germany sourced from the *INCA* Archive.

Curriculum Organisation

Define early years settings, to include all providers of funded places

Kindergarten is the traditional form of early years education for children between the ages of three and six. Some *Länder*, particularly those of the former East Germany, also provide care facilities for babies and children below that age in crèches, known as *Kinderkrippen*. Kindertartens are provided either by the State, churches, welfare organisations, or private bodies, and are subject to state supervision, but attendance at kindergarten is not, as a general rule, free of charge. Most kindertartens receive some form of financial assistance from the State, but parents generally also have to make some contribution to the cost. This is usually based on the level of parental income.

Kindertarten provision in Germany has increased in recent years. In 1989, in the former Federal Republic (West Germany) around 65 per cent of three- to six-year-olds attended a day nursery or similar. In today's reunified country, 95 per cent or more attend. Provision improved following German reunification in 1990, when the belief that every child is entitled to a kindergarten place began gradually to establish itself in the west, and the statutory sector began to meet this entitlement by increasing the number of available places. (In the *Länder* of the former East Germany, babies to six-year-olds had been provided with kindergarten places as a matter of right.)

Since 1 January 1996 all children who have reached the age of three have had a legal right to a place in a kindergarten (or alternative form of provision). Attendance at early years institutions remains voluntary.

In addition to kindergarten, some *Länder* also provide preparatory classes (called *Vorklassen* or *Vorschulklassen*) for children aged five whose parents wish to provide them with special assistance and preparation for primary school (*Grundschule*), which generally commences at age six. Attendance is voluntary.

How long are the funded sessions?

Kindertarten opening hours are arranged by the maintaining bodies after consultation with parents and can consequently vary between kindertartens dependent, to some extent, on the needs of the families in the catchment areas.

As a general rule, however, supervision is provided in the morning, five days a week. More specifically, most kindertartens are open for four to six hours a day during term-time, but some are open for at least eight hours a day. In the *Länder* of the former East Germany, kindertartens tend to remain open all day (that is to say for 10 to 12 hours), whereas in the west German *Länder*, only about 14 per cent of places are open for the

full day; the rest are usually open for four hours in the morning and, in some cases, for two hours in the afternoon.

Is there an early years curriculum?

There is no fixed, nationally defined early years curriculum, but kindergarten curricula do exist in the various *Länder*, and these generally aim to "achieve a readiness for school enrolment by channelling the child's natural urge to play and engage in activity without anticipating the subject matter taught at school".

The kindergarten maintaining body works with the educational staff of the institution to develop the basic pedagogical concept for the respective institution, on the basis of the elementary educational aims of the kindergarten (see below) and the institution's own ideological, denominational, religious or educational concept. Work in early years institutions is essentially based on the situational approach; that is, it is guided by the needs and situations of the individual children. The staff therefore have to keep watch over the children, monitor their development and talk to parents regularly.

If so, what are the principles underpinning this curriculum?

Institutions providing early years education are called upon to encourage the child's development into a responsible and autonomous member of the community. Their function includes caring for and the general and social education of the child. Early years education is designed to "support and supplement the child's upbringing in the family, compensate for any developmental deficiencies and afford the child optimum opportunities for his/her development and education". The child is encouraged to develop his/her abilities through play and other activities suited to children, and to learn to 'live' together with the rest of the group. It is also the responsibility of the early years setting to prepare children for primary school education in line with their level of development.

Early years education in Bavaria aims to:

develop the whole child by means of play, and without pre-empting formal school learning or the introduction to the alphabet. A flexible approach is used, taking into consideration the qualities and the individuality of each child. In play and in group work, the most important fields of learning are religious education, living in a community, communication and creativity, nature and the environment, and health education.

Is there balance across the curriculum?

The following areas and activities, designed to stimulate the child's general development, are generally introduced during early years education:

- development of the child's physical, mental, emotional and social abilities;
- development of a sense of responsibility;
- accustoming the child to a daily routine and to basic hygiene; and
- play and other activities suited to children.

Data collated for inclusion on the *INCA* website notes that the Kindergarten Acts of the individual federal *Länder* generally recommend that kindergartens should pass on elementary knowledge about the environment, and promote an awareness of environmental responsibility, to children in their care. This can be, for example, by outings to parks, woods or recreational areas, to enable children to come into contact with nature and have experience of native flora and fauna.

Are children grouped in any particular way during each session?

In early years kindergarten provision for three- to six-year-olds education is not usually organised into grades or year groups; groups usually consist of children from different age groups.

At what age do children transfer to compulsory education?

Compulsory schooling starts on 1 August for all children who reach their sixth birthday before 30 June of that year. The start of school attendance is also conditional on the child having attained an adequate level of development. School doctors conduct school entry tests, examining every child's oral abilities, sight, hearing, touch, recognition, ability to understand numbers and quantities, thinking abilities, motor skills and movement, attitude to work, concentration, memory, and physical and social conduct. On the basis of the results of such tests, the school doctor recommends either that the child should start school at six, or that schooling should be delayed for a year. Parents can disregard the school doctor's opinion in making a decision on whether to send their child to primary school or defer entry.

Children whose sixth birthday falls between 1 July and 31 December may be permitted to start school early on their parents' application, provided they have attained the requisite level of physical and mental maturity. The decision is taken either by the headteacher or, in some *Länder*, by the school supervisory authority - based on their own judgement and usually in consultation with the school doctor, the local health authority and the school psychologist (where one exists). Special tests are often employed to determine a child's level of development.

Assessment Arrangements

What are the forms of assessment that take place?

Although there is no formal, national system of assessment for children during early years education, children are regularly and informally monitored.

Are these assessments used to identify special educational needs?

The informal monitoring process which takes place during early years education is used to help judge whether, on reaching compulsory school age (six years), a child's level of development is inadequate to allow him/her to cope with primary school. In such cases, in most *Länder*, the school authorities are authorised to require such children to attend special preparatory classes or institutions (see below).

What arrangements are made for children identified as having a special educational need?

Special institutions (called *Schulkindergarten*, *Vorklassen*, *Vorschulklassen*, *Vorbereitungsklassen*, or *Förderklassen*, depending on the *Land*) (or, in some *Länder*, special classes in the first year of primary school) have been established for children who have reached compulsory school age (six years), but whose level of development does not yet allow them to cope with primary level education. Legislation in most *Länder* enables the school authorities to require six-year-olds who are not yet ready for primary school to attend such classes. The decision on deferment of six-year-olds to such classes is taken by the appropriate primary school on the basis of an educational and psychological assessment and the school doctor's report. Where doubts still remain at the end of the period of deferment as to the child's suitability to attend a mainstream primary school, the school's supervisory authority decides whether he or she should be required to attend a special school.

Are records passed on to the children's next setting?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Quality Assurance

What systems and procedures are in place for funded settings?

Early years settings, whether funded by public or non-public bodies are subject to public/state supervision. This is generally exercised by the youth welfare offices of the *Länder* in their role as supra-regional organisers of public youth welfare services. Publicly-funded kindergartens are obliged to provide a 'neutral' education as regards religious philosophy and politics.

Staffing and Ratios

What is the average size of the group?

What is the pupil:practitioner ratio?

Nationally, it is recommended that kindergarten groups (for children from age three to age six) should comprise between 15 and 30 children, cared for by at least one person with a qualification in education, plus an assistant/helper. In Bavaria, average kindergarten class/group sizes are between 20 and 25 children.

Do all staff have an early years qualification?

Early years staff are generally trained at upper secondary level (aged 16+), and children in early years settings are usually looked after by staff with a qualification in education, and also by assistants/helpers. The trained staff include state-recognised graduate youth and community workers (*Sozialpädagogen*) and state-recognised qualified youth or childcare workers (*Erzieher*). Helpers are mainly nursery assistants (*Kinderpflegerinnen*) and, as a general rule, each group/class of children in kindergarten is looked after by at least one trained educational staff member and at least one helper. Kindergartens are generally headed by state-recognised graduate

youth and community workers or state-recognised qualified youth or childcare workers (*Sozialpädagogen* or *Erzieher* respectively).

Bibliographical note

Readers may be interested in the following article:

BILDUNG UND WISSENSCHAFT (1999). 'Pre-school education', *Bildung und Wissenschaft*, 4 (whole issue).

Hungary

Curriculum Organisation

Define early years settings, to include all providers of funded places

Early years (*óvoda*) education is generally provided in kindergartens or nursery schools, which are "professionally independent educational institutions whose most important functions are protective, social and educational". Kindergartens take children from the age of three up to school maturity (usually age six, maximum seven years of age) and, according to Hungarian law, all five-year-olds must attend kindergarten in order to prepare for school.

Kindergartens are generally the responsibility of municipal government (that is, they are part of the publicly-funded system of education) and (except privately-maintained ones) do not charge fees.

As a result of the fact that Hungary's minorities have the right to education in their mother tongue, various types of kindergartens have developed for such children, dependent usually on the proportion of ethnic minority children attending. There are:

- kindergartens where the mother tongue is taught as a foreign language;
- kindergartens where the languages of instruction are the mother tongue and Hungarian (bilingual education); and
- those where the mother tongue is the language of instruction.

In addition to kindergarten provision for three- to six-year-olds, children up to three years of age may attend day nurseries, but these do not perform any formal educational tasks and are operated under the auspices of the Ministry of Family and Social Affairs.

How long are the funded sessions?

Kindergarten opening hours are regulated by the maintaining body (usually the local authority), but they tend to open from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm (Monday to Friday) from the beginning of September until the end of June. There is usually one month's vacation in either July or August. There are also usually two-week vacations at Christmas and Easter.

Although all five-year-olds must attend kindergarten in order to prepare for compulsory education, formal teaching for five-year-olds in kindergartens must not exceed four hours per day.

Is there an early years curriculum?

In 1996, a *Core Programme for Kindergarten Education* was introduced by government decree. This stated that, by 1999, kindergartens should form their own programme of education, based on the *Core Programme for Kindergarten Education*.

Prior to 1996, the kindergarten curriculum was determined by the State, through compulsory common objectives for all kindergartens.

No compulsory subjects are specified for kindergarten education. The individual programmes of education, which each kindergarten is expected to develop, based on the Hungarian *Core Programme for Kindergarten Education*, are approved by the teaching staff of the kindergarten and the maintaining body (usually the local authority).

Individual kindergarten educational programmes must include information regarding:

- the principles and objectives of early years education;
- the educational tasks;
- the pedagogical activities relating to the protection of children and juveniles;
- the forms of cooperation between parents, the child and the kindergarten teacher;
- in the case of education for ethnic minorities, details of responsibilities relating to the promotion of the culture and language of the minority;
- the system of supervision, monitoring, assessment and quality assurance of educational work; and
- a list of the facilities and equipment necessary for the implementation of the educational programme.

If so, what are the principles underpinning this curriculum?

Is there balance across the curriculum?

The fundamental aim of kindergarten education in Hungary is to ensure well-balanced personal development and that "each and every child develops according to personal characteristics and in varying patterns". Early years education aims to prepare children for life in the community and for school, and to develop their skills and capabilities.

The Hungarian *Core Programme for Kindergarten Education* defines the aims of kindergarten education in accordance with the following principles:

- Pre-school education should focus on the full development of the human personality and on strengthening respect for human rights and basic liberties.
- A child - as a developing personality - is entitled to special care.
- The education of a child is the primary right and responsibility of the family. Kindergartens play a subsidiary role in the process.

It further defines the task of kindergarten education as being "to satisfy kindergarten children's physical and spiritual needs".

By the end of kindergarten education, children are expected to have reached the level of development necessary for school work and school life. The kindergarten is expected to ensure this through its three key aims of:

- developing a healthy way of life in the children in its care, thus ensuring that, at the end of their time in kindergarten children's physical development has progressed so that they are ready to move on to the compulsory general school;
- providing emotional and social education so that children's behaviour patterns, for example, have matured by the end of kindergarten to such an extent that they are ready for the compulsory general school; and
- beginning to develop children's intellectual development, so that, by the time they are ready to move from kindergarten to general school, they are developing language skills and improving other intellectual abilities such as perception, observation, memory, attention, imagination and creativity.

Kindergarten education has a major role in arousing interest in children, in establishing their learning skills, and in developing their motivation and creativity.

Even in kindergartens, in accordance with the 1993 Public Education Act, children belonging to one of Hungary's 13 ethnic minorities (Gipsy, German, Croatian, Slovak, Romanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Polish, Armenian, Ruthenian, Serbian, Slovenian and Ukrainian) have the right to education in their mother tongue. Indeed, kindergarten education has an important role in balancing cultural and linguistic disadvantages, which can be the cause of learning difficulties in later years.

The Hungarian *Core Programme for Kindergarten Education* document recommends the use of games, poems, music, singing, drawing, modelling, crafts, and movement in order to achieve the above aims with young children.

Teaching methods are a matter for the individual teacher, but play is the main method of education until children reach the age of five, when preparatory activities for entry to compulsory schooling begin.

Are children grouped in any particular way during each session?

In general, kindergartens are co-educational, usually located in buildings separate from compulsory general schools, and teaching groups are usually organised by age cohorts, three groups divided by year ('little', three- to four-year-olds; 'middle', four-to five-year-olds; and 'big', five- to six-year-olds). Progression from one group to the next is usually automatic with age, except in cases where the teacher advises otherwise and the parents agree.

There are, however, some ad hoc special interest groups for subjects such as swimming, gym, foreign languages etc. In addition, as a result of the decline in the birth rate since the 1980s, and consequently in the number of young children attending kindergarten, some kindergartens now organise children in mixed-aged groups.

At what age do children transfer to compulsory education?

Parents are generally discouraged from transferring children from early years provision in kindergarten to the compulsory general school until they are mature enough/have reached the required standard. However, children generally start compulsory schooling in the academic year in which they become six, unless they were born after 31 May. Summer born children may enrol at the age of seven but, as with all others, have to attend kindergarten from age five.

Children require a kindergarten certificate for admission to compulsory general school and, if applying to enter a school which is not in their local district, may also have to sit an entrance examination. District schools are legally obliged to admit eligible students living in the local area.

Assessment Arrangements

What are the forms of assessment that take place?

The assessment process for children in the final year of kindergarten (five- to six-year-olds) amounts to informal observation by experts who assess their readiness for the compulsory general school. Progression is then certified by the kindergarten. If, on the basis of this assessment, children are judged not yet ready to move on, entry may be deferred to age seven. Indeed, it is recommended that children should not progress to compulsory education at age six if they are not ready.

Are these assessments used to identify special educational needs?

Unfortunately, no data additional to that provided above is currently available via the INCA Archive.

What arrangements are made for children identified as having a special educational need?

Unfortunately, no data additional to that provided above is currently available via the INCA Archive.

Are records passed on to the children's next setting?

There is not always close contact between kindergartens and schools. Indeed, in general, kindergartens are located in buildings separate from compulsory general schools.

A child's kindergarten certificate, received on successful completion of kindergarten, and attesting that a child is ready to progress to compulsory general school, is required by the local general school to entitle the bearer to attend.

Quality Assurance

What systems and procedures are in place for funded settings?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the INCA Archive.

Staffing and Ratios

What is the average size of the group?

What is the pupil:practitioner ratio?

The maximum permitted size, by law, for a group of children in kindergarten education in Hungary (catering for three- to six-year-olds) is 25 children, and average kindergarten class size in the 1998/99 academic year was around 12. Each teaching group in a Hungarian kindergarten usually has two nursery/kindergarten teachers and one nursery assistant.

Do all staff have an early years qualification?

Prior to 1996, kindergarten teachers did not always have to have a college diploma/professional qualification. This is now no longer the case, and the secondary school leaving certificate (*erettsegi*), along with a professional qualification, is no longer considered adequate. Consequently, kindergarten teachers are generalists who now train for three years in kindergarten teacher training institutions or colleges, and then take a professional examination leading to a college diploma. Training specialisations are, however, offered in subjects such as physical education, music etc.

Kindergarten teachers are state employees.

Ireland

Curriculum Organisation

Define early years settings, to include all providers of funded places

Provision in state-funded primary schools for four- to six-year-olds

Although children in Ireland are not obliged to attend school until the age of six, well over half of all four-year-olds and almost all five-year-olds are enrolled in early childhood education in infants classes provided by state-funded primary schools. In other words, state-funded early childhood provision for children aged four to six years is an integral part of the regular school system, with children in infants classes (aged four to six) following a prescribed curriculum and being taught by fully-trained school teachers. Infants classes are usually an integral part of a primary school and, as such, operate within the general framework of the primary school system.

Provision for younger children

State provision for younger children is significantly less developed. Indeed, there is no nationally-funded, nationally available educational provision for children under the age of four. Just over one per cent of three-year-olds were classified as in full-time education on 1 January 1998 and the majority of these were enrolled in private (non-state funded) crèches, playgroups or primary schools.

There are, however, a limited number of state-funded compensatory programmes for three-year-olds, including programmes for the children of travellers, and a specific programme for children in an inner-city area of Dublin. In addition, there are a number of early years programmes for younger children with special educational needs (SEN).

Health authorities also give grants to voluntary bodies to offer early years provision to children with disabilities and SEN, and to disadvantaged groups. Such provision is mainly in nurseries and in community playgroups run by voluntary agencies.

How long are the funded sessions?

Primary schools usually open between the hours of around 9 a.m. and 3 p.m., Monday to Friday. Children in junior infants and senior infants classes in primary school (aged four to five and five to six respectively) normally have a shorter school day, ending between 1.30 and 2.30 p.m.

Is there an early years curriculum?

A revised Primary School Curriculum (*Curaclam na Bunscoile*) was introduced in Ireland in September 1999 and is being implemented in phases over a four- to five-year period. This curriculum provides a detailed framework for schools, within which schools are afforded the flexibility to plan a programme that is appropriate to the individual school's circumstances and to the needs, aptitudes and interests of the

children involved. In the presentation of content and in the exploration of approaches and methodologies, the curriculum assumes that schools, in the process of planning its implementation, will adapt and interpret the curriculum where necessary to meet their own unique requirements.

In developing this Primary School Curriculum and, in view of the fact that a characteristic feature of Irish education is that many children begin formal schooling at age four, the Government aimed to ensure that the curriculum is appropriate to the developmental and learning needs of young children. The curriculum for junior infants and senior infants classes (children aged four to five and five to six respectively) takes account of these factors by, for example, the informality of the learning experience inherent in it, and the emphasis it gives to the element of play and learning through play. It stresses too, the centrality of language in early childhood learning, along with the importance of activity and the manipulation of a variety of materials in promoting motor and sensory development.

If so, what are the principles underpinning this curriculum?

The Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999)³, which applies to children aged four to six in early years education in infants classes in primary school, is based on the following principles:

A focus on learning: the curriculum is based on a philosophy and psychology of teaching and learning that accords equal importance to what a child learns and to the process by which he or she learns it. The curriculum therefore articulates not only the content to be learned and the outcomes to be achieved, but also a wide range of approaches to learning. The curriculum aims to ensure that children's experience of school will be such that they will come to value learning and will develop the ability to learn independently. It also aims to enhance the enjoyment of learning and the motivation to learn.

A relevant curriculum: the curriculum seeks to satisfy the developmental and educational needs of the children it serves in the context of the contemporary society in which they live. It aims to provide for their immediate learning needs and interests and, at the same time, to prepare them to benefit from further education. It aims to enable them to function effectively in a changing society and to cope successfully with the demands of modern life.

A broad and balanced curriculum: the curriculum is characterised by its breadth and balance and is directed towards the development of the full potential of every child. Within a clear and structured national framework, it affords flexibility to the school and the teacher in planning the learning experiences that are useful to the individual child at the various stages of his or her development.

³ DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE (DES) (1999). *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

A developmental approach to learning: by revisiting knowledge and ideas already acquired as the starting point for new learning, the curriculum aims to allow for the coherent expansion of knowledge and the gradual refinement of concepts. It also recognises the integrated nature of knowledge and thought and stresses the connections in content in the different curriculum areas.

A detailed statement of content: the curriculum gives a detailed statement of content for each subject and aims to provide for an extensive learning experience and encourage a rich variety of approaches to teaching and learning to cater for the differing needs of individual children.

A balance of knowledge, concepts and skills: the curriculum envisages a particular relationship between the acquisition of knowledge and the development of concepts and skills. Concepts and skills are outlined at each class level, and their development is approached through the exploration of the content of the curriculum. Strong emphasis is placed on developing the ability to question, to analyse, to investigate, to think critically, to solve problems and to interact effectively with others.

Assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning: a significant feature of the Primary School Curriculum 1999 is the central position given to assessment in the teaching and learning process. Each subject in the curriculum contains a statement on appropriate assessment procedures and their use, with a view to directing assessment strategies towards the identification of children's needs and providing experiences to fulfil those needs.

The importance of planning: the curriculum envisages an integrated learning experience for children. In order to achieve this, strong emphasis is placed on planning. Within the framework of the curriculum, schools are afforded flexibility to plan a programme that is appropriate to the individual school's circumstances and to the needs, aptitudes and interests of its children. The curriculum assumes that schools will adapt and interpret it where necessary to meet their own unique requirements.

In addition, the principles of learning on which the Primary School Curriculum is based comprise:

The child's sense of wonder and national curiosity: it is in cultivating the child's sense of wonder that the curriculum can provide the most fulfilling learning experience for the child and foster an appreciation of the value of learning.

The child as an active agent in his or her learning: it is an underlying principle of the curriculum that the child should be an active agent in his or her own learning. The structure and content of the curriculum are designed to provide opportunities for active engagement in a wide range of learning experiences, and to encourage children to respond in a variety of ways to particular content and teaching strategies.

The developmental nature of learning: the curriculum offers the child the opportunity, having dealt with particular knowledge, ideas and skills at a simple level, to return to these at regular intervals in order to deepen his or her understanding.

The child's knowledge and experience as a base for learning: it is a fundamental principle of the curriculum that the child's existing knowledge and experience should be a starting point for acquiring new understanding.

Environment-based learning: the curriculum reflects the principle that the child's environment is an important context for his or her development.

Learning through guided activity and discovery: the principle of guided activity and discovery and the importance of the teacher in providing the most effective learning experiences for the child are central to the curriculum.

Learning through language: in view of the crucial relationship between language and learning, the curriculum incorporates the use of talk and discussion as a central strategy in every curriculum area.

The aesthetic dimension: the curriculum aims to enable the child to perceive the aesthetic dimension in every area.

Is there balance across the curriculum?

The Primary School Curriculum is presented in seven curriculum areas, some of which are further sub-divided into subjects.

The seven curriculum areas are:

- language: sub-divided into *Gaeilge* (Irish) and English; ⁴
- mathematics;
- social, environmental and scientific education (SESE): sub-divided into history, geography, and science;
- arts education: sub-divided into visual arts, music, and drama;
- physical education (PE);
- social, personal and health education (SPHE); and
- religious education (at primary level, the development of the curriculum for religious education is the responsibility of the relevant church authorities).

⁴ Most schools conduct lessons through the medium of English, as this is the mother tongue of the majority of the population. However, in those areas of the country where *Gaeilge* is the mother-tongue, the teaching medium is usually *Gaeilge*. There are also some schools where teaching takes place through the medium of *Gaeilge* but where *Gaeilge* is not normally the mother-tongue of the children, nor is the school in a *Gaeltacht* (*Gaeilge*-speaking) area.

Within the above organisational framework, it is important to emphasise that all aspects of the child's development are interrelated and that the developmental process is interactive. The curriculum at primary level is usually delivered in an integrated manner.

A time framework is suggested in the curriculum documents. This allocates a minimum time to each of the seven curriculum areas. This guideline includes three elements:

- the time allocated to religious education;
- a suggested minimum time allocation for each of the other six curriculum areas, along with a period of discretionary curriculum time; and
- the time allowed for breaks and school assembly.

Curriculum areas	Recommended lesson times during one week of short day infants classes (four- to six-year-olds)
Secular instruction	
Language 1	3 hours
Language 2	2 hours 30 minutes
Mathematics	2 hours 15 minutes
SESE	2 hours 15 minutes
SPHE	30 minutes
PE	1 hour
Arts education	2 hours 30 minutes
Discretionary curriculum time	1 hour
Total secular instruction	15 hours
Religious education (typically)	2 hours 30 minutes
Assembly time	1 hour 40 minutes
Roll call	50 minutes
Breaks	50 minutes
Recreation (typically)	2 hours 30 minutes
OVERALL TOTAL	23 hours 20 minutes

Are children grouped in any particular way during each session?

As far as possible, primary schools group classes for pre-school children (aged four to six) by age; junior infants classes cater for those aged four to five and senior infants those aged five to six. However, in smaller schools it is often necessary to combine different class levels with one teacher. In such cases junior infants and senior infants will usually be taught in one class.

At what age do children transfer to compulsory education?

Children must be aged four or over to begin primary education, although compulsory education does not start until they are aged six. Pre-school age children may be enrolled in the junior infants class of a primary school on their fourth birthday.

Assessment Arrangements

What are the forms of assessment that take place?

Pre-school age children, aged four to six, in the junior infants and senior infants classes of primary schools, are continuously observed and monitored by their class teacher. In exceptional cases, on the basis of such monitoring, some children in such early years provision in primary schools may repeat a year. For the majority of those who do so, this is usually because of learning difficulties of one form or another.

A significant feature of the Primary School Curriculum (1999), which applies to children in the infants classes in primary schools, is the central position given to assessment in the teaching and learning process. Assessment strategies are directed towards the identification of children's needs with the aim of improving the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process.

Are these assessments used to identify special educational needs?

What arrangements are made for children identified as having a special educational need?

See above in addition.

Assessment is used to identify children with specific learning difficulties so that the nature of the support and assistance they need can be ascertained, and appropriate strategies and programmes put in place to enable them to cope with the particular difficulties they may be encountering

Are records passed on to the children's next setting?

Children in funded early years provision are usually in the infants classes of primary school. As a result, their records are generally already in the school in which they begin their compulsory education.

Quality Assurance

What systems and procedures are in place for funded settings?

There are different levels of responsibility for the development and implementation of the primary level curriculum, which applies to children aged four to six in early years provision in the infants classes of primary school. At national level, the curriculum is formulated by the Minister for Education and Science, on the advice of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), and the Department of Education and Science (DES) oversees its implementation through its Inspectorate. At school level, the particular character of the school makes a vital contribution. Adaptation of the curriculum to suit the individual school is achieved through the preparation and continuous updating of a *plean scoile* (school plan).

The NCCA supports the implementation of the curriculum through involvement in in-service training courses and the production of guidelines for teachers; reviewing the effectiveness of the curriculum by monitoring children's performance in public examinations and commissioning research; and informing school authorities, teachers, parents, employers and the general public about developments in curriculum and assessment, through publications, public meetings, briefings and the media.

The development and implementation of the curriculum in religious education in primary schools is the responsibility of the relevant church authorities.

Staffing and Ratios

What is the average size of the group?

What is the pupil:practitioner ratio?

Government recommendations, introduced in September 1999, are that the maximum class size in primary schools in the Republic of Ireland should be 30. Prior to the introduction of this recommendation, class size varied significantly in junior infants and senior infants classes for children aged four to six in primary schools. In the 1997-98 school year, for example, while 6,687 children were in junior infants classes of 0-19 children, there were over 15,718 children in classes of 30 and over. For senior infants classes, the numbers were 5,966 and 20,098 respectively.

Do all staff have an early years qualification?

Teachers within the state-funded primary education system (including those responsible for junior and senior infants classes for children aged four to six years) usually hold a Bachelor of Education degree after a three- or four-year course in a college of education. They are generalist teachers, employed by the school but classed as public servants.

Italy

Curriculum Organisation

Define early years settings, to include all providers of funded places

Day care centres or crèches are available for children up to the age of three years. From three, children can attend state-funded nursery/infant school (*scuola dell'infanzia*) which, although not compulsory, constitutes the first stage of the schooling system. State nursery schools offer three-years' full-time pre-compulsory education and are free of charge, although a contribution is requested from families for transport and meal services provided by the commune.

All children who are three years old at the beginning of the school year (1 September) or those whose third birthday is before 31 December of the same year can be admitted to a nursery school. Children who reach three years of age between 1 and 31 January of the next year may also sometimes be admitted.

How long are the funded sessions?

State-funded schools are required to be open at least eight hours a day and may be open as long as ten hours a day. The nursery school day generally lasts for seven or eight hours, indeed around 70 per cent of all children attending nursery schools do so for more than seven hours a day. Opening hours are usually 8:30 am to 4:30 pm over six days per week (Monday to Saturday), although this is gradually giving way to five days per week (Monday to Friday). Precise lesson times, subjects or play times are not specified during this phase.

The administrative school year for all state-funded schools runs from 1 September to 31 August of the following year. Educational activities in early years education generally begin on 1 September and end on 30 June, and the school year lasts at least 200 days. Early years teaching must be provided for at least 10 months per year and may be extended to 11 months at parents' request. In July and August, communes may run educational and recreational services with different staff.

Is there an early years curriculum?

There is no prescribed national curriculum for early years education in Italy. Guidelines (*orientamenti*) for the education of children during this phase are, however, issued by the Ministry of Public Education (MPI). The MPI intends that these guidelines should be adapted by the headteachers and staff of individual early years institutions, in consultation with parent representatives, and in line with the particular requirements of their specific environment.

If so, what are the principles underpinning this curriculum?

The aims of early years education, as set out in the Ministry-defined guidelines, are:

- the strengthening of the child's identity with respect to physical, intellectual and psychodynamic characteristics;
- the gradual achievement of independence by the child; and
- the development of the child's abilities, in particular his or her sensorial, perceptive, motor, linguistic and intellectual abilities.

The *scuola dell'infanzia* aims to contribute to the effective, cognitive and social development of children between three and six years of age; to promote their independence, creativity and learning potential; and to ensure equal educational opportunity for all.

The educational organisation of nursery schools aims to create a comfortable and stimulating environment, suitable for communication and learning. Schools are expected to avoid early disciplinary and prescriptive methods in favour of a system based on activities which are both structured and free, differentiated, gradual and mediated. Teaching methods in nursery schools are expected to be based on games and exploration.

Is there balance across the curriculum?

There are no prescribed compulsory subjects for early years education in Italy. Similarly, there is no prescribed time allocation. However the Ministry of Public Education (MPI) guidelines suggest that early years teachers should organise activities for their children in accordance with their age, maturity and environment, and that these activities should incorporate the following 'fields of educational experience':

- body and movement;
- speech and words;
- space, order and measure;
- objects, time and nature;
- messages, forms and media; and
- self and others.

Teachers are responsible for allocating the necessary time to deal with topics related to the specific areas of experience

Are children grouped in any particular way during each session?

State-funded, early years education for three- to six-year-olds in Italy is usually divided into three teaching 'sections', one for each year of nursery education; consequently, children are usually grouped in classes with children of a similar age (three- to four-year-olds, four- to five-year-olds, and five- to six-year-olds). However, schools are at liberty to organise teaching groups as they see fit and, in instances where there are insufficient children to form single-age teaching groups, mixed-aged groups do exist.

Children move automatically from one class/section to the next and from early years to compulsory primary school education. Their teachers, two per teaching group/section, usually follow them throughout the three years of early years education.

At what age do children transfer to compulsory education?

All children who have reached the age of six at the beginning of the academic year (1 September) or who will do so by 31 December of that year, can enrol in compulsory primary education.

Where children have previously been receiving state-funded early years education in nursery school (around 99 per cent of cases) progression from pre-compulsory to compulsory primary education is automatic. That is to say there are no academic admissions requirements. In addition, specific programmes to prepare children attending nursery school for the transition to primary education are frequently organised, as well as information meetings for parents to discuss the transition procedure.

Assessment Arrangements

What are the forms of assessment that take place?

There is no national system of assessment during this phase of education. Assessment is carried out by individual schools, in accordance with general guidance provided by the Ministry of Public Education (MPI). There is no central organisation appointed to verify that the above-mentioned criteria are followed.

The MPI's guidelines recommend that teachers should make an initial assessment of a child's ability on his/her admission to nursery school, and that this should be followed by other checks throughout the school year, making it possible to continually adjust educational methods and content to the child's abilities. A final assessment of skills is usually made before the child enters compulsory primary education (at age six).

Are these assessments used to identify special educational needs?

Continuous assessment of the development of children with special educational needs, as well as of the validity of their educational programme, takes place on a regular basis, and in the same manner as for all children, at every level of education. This assessment aims to ensure that the education being provided continues to be appropriate to the child's individual needs.

What arrangements are made for children identified as having a special educational need?

State-funded early years provision in nursery schools includes all children wishing to attend school between the ages of three and six, including those with adjustment and learning difficulties. Indeed, the education system in Italy provides full integration in state schools and early years settings for all children who have special educational needs, irrespective of the extent of these needs. The Government believes that the inclusion of such children in mainstream schools provides an opportunity for all children to become more mature.

In addition, children younger than three who have a special educational need are admitted to state-funded early years provision in nursery schools.

Are records passed on to the children's next setting?

No official assessment records are given to families during this phase of education, but informal discussion with parents of a child's behaviour, progress and abilities does take place.

Unfortunately, no further information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Quality Assurance

What systems and procedures are in place for funded settings?

1968 legislation established the present system of state nursery schools (*scuola dell'infanzia*) and provided for funding for non-state (local or private) nursery schools for children aged three to six years. Overall responsibility for state-funded early years provision lies with the Ministry of Public Education (MPI), with the administration of the majority of nursery schools delegated to local education authorities. Non-state schools receive funding from the State subject to certain conditions.

Unfortunately, no further information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Staffing and Ratios

What is the average size of the group?

Children attending state-funded early years provision in nursery school are organised into teaching groups (known as 'sections'), with a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 25 children. If a child with special educational needs is integrated in the class, the maximum tends to be 20. These official, maximum class size recommendations are, however, not statutory, and may be overlooked to permit schools to respect annual budget restrictions.

There are usually two teachers per class/section. Alternatively, some nursery classes may be staffed by one teacher only. In such cases, teaching is provided in mornings only. If a class includes children with special educational needs, a support teacher is also provided, in addition.

The minimum number of children per teaching group may be reduced to 10 for nursery schools operating in rural/mountainous regions and small islands.

What is the pupil:practitioner ratio?

In the 1999-2000 academic year, the child:teacher ratio in state-funded nursery schools in Italy was around 12:1, with an average of approximately 24 children in each teaching group.

Do all staff have an early years qualification?

Previously, nursery teacher training schools (*scuole magistrale*), in the upper secondary sector (students aged 14+), provided a three-year training course for nursery school teachers. However, since the start of the 1998/1999 academic year schools of nursery teacher training have not accepted any new students on to the first year of the course. As a result, these schools are gradually being phased out and all nursery school teachers now have to follow a specific four-year university course (age 19+).

Japan

Curriculum Organisation

Define early years settings, to include all providers of funded places

Kindergartens (*yochien*) provide non-compulsory early years education for children from the ages of three to six. There are also day nurseries (*hoikuen*) which accept children from the age of six months to compulsory school age (six years old). These day nurseries are intended to be used by parents who cannot look after their children during the day for whatever reason (work, illness).

In addition, there are an increasing number of early years correspondence courses, offered by several private companies, which provide material for pre-school children (some as young as 12 months old) to study at home. There is a monthly subscription fee for the materials.

Kindergartens, whether public or private, and which are under the control of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), receive national aid for building and for purchasing equipment, along with a modest yearly subsidy per child. The remaining costs are usually met by parents, who are charged a flat-rate tuition fee. There is some limited tuition aid available for parents on restricted incomes.

Public and private day nurseries for children aged six months to six years, on the other hand, receive large reimbursements per child from the Ministry responsible for them, the Ministry of Health and Welfare (*Koseisho*). As a result, approximately 80 per cent of nursery costs are covered by (central) state funds, 10 per cent by local funds and 10 per cent by tuition payments.

How long are the funded sessions?

Pre-compulsory kindergartens (*yochien*) (along with compulsory schools) adopt a three-term school year, as follows:

- Term 1: April to July, followed by a long summer (August) vacation.
- Term 2: September to December, followed by a shorter, winter vacation.
- Term 3: January to March, followed by a short spring vacation.

The minimum number of school weeks for early years kindergarten education is 39 weeks a year, and the standard number of classroom hours per day (Monday to *Saturday*) is four hours, in consideration of the developmental level of the minds and bodies of the children.

Day nurseries (*hoikuen*) tend to open year round, six days per week (Monday to *Saturday*) from around 7:00 am to 7:00 pm.

The school week in Japan is gradually being reduced from six to five days per week, Monday to Friday. In place of Saturday schooling, community play and activity schemes are being organised for some children.

Is there an early years curriculum?

There is a national curriculum, a Ministry-defined *Course of Study*, for children during the early years phase.

Each school is expected to organise its own curriculum/teaching programme in accordance with the Course of Study, taking into account circumstances peculiar to the local community and the school, and the stage of mental and physical development of the children enrolled. That is to say that the local boards of education have the right to make curriculum changes to suit their particular needs.

If so, what are the principles underpinning this curriculum?

The national Ministry provides a framework for the early years curriculum with a view to ensuring an 'optimum national level of learning while at the same time adhering to the principle of equal educational opportunity'.

Courses of Study for all levels of education are regularly reviewed and revised. The 1989 version was introduced to kindergartens in 1990, and the revised Course of Study for kindergarten, which was agreed and published in 1998, began to be introduced in April 2000. Courses of Study set the direction for the nation's education by instructing teachers on what and how to teach. In the new Courses of Study, the Government calls for education to produce citizens who are more creative and considerate, and for a "unique system of education, which will foster children's willingness to learn in a relaxed environment".

The general principle behind the early years curriculum is that it should consist largely of constructive play and learning social behaviour, and concentrate on fun activities, on making friends and on learning how to operate within a group.

The early years curriculum:

- helps children develop, through everyday activities, in a manner appropriate to their stage of growth;
- helps children to attain the aims of education, mainly by instruction through play; and
- provides guidance, in accordance with the developmental characteristics of each individual child.

The general objectives of kindergarten education are:

- To encourage basic living habits and attitudes for a healthy, safe and happy life, and to nurture the foundations for a healthy mind and body.
- To encourage love and trust for people and to cultivate an attitude of independence, cooperation and mutuality.

- To encourage interests towards one's surrounding nature and society, and to cultivate sensitivity and a capacity for appreciating one's surroundings.
- To encourage interest towards language in daily life, to develop pleasant attitudes in talking and listening to others and to cultivate language sense.
- To encourage a rich mind and to enrich creativity through various experiences.

Is there balance across the curriculum?

Japanese kindergarten provide an academic curriculum which includes the first stages of reading and arithmetic, and children are expected to be able to read and do simple sums involving addition and subtraction by the time they leave at age six. However, the Japanese schooling system does not *require* children to have academic abilities, such as reading, writing and arithmetic before they start compulsory schooling. In fact, the curriculum in Year 1 of primary education is designed for children who have no academic experience.

In addition to teaching the first stages of reading, writing and arithmetic, many Japanese kindergarten also attempt to develop the more general intellectual skills of thinking, observation, learning and general intelligence. To this end, the aims and contents⁵ of the kindergarten curriculum framework, adopted in April 1990 (see above), focused on five inter-related aspects:

- health;
- human relationships;
- the environment;
- language; and
- expression.

The overall aim is, through play, to promote intellectual development and qualities of self-reliance and awareness of others.

Note to readers: The *National Curriculum Standards (Course of Study) for Kindergarten Education*, in full, can be downloaded from:
<http://www.mext.go.jp/english/news/2001/04/010401.htm>

Are children grouped in any particular way during each session?

In kindergartens, for children aged three to six years, in accordance with government standards for class size and organisation, classes usually comprise children of the same age. In special cases, however, several different age groups may attend the same class. In every classroom, slow learners are integrated with the gifted.

At what age do children transfer to compulsory education?

Children transfer to compulsory elementary school education in the April after their sixth birthday.

⁵ Aims describe the feelings, attitudes and desires which are expected to be developed by the time infants leave kindergarten. Contents are specified material to be taught in order to achieve those aims.

Assessment Arrangements

What are the forms of assessment that take place?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Are these assessments used to identify special educational needs?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

What arrangements are made for children identified as having a special educational need?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Are records passed on to the children's next setting?

Kindergartens have their own system of *Records of Kindergarten Children's Guidance*, which consists of a *Record of Registration* and *Record of Guidance*. In the latter, the absolute assessment system is used (checklists); each achievement being ticked off in the record, and notes on the process of guidance are written freely. In addition, kindergarten staff keep contact with parents through meetings held every term to improve mutual understanding.

Unfortunately, no further information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Quality Assurance

What systems and procedures are in place for funded settings?

The *School Education Law (Fundamental Law of Education)* of 1947 defined pre-compulsory kindergarten (*yochien*), for children aged three to six years, as educational institutions and formally placed them under the control of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). The *Child Welfare Law*, passed the same year, defined nurseries for children aged from six months to six years (*hoikuen*) as welfare facilities and placed them under the control of the Ministry of Health and Welfare (*Koseisho*).

Unfortunately, no further information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Staffing and Ratios

What is the average size of the group?

What is the pupil:practitioner ratio?

The *Standards for the Establishment of Kindergartens* prescribe the maximum number of children per class as 40. These standards for class size and organisation determined by the Government generally require classes to be composed of children of the same age, except for special cases when students from several grades can join in one class.

In May 1992, the average number of children per class was 26.4 and the average child:teacher ratio was just over 19:1.

Unfortunately, no further information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Do all staff have an early years qualification?

In early years kindergarten most teachers have a Kindergarten or Elementary School Teacher Certificate and are qualified as generalist class teachers to teach all subjects.

Staff at day nurseries are qualified when they graduate from a two-year further/higher education training school or college, following graduation from upper secondary school at age 18. The training school or college has to be approved by the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

Korea

Curriculum Organisation

Define early years settings, to include all providers of funded places

Early years education in Korea is available in kindergartens for children aged three to six years, and has mostly been provided by religious, social and private institutions, with parents paying. As a result, and in view of the fact that it is not compulsory, families have not considered it particularly important and necessary. The enrolment rate has consequently been low, with less than half of all five-year-olds attending. In an attempt to improve the enrolment rate, since September 1999, early years education has been provided free of charge for children in rural areas and for low-income families in urban areas.

How long are the funded sessions?

The standard instructional time per day in kindergarten is three hours. There are 180 standard instructional days per year. This figure may, however, be adjusted in view of the age level of the students.

Is there an early years curriculum?

Korea has a national curriculum, which is mandatory for all schools from the kindergarten to upper secondary phases, including private schools. This curriculum is reviewed and revised regularly in accordance with a five- to ten-year cycle. The centrally-defined curriculum sets strict regulations for the number of school days, the subjects to be taught during each school year, and the time allocation for each subject in each school year. In other words, the national curriculum prescribes not only the range of subjects to be offered at each level of education, but also the content of, and the time allocation for, each subject. Moreover, it provides criteria for the development of textbooks. The national curriculum also provides general guidelines for teaching-learning activities and methods of assessment. There is, however, increasingly, room for modification either by local education authorities or individual schools.

The most recent revision of the curriculum in Korea has resulted in the Seventh National Curriculum being gradually introduced (commencing in kindergartens) since March 2000.

If so, what are the principles underpinning this curriculum?

Kindergartens aim to provide children with a proper environment to encourage physical and mental progress.

The basic principle behind the Seventh National Curriculum is stated as being:

to loosen the rigid and centralised curriculum framework. Specifically, teachers are encouraged to be directly and actively involved in the decision and planning process for the curriculum. Local offices of education and schools should establish systematic and concrete guidelines for the organisation and implementation of the curriculum and develop individualised guidelines which are customised for local needs and circumstances.

On the basis of the stated ideals of education, the well-educated Korean citizen targeted by the Seventh National Curriculum is defined as follows:

- A person who seeks to develop his/her own individuality on the basis of well-rounded and wholesome development.
- A person who demonstrates creative ability on the basis of a solid grounding in basic knowledge and skills.
- A person who explores career paths on the basis of broad intellectual knowledge and skills in diverse academic disciplines.
- A person who creates new values on the basis of understanding the national culture.
- A person who contributes to the development of the community where he/she lives, on the basis of democratic citizenship.

With specific reference to early years kindergarten education, the main focus is:

- To implant habits for a healthy and safe life and a balanced physical development.
- To develop an ability to understand others and express ideas using correct words.
- To arouse interest in one's natural and social environment and develop an inquisitive attitude toward unknown things.
- To respect children's interests, concerns and individual differences.
- To have pride in what one does and to develop an ability to express oneself creatively in music, dancing and painting.
- To develop basic life habits necessary for daily life and to foster love for family, peers and neighbours.
- To arrange play-centred activities for children.
- To promote the well-balanced and wholesome development of the child.

Is there balance across the curriculum?

The early years curriculum covers five areas: physical, social, expressive, language/linguistic, and enquiry.

Are children grouped in any particular way during each session?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

At what age do children transfer to compulsory education?

Most children receive a notification of admission to an elementary school located in their residential area when they reach the age of six. Prior to 1996, no child under the

age of six was allowed to attend elementary school. However, since that time, with the approval of their regional/local office of education, some five-year-old children have been able to apply for earlier entrance to elementary school. Generally, this provision is restricted to five-year-olds who have been identified as having the necessary ability to begin school early. Space restrictions are sometimes taken into consideration when deciding on individual cases. This is a matter for local offices of education.

Assessment Arrangements

What are the forms of assessment that take place?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Are these assessments used to identify special educational needs?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

What arrangements are made for children identified as having a special educational need?

Some children identified, during early years education, as having a specific (higher than usual) level of ability may be permitted to begin compulsory elementary school at age five, rather than waiting until they reach six.

Unfortunately, no further information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Are records passed on to the children's next setting?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Quality Assurance

What systems and procedures are in place for funded settings?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Staffing and Ratios

What is the average size of the group?

In 1997 there were, on average, just over 28 children per class in kindergarten education in Korea. In 1998, this figure was just under 27.

What is the pupil:practitioner ratio?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Do all staff have an early years qualification?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

The Netherlands

Curriculum Organisation

Define early years settings, to include all providers of funded places

Provision for four-year-olds in primary school

The *Primary Education Act 1985* (now superseded by the *Revised Primary Education Act 1998*) lowered the starting age of compulsory education from six to five years, abolished separate nursery schools and brought provision for four- and five-year-olds into primary education (*Basisschool*). As a result, nearly all children attend school from the age of four (99 per cent), although schooling does not become compulsory until the age of five.

Early years provision for children under the age of four

Although there is universal, state-funded early years provision for four-year-olds, none is specifically provided for children younger than four. To fill this gap, the Netherlands relies heavily on playgroups which do receive some public funding (covering about half of their costs). As the result of a government initiative, there has also been a recent substantial increase in centres providing full-time care for children under three years and in those providing out-of-school care for children aged four and over.

Provision at this level includes:

- Day nurseries catering for children aged from six weeks to three years. (There are also half-day nurseries catering for the same age group. The two are often combined.)
- Company childcare schemes, including crèches attached to individual companies or shared company crèches (run in both cases by a childcare organisation), and childminding schemes, where a specialist organisation places the children of company employees with approved childminders. Employers receive a premium from the Government for every non-subsidised childcare place they pay for.
- Playgroups catering for children aged from two to three years. These originated as a means of fostering children's social development, by giving them the opportunity to play with other children of the same age, rather than as a form of childcare. Playgroups are usually funded by the municipal authority, but may also be funded privately. There is usually also a fixed parental contribution.

How long are the funded sessions?

Provision for four-year-olds in primary school

By law, children in the first cycle of primary education - including the pre-compulsory Year 1 for four- to five-year-olds - must receive at least 3,520 hours of teaching during this four-year cycle (Years 1 to 4, four to eight years of age). The minimum number of school days per year is 200 and a school week is made up of five days, Monday to Friday, but Wednesday afternoon is generally free.

Four- to five-year-olds receive an average of 22 hours of lessons per week, and a maximum of five-and-a-half hours of lessons each day (excluding breaks). There are no rules as regards the length of lessons, but in general they last for 60 minutes. The school day normally lasts from 8:30 or 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 or 3.30 p.m., with a lunch break lasting an average of an hour to an hour and a half.

Early years provision for children under the age of four

Children under the age of four who attend playgroups, only attend on average for five to six hours each week. Playgroups are usually open for three days a week, for between two, four and five hours a day.

Full day nurseries are open on weekdays, from around 7 am to 6 pm. Half-day nurseries are open for at least five hours a day.

Is there an early years curriculum?

Provision for four-year-olds in primary school

Four-year-olds in early years provision in Year 1 of primary school follow the statutory national curriculum for primary education.

If so, what are the principles underpinning this curriculum?

Provision for four-year-olds in primary school

The principle behind the primary school curriculum is that it should be well-balanced and geared to children's development and the diversity of the demands of the society to which they belong.

Early years provision for children under the age of four

Playgroups (for children aged two and over) aim to offer young children the opportunity and the space to play and develop in the company of children of their own age. The principle is to stimulate children's cognitive, social and emotional development. There is, however, no curriculum as such in playgroup and childcare provision.

Is there balance across the curriculum?

Provision for four-year-olds in primary school

Since August 1993, a set of core objectives has determined the formal content of primary education. These core objectives are revised five-yearly, with the current set in place for the period 1998-2003. The following subjects must be taught to all students in primary school, if possible in an interdisciplinary form:

- Dutch;
- arithmetic and mathematics;
- English (at least in the final two years, students aged 10-12);
- a number of factual subject areas under the title 'orientation on man and the world', which includes: geography, history, society, technology, environment, promotion of self-reliance and healthy behaviour, nature study;
- physical education; and
- art orientation: sub-divided into drawing, art and crafts, music, drama/promoting and developing the use of language, and movement.

In addition, schools in the province of Friesland must also teach Frisian and may conduct some lessons in that language.

There are also cross-curricular objectives, which aim to develop children's general skills. These are grouped around the following themes:

- attitude to work;
- working according to a plan;
- use of a diversity of learning strategies;
- self-image;
- social behaviour; and
- new media.

Are children grouped in any particular way during each session?

Provision for four-year-olds in primary school

Primary schools are co-educational, separate school units catering for students aged four to 12 years. Most are divided into eight classes, each containing one age group. Year 1 consequently caters for children aged four to five in pre-compulsory early years provision. The compulsory phase begins in Year 2, five-year-olds. However, as schools are free to decide on internal organisation, it is possible for classes to contain more than one age group. Some children may also be grouped by different levels of achievement, with possible mobility between the groups.

Early years provision for children under the age of four

In day nurseries which cater for children aged from six weeks to three years, children are usually grouped by age, with two adults per group.

At what age do children transfer to compulsory education?

Compulsory education begins at age five. However 99 per cent of four-year-olds are already attending primary school (Year 1 for four- to five-year-olds) before compulsory education begins officially.

Assessment Arrangements

What are the forms of assessment that take place?

Provision for four-year-olds in primary school

Children aged four in Year 1 of primary school are continuously assessed by their teachers. This assessment, which usually takes place at least twice during the school year and once at the end, has a primarily diagnostic function, to help guide students through the system. Assessment is based on all oral and written work accomplished during the year.

Early years provision for children under the age of four

There is no formal assessment of children under the age of four in playgroups and day nurseries.

Are these assessments used to identify special educational needs?

What arrangements are made for children identified as having a special educational need?

Children aged four in primary school generally progress automatically from Year 1 to Year 2 to begin compulsory education. Where continuous assessment and monitoring identifies difficulties, each school decides on measures to accommodate weaker students. Such measures include differentiated teaching, the provision of support teachers or, exceptionally, a child may be requested to repeat the year.

Unfortunately, no further information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Are records passed on to the children's next setting?

Where children enter their chosen primary school at age four, records are readily available in school when compulsory education begins in Year 2, aged five.

Unfortunately, no further information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Quality Assurance

What systems and procedures are in place for funded settings?

Provision for four-year-olds in primary school

The Minister of Education, Culture and Science is charged with the inspection of education. This is carried out, under his authority, by the Education Inspectorate, which:

- ensures compliance with statutory regulations;
- keeps up-to-date with the educational situation by visiting schools, and publishes an annual report on its findings and impressions gained;
- promotes the development of consultations on education; and
- reports to and advises the Minister.

Unfortunately, no further information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Staffing and Ratios

What is the average size of the group?

What is the pupil:practitioner ratio?

Provision for four-year-olds in primary school

The *Committee on the Qualitative Aspects of Class Size in Primary Schools* has recently recommended a maximum class size of 25 students in the first cycle of primary school (Years 1-4, four- to eight-year-olds). There is, however, no current legislation on maximum class size but, in line with a current class-size reduction policy, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science intends to reduce class sizes in this first cycle to 20 children per teacher by the 2002/2003 school year. The average class size for this group has recently fallen to an average of 22.7.

Provision for children under the age of four in day nurseries and playgroups

As part of the quality requirements for childcare, day nurseries are subject to a number of restrictions as far as the grouping of children is concerned. Rules are laid down by the municipal authorities regarding the size of each group and the ratio of staff to children. The *Childcare Quality Requirements (Temporary Measures) Decree* imposes the following restrictions:

- For children under 12 months of age: no more than 12 children per group, and no more than four children per adult.
- For children aged one to two years: no more than five children per adult.
- For children aged two to three years: no more than six children per adult.
- For children aged three to four years: no more than eight children per adult.

Although playgroups are not covered by the *Childcare Quality Requirements (Temporary Measures) Decree*, these rules are often extended to playgroups too.

Do all staff have an early years qualification?

In early years provision in the first class of primary education, four-year-olds are taught by qualified primary teachers. These are generalists, qualified to teach all subjects, but who have one specialist subject.

Unfortunately, no further information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

New Zealand

Introduction

Readers may be interested to learn that a Working Group for the Development of a Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education has recently been set up in New Zealand. Its overall brief is to "introduce some coherence to the sector". A final report on early childhood education goals for the next ten years is expected to be published by the Group in autumn 2001.

The objective of the Plan is to develop strategic goals and a framework for early childhood education policy that will:

- improve quality and access to early childhood education for all New Zealand children;
- identify and take into account relationships between government policy in early childhood education and other government policy goals, particularly those relating to the labour market, to health, and to welfare policies; and
- give stability to the sector as to the future direction of early childhood education in New Zealand.

The Early Childhood Education Strategic Plan Consultation Document has recently been published on the Ministry of Education's website at <http://www.minedu.govt.nz>, from where further information is available.

Curriculum Organisation

Define early years settings, to include all providers of funded places

In New Zealand, the term 'early childhood education' is used to refer to the non-compulsory provision of education and care for young children and infants before they begin school. Although early childhood education is voluntary, most children between the ages of three and five are in some form of provision. Although compulsory education does not begin until the age of six, most five-year-olds are admitted to the junior phase of compulsory primary schools.

The Ministry of Education provides funding to early childhood centres. In return, these must be chartered. Chartered early childhood services can then claim funding for a maximum of six hours per child place per day, with a limit of 30 hours per week. The precise funding formula varies according to the type of service, the quality standard met and the ages of the children enrolled.

The main forms of early childhood centre are **kindergartens**, **playcentres**, **te kohanga reo** (Maori 'language nests'), **Pacific Islands early childhood centres** (PIECCs), **Pacific Islands language groups** (PILGs), **community playgroups**, **family day-care schemes** (also known as home-based services) and **childcare centres**.

Kindergartens cater for almost one third of children aged from three to five years, in sessions. Mobile kindergarten services are also available in some rural areas. Parent participation is encouraged in the kindergarten programme.

Playcentres, which originated in the 1940s, currently cater for around 10 per cent of pre-school age children. These are parent cooperatives, where parents take responsibility for the management and supervision; all parents are required to help supervise sessions on a rostered basis. A playcentre trained supervisor, or a group of parent supervisors, take overall responsibility for the programme. Playcentres are administered through parent management committees at local and regional level, linked to a national organisation. Training and parent education programmes, which can lead to a recognised early childhood qualification, are implemented through centre-based training programmes.

Te kohanga reo (which translates as 'language nest') is a Maori community-based early childhood education programme, which is delivered through the Maori language (the official indigenous language of New Zealand.) Originally established by Maori initiative, with government funding, it aims to increase participation by Maori children in pre-school education, and to promote Maori language and family and cultural values. *Kohanga reo* has grown rapidly since the 1980s and is now the single most popular form of early childhood education for Maori families. It is unique in that it is the only childhood service in New Zealand where Maori make up the majority of the children. *Te kohanga reo* centres are administered by local management groups which are affiliated to a national body - *Te Kohanga Reo National Trust*. This Trust receives government funding which allocates funds to individual *kohanga reo*. *Te kohanga reo* currently cater for around eight per cent of pre-school age children in New Zealand.

Pacific Islands Early Childhood Centres (PIECCs) include bilingual and full immersion centres offering programmes based on the values and languages of Pacific Islands cultures. The centres cover a range of nationalities: Samoan, Cook Islands, Maori, Niuean, Tongan, Tokelauan, Tuvaluan and Fijian.

Pacific Islands language groups (PILGs) are informal, family-, community- or church-based playgroups based on a variety of Pacific Islands values and languages (similar to those catered for by PIECCs, see above). They are eligible for support as playgroups (see community playgroups, below) and may progress to become licensed and chartered services.

Community playgroups, catering for around eight per cent of pre-school age children, are community-based, non profit-making groups of parents who meet to provide early childhood education for their children. Community playgroups are exempt from licensing, but must still meet criteria set down by the Ministry of Education. The active participation of parents is required at all sessions. Some playgroups may operate from local community or church halls, which do not meet standards required for licensing. Others are parent-child groups which do not have trained staff. Many of these playgroups eventually develop into licensed and chartered early childhood centres.

Family day-care schemes (home-based services) is an organised system whereby parents of young children or babies requiring childcare are linked to caregivers who are often themselves parents. Home-based care does not include private arrangements made by parents with individuals such as nannies. Licensing regulations do not apply to home-based services. However, a home-based care order sets out minimum standards for organisations providing home-based care and education, and for the homes in which the service is provided. Home-based care currently caters for around five per cent of pre-school age children in New Zealand.

Childcare centres is the term used to describe sessional, all-day or flexible hours early childhood education services other than playcentres, kindergartens, *kohanga reo* or PIECCs. Services may describe themselves as childcare centres, kindergartens, infant centres, crèches, pre-schools, or by a name that indicates their particular philosophy or purpose. Childcare services may be privately owned profit-making businesses, non profit-making, e.g. an incorporated society or charitable trust, or may operate as an adjunct to the main purpose of a business or organisation, e.g. factory childcare services. Such services currently provide for almost 40 per cent of pre-school children.

The **correspondence school** is a state-funded distance education service, which includes an early childhood section. Children between the age of three and five years, who are unable to attend an early childhood centre because of isolation, illness or itinerancy, may be enrolled in the early childhood service. Trained and registered teachers work closely with parents to plan home-based early childhood education programmes. Parents receive written materials on play activities and learning experiences suited to the age level and experience of their children. A wide range of books, games, puzzles and tapes is sent on loan to use with children. The correspondence school caters for less than one per cent of pre-school age children in New Zealand.

The State also funds the **Parents as First Teachers** distance education programme, based on a scheme developed by the Missouri State Department of Education in the United States of America. It involves a series of regular home visits, by early childhood educators, to parents with children from birth to three years. These are designed to help children develop the language, intellectual and social skills on which to build learning. Programmes are funded directly by the Government and are offered by contracted providers in a range of different areas throughout the country.

In addition to the above provision, the Government is currently piloting multi-purpose centres, known as **family service centres**. These operate in six areas of the country, and offer early childhood services and self-help programmes such as HIPPY (Home Instruction Programme for Preschool Youngsters), to help educationally disadvantaged parents prepare their children for school. A range of support services for parents is also available. Communities are encouraged to be involved in the running of the centres.

How long are the funded sessions?

Kindergartens, catering for three- to five-year-olds, normally provide education in sessions, with younger children generally attending afternoon sessions three times each week, while the older age group attend on five mornings a week.

Playcentres also offer care in sessions. This is usually for up to five half days each week for children from birth to school age.

Te Kohanga reo (Maori 'language nests') either offer all day or sessional, part-day care.

Pacific Islands language groups (PILGs) usually meet for three half-day sessions per week.

Other childcare/early childhood education centres either open all day or offer care in sessions.

Is there an early years curriculum?

There is a national early childhood curriculum in New Zealand - *Te Whariki*. Developed by the Ministry of Education, this became a requirement for all chartered early childhood education services in August 1998.

If so, what are the principles underpinning this curriculum?

Te Whariki is expressed in terms of principles, strands, goals within those strands, and outcomes.

The four foundation principles are:

- Empowerment: *Te Whariki* should empower the child to learn and grow.
- Family and community: the wider world of family and community should be an integral part of *Te Whariki*.
- Holistic development: *Te Whariki* should reflect the holistic way children learn and grow, and should encourage learning as a whole, rather than in separate subjects.
- Relationships: *Te Whariki* should reflect the fact that children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places and things.

Is there balance across the curriculum?

Te Whariki is expressed in terms of principles (see above), strands, goals within those strands, and outcomes. This framework is not subject-based and no time allocations are mentioned.

Strands, which are interwoven with the principles (see above), identify the major areas of *Te Whariki* as follows:

- Well-being: the health and well-being of the child should be protected and nurtured.
- Belonging: links should be ensured with children's families, with what they do and how they do it.
- Contribution: opportunities for learning should be equitable and each child's contribution should be valid.
- Communication: the languages and symbols of a child's own and other cultures should be promoted and protected, and all kinds of language should be used (spoken, written, drawn and signalled).
- Exploration: the child should learn through active exploration of the environment (that is to say, through playing and working things out through new experiences).

Goals are intended to provide clear direction for learning programmes, based on the principles and strands. The goals set out in *Te Whariki* describe:

- learning outcomes for developing children's knowledge, skills and attitudes;
- questions to help children think about how a programme is working; and
- examples of the kind of experiences that can help children learn.

Principles, strands and goals are intended to make up the early childhood curriculum as if woven together like the strands of a woven mat, or *whariki*.

The full text of *Te Whariki* is accessible via the New Zealand Ministry of Education website at <http://www.minedu.govt.nz> (see the Early Childhood section).

Are children grouped in any particular way during each session?

In kindergartens, children are generally grouped by age, with younger children often attending afternoon sessions and the older ones attending in the morning.

In playcentres, children are usually organised in mixed-age groups.

At what age do children transfer to compulsory education?

Although education does not become compulsory until the age of six, children almost universally start school at the age of five and spend two years in 'Junior Classes', Years 1 and 2, ages five to six and six to seven respectively. School entry is flexible throughout the year, with children enrolled at any time after they turn five years of age. In practice, nearly all New Zealand children commence school on their fifth birthday.

Assessment Arrangements

What are the forms of assessment that take place?

Are these assessments used to identify special educational needs?

There is no national system of assessment or examination during early years education. However, most early childhood services use some form of assessment voluntarily. This is mostly informal and carried out by the class teacher, except in the case of children with special educational needs who are in need of additional resources. In the latter case more formal approaches are often used.

What arrangements are made for children identified as having a special educational need?

In the case of children with special educational needs, some formal assessment procedures may be implemented during the early years education phase, with a view to identifying student need, requirements for additional resources etc. Unfortunately, no further details of the exact types of formal procedures in place are available via the *INCA* Archive.

Assessment of children with special educational needs during this phase, may result in the allocation of additional resources for specific children

Are records passed on to the children's next setting?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Quality Assurance

What systems and procedures are in place for funded settings?

All early childhood education services - whether home-based or centre-based - are subject to Ministry of Education regulations and are monitored by the Education Review Office (ERO).

Regulations under the Education Act 1989 established minimum licensing standards for all early childhood centres. Consequently, unless meeting the specific requirements for licence-exempt services, all early childhood centres are required to be licensed. Licensing regulations set minimum standards for premises, staffing, programmes, organisation, and management of early childhood centres. Current minimum standards require that a 'person responsible', who holds an approved early childhood education qualification must be present with the children in an early childhood centre at all times.

In addition to being licensed, to be eligible for government funding, early childhood services must also be chartered. Under the Education Act 1989, all charters are expected to contain a Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices (DOP) which is gazetted by the Minister of Education. The purpose of DOPs is to support early childhood services in receipt of government funding to provide a high quality of

education and care. Services are required to develop their own charters, incorporating the DOPs, in consultation with parent users, caregivers and the community. Charters are then approved by the Ministry of Education.

Staffing and Ratios

What is the average size of the group?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

What is the pupil:practitioner ratio?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Do all staff have an early years qualification?

Current situation

Current minimum early years education licensing standards require that a 'person responsible', who holds an approved early childhood education qualification, must be present with the children in an early childhood centre at all times.

In kindergartens, all teachers are trained to diploma level, that is to say, that they hold the Diploma of Teaching and must be registered teachers.

In playcentres, all parents are required to help supervise sessions on a rostered basis. A playcentre trained supervisor or a group of parent supervisors take overall responsibility for the programme. Training and parent education programmes are in place, some of which can lead to a recognised early childhood qualification.

In the case of childcare centres, some currently have all trained staff while others may have a mixture of trained and untrained personnel.

For home-based services (family day-care), trained coordinators supervise the provision of early childhood education and care in approved homes, and provide regular playgroup and workshop meetings for parents and caregivers. Caregivers participate in New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) approved training courses.

Changes being introduced

Changes are currently being introduced, which will make it compulsory for persons responsible in early childhood centres, and home-based care coordinators, to hold a Diploma of Teaching (ECE). This change is being introduced gradually but, once fully implemented, all licensed centres and chartered services and networks will need to have a person responsible or a coordinator with a Diploma of Teaching (ECE) or other approved qualification to remain licensed or chartered. Most centres and networks will, however, already have a staff member who holds a Diploma of Teaching, so will not need to make major changes to comply with the new policy. The changes will not apply in *Te Kohanga reo* (Maori 'language nests') and similar groups, as staff in such

groups have specific qualifications which reflect the practices and philosophies followed.

The dates for the gradual introduction of the above changes are as follows:

From 1 January 2002, all people new to the position of person responsible in an early childhood centre, or coordinator in a home-based care network, must hold a Diploma of Teaching.

From 1 January 2005, all people who held the position of person responsible in an early childhood centre, or coordinator in a home-based care network, before 1 January 2002 will be required to hold a Diploma of Teaching.

Singapore

Introduction

In November 1999, the Ministry of Education (MOE) set up a Pre-school Education Steering Committee to study how the quality of pre-school education in Singapore could be improved. This Committee has defined a new set of desired outcomes for pre-school education (PSE) - issued in March 2000 - and has contributed to the development of a new framework for pre-school teacher training and accreditation. The Government is keen to emphasise that it did not set up the PSE Steering Committee with a view to enabling central government to take over PSE provision, as it believes that private sector and community involvement in PSE allows for diversity of ethos and teaching methods. The Committee is concentrating its efforts on several crucial areas such as defining outcomes, designing curriculum, training teachers, improving the regulatory framework, and conducting research.

Curriculum Organisation

Define early years settings, to include all providers of funded places

Early years education in Singapore caters for children from the ages of three to six years in kindergartens, or from babies to six years of age in childcare centres. Although early years education is not compulsory, as parents in Singapore place a premium on education in general, almost 99 per cent of children experience between one and three years of early years education.

Kindergartens (for three- to six-year-olds)

Kindergartens are run by various groups, including community foundations, social groups, religious bodies and private businesses. Fees are payable, and those run by foundations, religious bodies and social groups may receive financial subsidies or grants from their parent organisations.

Childcare centres (for babies to six-year-olds)

Childcare centres offer full-day or half-day programmes for children who are not yet in schooling. The centres, which come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS), also offer pre-school education activities to children placed under their care. Working mothers are provided with a government subsidy per child for children attending half-day care.

Parents usually enrol their children in childcare centres or kindergartens which will meet the language needs of their children. Malay, Chinese (Mandarin), Tamil and English are the official languages.

How long are the funded sessions?

Kindergartens function every day, five days a week (Monday to Friday), for sessions of between two-and-a-half and four hours a day. Most offer at least two sessions per day. Kindergartens follow the academic year observed by schools in the formal education system. This consists of four 10-week terms beginning on 2 January each year. There is a one-week vacation after the first and third term, a four-week vacation mid-year, and six weeks at year-end.

Is there an early years curriculum?

The Ministry of Education (MOE) publishes pre-school curriculum guidelines and desired outcomes for pre-school education (for children aged three to six years). On the basis of these, kindergartens and childcare centres are expected to build and plan their curriculum to cater for the needs of the children in their charge. The desired outcomes are:

At the end of pre-school education, children will:

- know what is right and what is wrong;
- be willing to share and take turns with others;
- be able to relate to others;
- be curious and able to explore;
- be able to listen and speak with understanding;
- be comfortable and happy with themselves;
- have developed physical coordination and healthy habits; and
- love their family, friends, teachers and kindergarten.

Pilot new curriculum

The Ministry of Education is currently in the process of reviewing the guidelines for the early years curriculum, based on new desired outcomes for pre-school education.

If so, what are the principles underpinning this curriculum?

The kindergarten programme places emphasis on the overall development of the child, namely their intellectual, emotional, physical, social and moral development, so as to lay a good foundation for formal education and lifelong learning.

Pilot new curriculum

The new desired outcomes for pre-school education aim to guide early years teaching in Singapore by encouraging learning processes that are aimed at an all-round holistic development of the child. The goal is to capitalise on a child's curiosity and activity level, based on their developmental stage, ensuring that he/she learns in fun ways, and that his/her motivation and interest in learning are stimulated through exploration and discovery.

Is there balance across the curriculum?

Kindergartens and childcare centres aim to provide graded instructional programmes which will enhance the overall development of pre-school children, and provide a good foundation for formal education. To this end, most offer a programme of daily activities for three- to six-year-olds which includes:

- exposure to two languages – usually English and mother tongue (Malay, Chinese [Mandarin] or Tamil);
- pre-number concepts;
- simple science concepts;
- art;
- indoor free choice activities;
- outdoor play;
- story/rhyme time;
- music and movement; and
- social skills activities.

Pilot new curriculum

The pilot new curriculum, based on the new desired outcomes for pre-school education, aims to be balanced. It is not given to any single school of thought or model, but aims to be suited to Singapore's local and historical context. This has traditionally involved an over-emphasis on academic and rote learning, whereas the new curriculum guidelines being piloted incorporate information on how children learn, and on how to provide learning environments in order to capitalise on children's curiosity and activity level, based on their developmental stage.

The revised desired outcomes for pre-school education focus on values, attitudes and skills, but make no mention of specific competencies in reading, writing and arithmetic. This is deliberate, with a view to preparing children for lifelong learning, rather than for entry to primary education.

Are children grouped in any particular way during each session?

The three years of kindergarten, children aged three to six years, are divided into three groups, by age, one for each year: nursery (three- to four-year-olds), kindergarten 1 (K1) (four- to five-year-olds), and kindergarten 2 (K2) (five- to six-year-olds).

At what age do children transfer to compulsory education?

Children aged six on 1 January of the year of admission are admitted to Primary 1. The school year commences on 2 January.

There is an average of ten years of formal general education, commencing at age six and comprising six years of primary school education, followed by four years or more in the secondary sector. This education is universal, but not compulsory. The Government has, however, recently accepted the recommendation of a review panel that these ten years of formal education should become compulsory.

Assessment Arrangements

What are the forms of assessment that take place?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Are these assessments used to identify special educational needs?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

What arrangements are made for children identified as having a special educational need?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Are records passed on to the children's next setting?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Quality Assurance

What systems and procedures are in place for funded settings?

Although early years education is not publicly-funded, strict guidelines and supervision are provided by the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS) for the running of childcare centres, and by the Ministry of Education (MOE) with regard to kindergartens.

Kindergartens (for three- to six-year-olds) and childcare centres (for babies to six-year-olds) are registered only when their programmes and curricula, teacher qualifications, and premises meet the minimum standards set by the MOE and the MCDS respectively.

Staffing and Ratios

What is the average size of the group?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

What is the pupil:practitioner ratio?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Do all staff have an early years qualification?

Kindergarten teachers are usually expected to possess appropriate academic and pre-school teacher training qualifications, such as the Certificate in Pre-School Teaching awarded by the National Institute of Education (NIE). A person deemed to have the appropriate minimum academic qualifications, but who does not have any specific pre-school training may be considered for approval as a temporary teacher for a two-year period, pending enrolment on a pre-school teacher training programme.

Recent changes

In January 2001, following recommendations from the Pre-school Education Steering Committee (see 'Introduction'), a new Pre-school Education (PSE) Teacher Training and Accreditation Framework was introduced by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS). This framework seeks to accredit training courses for supervisors and teachers in childcare centres and kindergartens, and to ensure that there is a clear, common training route for those who intend to acquire qualifications at the certificate and diploma levels. A Pre-school Qualifications Accreditation Committee has also been formed to accredit all local, pre-school training programmes provided by training agencies, and to approve other pre-school teacher qualifications.

Under the new framework, there will be two key levels of training for pre-school professionals. The first, called the Certificate in Pre-school Teaching (CPT), is for those intending to be teachers. The second, the Diploma in Pre-school Education (DPE) is available in two tiers. The Diploma in Pre-school Education - Teaching (DPE-T) is the first tier of the qualification, and is primarily for those intending to be teachers. The second, the Diploma in Pre-school Education - Leadership (DPE-L) is for those intending to be teachers *or* supervisors. Pre-school teachers with a minimum of three O-levels will be eligible to take the CPT. Those with a minimum of five O-levels will be able to proceed to take the DPE. All pre-school supervisors will be required to be trained to DPE-L level in four to five years from now.

Further information is available via the MOE and MCDS websites at <http://www1.moe.edu.sg/preschooleducation> and <http://www.mcds.gov.sg/> respectively.

Spain

Introduction

Spain has recently undergone a process of decentralisation. As a result, the Spanish education system is managed by 17 administrations - the 17 Autonomous Communities, under the coordination of the Ministry of Education and Culture at state/national level. The data which follows gives a general outline of provision, but there are likely to be regional and institutional differences.

Curriculum Organisation

Define early years settings, to include all providers of funded places

Pre-compulsory infant education (*educación infantil*) is an integral part of the education system, although it remains optional.

Establishments providing pre-compulsory infant education are called infant schools (*escuelas de educación infantil*), and may offer either the first cycle (babies to children aged three years), the second cycle (for three- to six-year-olds), or both cycles of infant education. Infant schools often form part of a primary school.

State-funded early years provision has recently been extended to include all three-, four- and five-year-olds whose parents wish it. Parents may, however, be expected to contribute to the costs of textbooks, catering, or transport, depending on their income. In addition, there is a system whereby parents are given financial assistance to help pay for private provision.

How long are the funded sessions?

In early years institutions catering for three- to six-year-olds, the school year runs from the second fortnight of September to the end of June, comprising 180 days or 36 weeks of five days. The overall weekly timetable covers 25 hours, with each school day lasting five hours. This is usually divided into morning and afternoon sessions of three and two hours respectively, with a two-hour interval between the two (9.00/10.00 a.m. to 12.00 p.m./1.00 p.m. and 2.30/3.00 p.m. to 4.30/5.00 p.m.).

In early years establishments catering for babies to three-year-olds, there is usually a more flexible timetable to allow the establishment to fulfil its social function.

Is there an early years curriculum?

There are curriculum guidelines for early years education. These official guidelines determine general minimum goals for children to attain at a given stage, defined as a series of abilities and broad curricular areas. The guidelines are adapted by individual schools in the formation of their own, exclusive curricular plan, which is then further adapted by class teachers to suit the needs of their students.

If so, what are the principles underpinning this curriculum?

The basic aim of early years education in Spain is to ensure the child's physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual development.

Reforms introduced under the most recent major education act in Spain (the 1990 LOGSE) explicitly recognise the right and potential of young children to learn from the earliest stage within a clear educational framework. This framework is designed to ensure that the experiences provided for young children are global and not fragmented. The curriculum is seen as consisting of areas of experience and emphasises active learning in an integrated way, with actual curriculum subjects not being introduced until compulsory school age (six years).

Is there balance across the curriculum?

Educational content at this stage is organised around 'areas of experience' relating to children's experience and development. Learning is not divided into specific areas of knowledge or subjects, but stresses the global and integrated nature of a child's experience. However, early years educators may pursue more specific objectives when planning and developing activities to ensure that the children will derive the greatest benefit from each new experience. The three main areas of experience around which the teaching experience at pre-school level is arranged are:

- personal identity and independence (includes body and self image, play and movement, activity and daily life, and self care);
- physical and social environment (includes first social contacts, social development, man-made and natural objects, animals and plants);
- communication and expression (includes oral language, approach to written language, artistic expression, musical expression, body language, measures, relations and spatial representation).

The first cycle of early years education (for babies to children aged three years) emphasises the development of movement, control of the body, initial communication and language, discovery of personal identity and elementary patterns of harmonious relations. The second cycle (for three- to six-year-olds) stresses the development of language as a tool for the understanding of and involvement in one's surroundings; the development of a positive and stable self-image; and the acquisition of day-to-day habits as a way of achieving personal independence.

There is no formal timetable for this phase, due to the interdisciplinary approach.

Are children grouped in any particular way during each session?

Children are generally grouped by age.

At what age do children transfer to compulsory education?

For most children, the nursery/infant school is part of the primary school they will go on to attend; this aims to allow a smooth transition to primary education at the age of six. Admission to primary education is automatic. Prior pre-compulsory education is not a requirement for admission.

Assessment Arrangements

What are the forms of assessment that take place?

There is no national, formal system of assessment for students during this phase. Continuous assessment does, however, take place and is the responsibility of the individual teacher.

Assessment techniques used during this phase include interviews with parents and the direct and systematic observation of children by teaching staff. Teachers' bodies in each school set the assessment criteria, methods and tools, and record assessment in qualitative terms.

Are these assessments used to identify special educational needs?

What arrangements are made for children identified as having a special educational need?

The informal, continuous, formative assessment, which takes place during this phase, aims to allow the teacher to identify any special needs attention required by children. The identification of difficulties through assessment could result in the introduction of Individual Curricular Adaptations (ACIs) (individual education plans) for some.

Exceptionally, children of pre-compulsory age who are identified as having special educational needs, which may be best met by a special school, can be enrolled in special education establishments that deliver compulsory education (usually for those aged six and above).

Especially gifted pre-compulsory age children may start compulsory primary education early. In addition, they may also spend less time overall in compulsory education, that is reduce the time they spend in a specific cycle or cycles (up to a maximum of two years). This is, of course, dependent on their successfully achieving the set objectives.

Are records passed on to the children's next setting?

Assessment at this level must be recorded in qualitative terms. Initial and final reports are designed by each individual school, since there are no progression or accreditation issues. That is to say that admission to primary school is automatic, and not dependent on participation in early years education or the results from it.

Schools complete a first report when a child arrives in early years education and produce a qualitative report at the end of the term, with a plan for the child's future education. A summary report is also provided at the end of each of the cycles (the first cycle includes babies to three-year-olds; the second encompasses children aged three to six), and teachers produce regular three-monthly reports, which are submitted to the child's family. Designed and written by the teacher, such reports include a description of the child's attainment, and recommended specific measures for future improvement/progression. Such reports are placed on the child's personal file. This is a single record which constitutes the educational record of the student and follows

him/her throughout his/her school career. Amongst others, this document records any special needs attention required, or any Individual Curricular Adaptations (ACIs) made.

Quality Assurance

What systems and procedures are in place for funded settings?

All early years establishments in Spain, whether state or private, have to provide an early years curriculum in line with the guidance provided, and are subject to inspection.

Since 2000, all establishments providing early years education have had to be registered as official pre-school establishments (*centros de educación infantil*), which come under the auspices of the competent education authorities.

Assessment is internally-moderated during pre-compulsory education.

Staffing and Ratios

What is the average size of the group?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

What is the pupil:practitioner ratio?

Maximum children:teacher ratios for this phase of education are determined by law. These vary, as follows, according to age:

- birth to one year old, 8:1;
- one to two years old, 13:1;
- two to three years old, 20:1;
- three to six years old, 25:1.

In addition, the Government is moving towards improving the ratio for three- to six-year-olds to 20:1.

Do all staff have an early years qualification?

Under the LOGSE reforms, pre-school teachers (*maestros*) must have specialised in infant education, and be qualified to teach all subjects at this level. As a result of the reforms, all early years teachers are now required to have completed a three-year course of professional training, specialising in working with children under the age of six. This training is at the same level as that for teachers training for the primary phase (children aged six to 12 years). All teachers are civil servants.

There is no tradition in Spain for paid classroom assistants or nursery nurses at this level, other than assistants for children with special educational needs.

Sweden

Curriculum Organisation

Define early years settings, to include all providers of funded places

There is a long tradition of early years welfare care in Sweden. Attendance is optional for the child, but provision is mandatory for the municipal authorities for all children over the age of one whose parents are working or studying, or because of a child's particular needs. Provision includes:

- *daghem*: day nursery or pre-school centre, for children aged one to five/six years;
- *familjedaghem*: registered childminders employed by the municipality to care for children in the minder's home, for children below school age;
- *deltidsgrupp*: part-time (play)group/pre-school group, for children aged four to six years;
- *öppen förskola*: open pre-school, or parent and toddler group, for children below school age; and
- *förskoleklass*: pre-school class for students aged six to seven, often provided in the *grundskola* (the all-through compulsory school for students aged seven to 16). Further information on the *förskoleklass* is provided below.

In addition, as a result of the fact that the number of immigrant and refugee children in nursery schools rose significantly during the 1980s and 1990s, many municipalities now also offer pre-school age children, whose native language is not Swedish, help with their mother tongue. This is with a view to developing active bilingualism and a dual cultural identity. There are Finnish nursery schools, Estonian nursery schools and others.

Municipalities are entitled to charge reasonable fees for places in *daghem* and *familjedaghem* catering for babies to five-year-olds. The fees must not be higher than the actual costs incurred by the municipality, nor should they be so high that parents might forgo a place which would be of value to a child. As a result, fees for early years education are often income-related.

The Government has recently proposed a maximum childcare charge to be introduced in stages from 2001. A reform which would entitle all children aged four and five years of age to free pre-school activities for a certain number of hours per day is also proposed.

The pre-school class (*förskoleklass*)

Since 1998, the pre-school class (*förskoleklass*) for six- to seven-year-olds has been recognised as a new school form within the school system. Children may be placed in pre-school classes located in, or coordinated by, a *grundskola* (all-through compulsory, comprehensive school for seven- to 16-year-olds). Alternatively, pre-school classes for six-year-olds may be linked to some other function of municipal

childcare. These pre-school classes are, however, part of the state school system and, although participation is voluntary, the Ministry of Education and Science regards them as education in the same sense as other types of schooling. Consequently, the pre-school class must have a responsible headteacher and be part of the municipal school plan (*skolplan*). Increasingly, pre-schools classes are part of the *grundskola*.

How long are the funded sessions?

The pre-school class (*förskoleklass*)

State-funded pre-school classes for six-year-olds must offer provision which does not exceed 15 hours per week, or 525 hours per year.

Pre-compulsory day nurseries (*daghem*)

Normally, pre-compulsory day nurseries (*daghem*) are open throughout the year, usually between 6.30 and 18.00 from Monday to Friday, although most children attend, on average, for around seven hours per day. Opening times are adapted to parents' working/study hours or to the children's needs.

Part-time groups (*deltidsgrupp*)

Part-time groups (*deltidsgrupp*) follow normal school terms (two 20-week terms, running from the end of August to early June, with a break in December/January, and the school week running from Monday to Friday). They provide three hours of activity per child per day. Childminders usually take care of registered children during the remainder of the time when parents are working or studying.

Is there an early years curriculum?

Pre-school curriculum 1987 - 1998

A pre-school curriculum (*Pedagogiskt program för förskolan; Lära i förskolan*) was originally published in 1987 by the National Board of Health and Welfare. This was not statutory and each early years institution carried out its own general and detailed planning, and detailed syllabuses and timetabling were (and remain) unusual at the pre-school level.

This curriculum has now been replaced by the new (1998) *Curriculum for Pre-school*.

Pre-school curriculum since 1998

Since 1 August 1998, day nurseries (*daghem*), registered childminders (*familjedaghem*), part-time play groups (*deltidsgrupp*), and pre-school classes (*förskoleklass*) which are not part of a compulsory level school (*grundskola*) have had their own nationally-applied curriculum in the form of a statutory ordinance. This ordinance highlights the significance of early years provision as the first step on the path to lifelong learning. In addition, general directives are also in the process of being drawn up for the activities of parent and toddler groups (*öppen förskola*) and similar.

Children attending pre-school classes (*förskoleklass*) which are part of a compulsory level school (*grundskola*) are subject to the compulsory level curriculum.

If so, what are the principles underpinning this curriculum?

Pre-school curriculum 1987 - 1998

The following goals were laid down:

- Pre-school education should seek, in collaboration with parents, to provide all children with the optimum conditions in which to develop their emotional and intellectual resources in a rich variety of forms.
- Pre-school education can thereby lay the foundations for the development of children into open, considerate people capable of empathy and interaction with others and able to make their own judgements and solve their own problems.
- Pre-school education should lay the foundations in children of a will to seek and use knowledge to ameliorate their own and others' living conditions.

Pre-school curriculum since 1998

The principle of the revised statutory pre-school curriculum is based around the idea that welfare and education are linked, and that good welfare provides a basis for development and learning, just as it entails an element of education. The significance of play in children's learning is also highlighted. In other words, the pre-school should provide a secure environment, be fun and educational for all children involved, and provide the basis for lifelong learning.

The introduction of a statutory curriculum for the pre-school also aimed to ensure a link between the three levels of curricula in the Swedish education system - the pre-school curriculum; the curriculum for the compulsory school (*grundskola*), which also covers the pre-school class for children aged six to seven where this is provided in the *grundskola*; and the curriculum for the upper secondary school. The three curricula aim to take a common view of knowledge, development, and learning.

The curriculum for the pre-school is based on a division of responsibility, where the State determines the overall goals and guidelines for the pre-school, and where the municipalities take responsibility for implementation. In its structure, the pre-school curriculum is consistent with the other curricula for the school system (see above).

The 1998 pre-school curriculum is an ordinance with binding provisions issued by the Government. It is intended that this curriculum, which contains the requirements the State imposes on the pre-school, should steer the pre-school. It also expresses the requirements and expectations children and parents may make on the pre-school. The curriculum sets out the foundation values for the pre-school; that is to say, the tasks, goals and guidelines for pre-school activities. However, the curriculum does not lay down the means by which such goals should be attained. This is an issue primarily for the staff working in the pre-school. The principal organiser is responsible for ensuring that the pre-school is in a position to attain the goals of the curriculum. It is also intended that the development and learning of the individual child should be supported in close cooperation between the pre-school and the home.

The full text of the 1998 *Curriculum for the Pre-school* (in English) can be accessed at the following url: <http://www.skolverket.se/english/publ.shtml>

Is there balance across the curriculum?

The 1998 pre-school curriculum provides goals and guidelines for the pre-school in the following areas:

- Norms and values. The pre-school should actively and consciously influence and stimulate children into developing their understanding and acceptance of society's shared democratic values.
- Development and learning. The pre-school should be characterised by a pedagogical approach where care, nurturing and learning together form a coherent whole. Pedagogical activities should be carried out so that they stimulate and challenge the child's learning and development. The learning environment should be open, enriched by content and attractive. Activities should promote play, creativity and enjoyment of learning, as well as focus on and strengthen the child's interest in learning and mastering new experiences, knowledge and skills. Activities should contribute to children developing an understanding of themselves and their surrounding world. A sense of exploration, curiosity and desire to learn should form the foundations for pedagogical activities. These should be based on the child's experiences, interests, needs and views. The flow of the child's thoughts and ideas should be used to create variety in learning.
- Influence of the child. The pre-school provides the foundations for children to understand what democracy is. The social development of the child presupposes that, in relation to their capacity, they are able to take responsibility for their own actions and for the environment in the pre-school. The needs and interests which children themselves express in different ways should provide the foundation for shaping the environment and planning pedagogical activities.
- Pre-school and home. The parent(s) or guardian(s) are responsible for their child's upbringing and development. The pre-school should supplement the home by creating the best possible preconditions for ensuring that each child's development is rich and varied. The pre-school's work with children should therefore take place in close and confidential cooperation with the home. Parents should have the opportunity, within the framework of the national goals, to be involved and influence activities in the pre-school. A prerequisite for children and parents to have the opportunity of exercising influence is that the pre-school is clear about its goals and the content of its work.
- Cooperation between the pre-school class, the school and the after-school centre. In order to support the all-round development of children and their learning for the future, the school should try to establish good working relationships with both the pre-school and after school centres. Cooperation should be based on the national and local goals and the guidelines applicable to different activities.
- The pre-school should provide children with a well-balanced daily rhythm and environment related to their age and time spent in the pre-school. A balance should be attained between care and rest, as well as other activities. Children should be able to switch activities during the course of the day. Their activities should provide scope for the child's own plans, imagination and creativity in play, and learning both indoors and outdoors. Time spent outdoors should

provide opportunities for play and other activities, both in a planned and natural environment.

Are children grouped in any particular way during each session?

In day nurseries (*daghem*), mixed age is the predominant form of grouping. There are usually toddlers' groups for children up to three years old and groups for children aged three to six years.

In the part-time groups (*deltidsgrupp*), there are groups for children aged four- to six-years-old, as well as groups for children of the same age.

Unfortunately, no further data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

At what age do children transfer to compulsory education?

The vast majority of children start compulsory school (*grundskola*) in the autumn of the same year as their seventh birthday. However, since 1 July 1997, it has been a statutory requirement that all municipalities should accommodate all six-year-olds who wish to start *grundskola* rather than attend a pre-school class (*förskoleklass*). Exceptionally, since 1998, some students may also defer entry to compulsory school to age eight. Some four per cent of children currently start compulsory school at six years old.

Assessment Arrangements

What are the forms of assessment that take place?

There is no formal, national system of assessment applicable during this pre-compulsory phase of education. However, individual pre-school establishments usually ensure that children are informally monitored and observed on a continuous basis. This serves not only to determine how the school's activities are working for each individual child, but also for the group as a whole. Active observation during this phase should also form the basis for evaluation and planning.

Are these assessments used to identify special educational needs?

What arrangements are made for children identified as having a special educational need?

Monitoring during early years education is particularly important in the identification of any problems and difficulties a child might be experiencing, and could, for example, ultimately result in a recommendation that a child should not attend the compulsory mainstream school (*grundskola*), but a form of special school more able to meet his or her needs. More usually, in cases where observation reveals that a child is experiencing difficulties, the child is entitled to some form of additional support.

Children with special needs identified prior to commencing any form of early years provision are entitled to a place in education as soon as possible, if their needs cannot be met in other ways. Consequently, children under the age of one who have special needs can be placed in a municipality funded pre-school environment. The child does

not only have the right to a pre-school place, but also to services of a standard that will ensure that his or her needs are actually met. In addition, the municipality should seek to ensure that the child makes use of the place and should keep parents informed about the service being provided and its purposes.

Are records passed on to the children's next setting?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Quality Assurance

What systems and procedures are in place for funded settings?

Nationally, the Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for matters regarding pre-school education and childcare for schoolchildren, pre-school classes, compulsory school education, upper secondary schools, independent schools, adult education, post-secondary education, universities and university colleges, research, student support and student social issues.

Since January 1998, the National Agency for Education (*Skolverket*), which is the central administrative authority for the schools sector, has also had responsibility as the supervisory authority for the pre-school. The National Agency for Education is also responsible for after-school childcare for children of compulsory school age.

At the local level, the municipalities are responsible for the quality of pre-school services.

Staffing and ratios

What is the average size of the group?

The average day nursery (*daghem*) has four groups or sections, each with some 15 to 18 children.

Unfortunately, no further data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

What is the pupil:practitioner ratio?

In 1995, the child:staff ratio in day nurseries (*daghem*) was between 5:1 and 6:1.

Within part-time groups (*deltidsgrupp*) comprising mostly 6-year-olds, the ratio was 18:1.

Unfortunately, no further data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Do all staff have an early years qualification?

Pre-school institutions are staffed by teachers and childcare attendants.

Municipalities are expected to engage staff to work in pre-school services who have adequate training or experience to ensure that children's needs for welfare are met and that sound educational services are provided.

Switzerland

It should be noted that, in Switzerland, responsibility for education is vested in the cantons. The information provided below aims to provide a general outline of early years provision in Switzerland sourced from the *INCA Archive* (<http://www.inca.org.uk>). Some specific examples from the cantons of Zürich and Berne are provided in addition.

Curriculum Organisation

Define early years settings, to include all providers of funded places

Pre-compulsory schools and classes, known as *Kindergärten*, *écoles enfantines* and *scuole dell'infanzia* (dependent on whether they are located in German- French- or Italian-speaking cantons respectively), cater for children up to the age at which they start compulsory school. This varies from canton to canton, but is usually around six years of age. In all cantons children have the right to receive publicly-funded early years education for at least one year, and often two, prior to starting compulsory education.

Kindergärten, *écoles enfantines* and *scuole dell'infanzia* are generally part of a higher unit (primary school or similar), although they normally occupy separate premises.

In addition to *Kindergärten*, *écoles enfantines* and *scuole dell'infanzia*, there are also crèches or day nurseries in larger towns and cities. These cater for very small children and are mostly run by the private-sector and consequently charge fees.

Generally, the trend in Swiss early years education is away from private to publicly-funded pre-compulsory institutions. However, the private sector still plays an important part. In addition to the traditional, often church-run, private institutions, new forms of mostly parent-run playgroups are growing in importance.

Zürich

In Zürich, children are required to start school at age seven. Consequently, the majority attend *Kindergarten* when they are five and/or six years old. Although *Kindergarten* attendance is not compulsory, 99 per cent of children attend in the year prior to compulsory primary education. *Kindergarten* education in Zürich is publicly-provided.

Berne

In Berne, publicly-funded *Kindergarten* classes are provided for the two years prior to the start of compulsory education.

Proposed new 'elementary cycle'

Although education in Switzerland is a cantonal affair, some national initiatives are encouraged and coordinated by the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Directors of Education (CDIP). At its plenary meeting in August 2000, the CDIP adopted some initial recommendations relating to the education of four- to eight-year-olds in

Switzerland. The recommendations are that the pre-school/early years education phase should be combined with the first one or two years of compulsory primary education to form an 'elementary cycle' for four- to eight-year-olds. Children would be organised in classes by age but, within the cycle, there would be flexibility for able children, for example, to begin compulsory primary classes early. The CDIP is also of the opinion that introduction of the cycle would facilitate the early introduction of initial numeracy and literacy, and of teaching methods concentrating on the individual. Cantons are being encouraged to consider the recommendations and to establish experimental schemes to evaluate their effectiveness.

How long are the funded sessions?

In the French- and German-speaking parts of Switzerland, pre-school establishments usually take children for between two and two-and-a-half hours in the mornings and for two hours in the afternoons. This means that children attend for between 18 and 22 hours each week. In the Italian-speaking region (the Ticino), *scuole dell'infanzia* are generally open from 8:45 am to 3:45 p.m.

Is there an early years curriculum?

As curriculum development in Switzerland is the responsibility of the individual cantons, there is no national early years curriculum. (Nor is there a national curriculum for other levels of education.)

However, a new general curriculum for early years education came into force in the French-speaking cantons during the 1994/95 academic year.

In many of the German-speaking cantons, *Kindergarten* teachers follow the curriculum devised by their professional association.

If so, what are the principles underpinning this curriculum?

Is there balance across the curriculum?

The early years curriculum in the French-speaking cantons, and the curriculum followed by *Kindergarten* teachers in many German-speaking cantons, include general aims which refer to the development of the child's personality, the acquisition of elementary skills, and social behaviour. The recommendation is that the child should be offered a rich and stimulating environment with games, handicraft materials and everyday objects, picture books, etc.

The general principle is that children in early years settings should not learn to read and write, but to develop their social capabilities and get used to sitting quietly for a while and paying attention to a teacher. By playing games and taking part in various educational activities, the development of their personality should be encouraged in a way which reinforces and complements parental education, and which helps to ensure a smooth transition from early years to compulsory primary education.

Berne

A new early years curriculum framework has recently been introduced in Berne. This replaces the previous framework, which consisted of outcomes relating to various individual subjects (known as 'teaching domains'), with a framework, which not only contains recommendations on teaching methods and organisation, but is based on three areas of competence:

- children's autonomy of thought and action;
- children's social/behaviour abilities; and
- children's cognitive abilities.

Outcomes are defined within each of the above key areas.

One of the main aims of this revised pre-school curriculum framework is to ensure that it is better integrated with the curriculum framework for compulsory primary education. The early years curriculum framework revision in Berne was also influenced by the CDIP recommendations regarding the elementary cycle for four- to eight-year-olds (see above).

Are children grouped in any particular way during each session?

Classes are usually organised by age.

At what age do children transfer to compulsory education?

In most cantons, compulsory education commences at age six; in some it is seven. Children identified as 'gifted' during early years education may, exceptionally, enter compulsory primary education at a younger than usual age.

Assessment Arrangements

What are the forms of assessment that take place?

Several cantons have a system of collective tests or assessment reports which are used to evaluate the scholastic abilities of pre-school children. These would generally involve all the children, not a selective sample. In some cantons, for example, formal school-readiness tests are used during early years education to judge whether children are ready for compulsory school entry. More often, the decision on whether a child is ready for school is assisted by the advice of the child's early years teacher, who has monitored the child in the months prior to school entry.

Are these assessments used to identify special educational needs?

What arrangements are made for children identified as having a special educational need?

For some time now, the function of early years education in Switzerland has been regarded as social and compensatory, that is to say, as an opportunity to integrate foreign mother-tongue and handicapped children into society before they start

compulsory education, as well as to identify and deal with children who have learning problems.

In cases where children are regarded as being slow in their general development, it is usually recommended that they should spend an additional year in an early years setting. Where a child has specific disabilities, whether these were identified before or are identified during early years education, he or she often spends an additional year in early years provision. This is usually prior to progressing to mainstream, compulsory primary education.

Similarly, children identified as 'gifted' during early years education may, exceptionally, enter compulsory primary education at a younger than normal age.

Are records passed on to the children's next setting?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Quality Assurance

What systems and procedures are in place for funded settings?

Generally, early years education is considered to be complementary to family education and about two-thirds of cantons have pre-school regulations at the cantonal level. The most important public body in early years education is, however, the (more local) commune. Most cantons try, by cantonal legislation, to offer all parents the option of one or two years of pre-school enrolment for their child(ren).

Unfortunately, no further data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Staffing and Ratios

What is the average size of the group?

On average, classes have between 17 and 19 children.

What is the pupil:practitioner ratio?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Do all staff have an early years qualification?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

USA

It should be noted that education in the United States is a matter for the individual states. Some general, overview information is provided below, complemented by more detailed information for the INCA states of Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts and Wisconsin.

There are some limited national initiatives in early years education in the USA. *Head Start*, for example, is a federal programme, which has been running for around 35 years, and provides funding to prepare children from low-income backgrounds for school. Since his election earlier this year, President Bush has been keen to show support for the *Head Start* scheme, and to ensure that, within it, greater emphasis is placed on educational preparation, specifically reading skills. Additionally, President Bush's Education Bill - *No Child Left Behind* - proposes additional federal funding for a new *Early Reading First* programme for kindergarten children. *No Child Left Behind*, which remains to be formally approved by Congress, is accessible on the Internet at <http://www.ed.gov/inits/nclb/index.html>

Curriculum Organisation

Define early years settings, to include all providers of funded places

National/general

Virtually all states offer some publicly-funded early years pre-kindergarten and/or kindergarten education for children at age four or five years respectively. (Pre-kindergarten children are usually aged four to five, whilst kindergarten caters for five- to six-year-olds, and Year 1 of compulsory education commences at around age six. This may, of course, vary between states.) Enrolment in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten education is usually voluntary. Kindergartens are often part of the local elementary (primary-level) school. In some locations, additionally, there are public or private pre-schools or other programmes serving three-year-old children.

In addition to publicly-funded provision, there are also often privately-run nursery schools and parent cooperatives, where parents employ and assist a qualified teacher.

Community day care centres offer full-time care for the children of working mothers or those whose parents are ill, and the modest fees are supplemented with private and government funds.

Child development centres cater for those in disadvantaged areas, with state and federal support.

Kentucky

In addition to a kindergarten year for five- to six-year-olds, Kentucky provides a state-wide publicly-funded early years programme for at-risk four-year-olds and all three- and four-year-olds with developmental difficulties.

Prior to commencing publicly-funded kindergarten or compulsory level education, children in Kentucky are required to undergo a physical examination.

Maryland

Kindergarten

Since 1992, every five-year-old Maryland child has been required to attend kindergarten. Parents may, however, request not to send their child, if they feel that kindergarten attendance at this age is not in the child's best interest. Kindergarten education for five-year-olds is often provided in compulsory elementary schools.

Pre-kindergarten

In addition to expecting all five-year-old children to attend a kindergarten year prior to the commencement of compulsory education at age six, Maryland also operates an Extended Elementary Education Programme (EEEP). This is a state-funded pre-kindergarten programme for four-year-old children who are potentially at risk of failing in school. The overall goal of EEEP is to provide learning experiences to help children develop and maintain the basic skills necessary for successful school performance. The programme aims to provide developmentally appropriate experiences that address the literacy, cognitive, social, emotional, and physical needs of young children. It is offered in selected schools state-wide.

Early Child Care and Education Centres

Grants have recently been issued for the establishment of Early Child Care and Education Centres, which will incorporate a comprehensive set of services for children from birth to age six, and their families. The Centres are based in, or affiliated with, local elementary schools, and provide full-day, full-year services designed to foster the young child's physical, social, emotional, cognitive and linguistic readiness for school. The effectiveness of the Centres will be measured by a state-wide study on how they impact children's readiness for school and subsequent school success. All early childhood programmes at the Centres must meet, or be working towards, national or state programme standards through accreditation. The Centres must also be community-based and provide strong links with, and transition to, elementary school programmes.

Massachusetts

In addition to the kindergarten year provided for children aged five to six years, early childhood education services are offered to at-risk three- and four-year-old children, usually at no cost to their families. State funding is also provided to make early childhood education programmes affordable to the working parents of three- and four-year old children. In addition, outreach and education services are provided to certain families with children from birth to three years.

Wisconsin

In addition to a kindergarten year for five- to six-year-olds, Wisconsin offers state-funded pre-kindergarten programmes to an increasing number of three- and four-year-olds who are regarded as being at risk, or who have developmental difficulties.

Current budget priorities in the state include the provision of additional funds to increase kindergarten opportunities for all four-year-olds, that is to ensure state funding for universal four-year-old kindergarten provision.

How long are the funded sessions?

National/general

Kindergarten year - children aged five to six

Throughout the United States, the length of the school year for students is around 180 days. A five-day week is usual (Monday to Friday), with a school day of five to seven hours and a short break for lunch. Many kindergartens in the USA, however, provide half-day rather than full-day sessions. Very few states (Arkansas, Florida, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia) currently have mandatory full-day kindergarten.

Maryland

Kindergarten

Kindergarten programmes for five-year-olds are often part-time programmes. In the 1999-2000 school year, 248 out of Maryland's 820 elementary schools offered some form of full-day kindergarten, although many of the schools offered full-day programmes only for a limited number of their kindergarten classes. Full-day programmes were offered in selected schools in 21 of Maryland's 24 school departments/boards. In August 2000, the Maryland State Board of Education voted to make mandatory full-day kindergarten programmes one of its budget priorities in the coming years.

Pre-kindergarten

Extended Elementary Education Programme (EEEP) sites, providing early years education for four-year-olds (see above), generally operate one morning and one afternoon session five days a week (Monday to Friday) for a minimum of two-and-a-half hours daily per session.

Wisconsin

All Wisconsin school districts offer kindergarten programmes for five-year-old children. These programmes vary from district to district with some being part-day, some full-day, and some districts providing the option of both.

Is there an early years curriculum?

National/general

In most states of the USA, the curriculum for the actual kindergarten year (children usually aged five to six) is part of the overall framework for the curriculum from kindergarten to Grade 12 (children aged from five to 17/18). Additionally, some states have curriculum guidelines for the pre-kindergarten phase.

Kentucky

In Kentucky, curriculum decisions are made by the school council, and activities for pre-school children, aged three to five, should align with the curriculum for primary level students (kindergarten to Grade 3 in Kentucky, aged five to eight/nine). The state does not specify any one curriculum but encourages local districts to consider utilising multiple sources of guidance to assist in designing an early years curriculum.

Massachusetts

Since the enactment of the (Massachusetts) Education Reform Act of 1993, state-wide curriculum frameworks across seven subject areas (mathematics; science and technology; social sciences/social studies; English language arts; world languages; the arts; and health) have been developed for pre-kindergarten to Grade 12 education in Massachusetts (children aged around four to 17/18). These define learning outcomes for each subject or subject strand. As an example, the learning standards for the 'number sense and operations' strand of the mathematics curriculum framework for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten children in Massachusetts can be downloaded at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/math00/numk.html>

If so, what are the principles underpinning this curriculum?

Kentucky

The pre-school programme in Kentucky (offered to disadvantaged children and children with learning difficulties aged three and over) is expected to offer children 'developmentally appropriate experiences', and to assist young children in developing their interpersonal skills and in maximising self-management and independence.

The educational component is expected to promote development of skills in the following ways.

Cognition and communication:

- encouraging children to explore and learn by doing (concrete experiential learning);
- encouraging language understanding and use among children as well as between children and adults (language experience approach);
- integrating skills across content areas into activities targeted towards the interests of children (integrated curriculum); and
- providing a balance of activities (indoor/outdoor, child/staff-initiated, structured/spontaneous, large/small group, group/individual, quiet/active).

Social and emotional development:

- providing an environment of acceptance to help develop a positive self-concept;
- providing positive guidance for self-regulation of behaviour;
- providing positive adult and peer role models; and
- having a curriculum which is relevant and reflective of the population being served.

Physical development:

- providing developmentally appropriate information on nutrition;
- involving children in snack and meal preparation where feasible;
- working with children during meals to develop language and problem-solving;
- providing appropriate indoor and outdoor space with materials and equipment designed to increase physical skills; and
- providing developmentally appropriate instruction in health and safety procedures.

Maryland

Under the Extended Elementary Education Programme (EEEP) for four- to five-year-olds, children receive developmentally appropriate experiences that address their literacy, cognitive, social, emotional, and physical needs. The overall goal of EEEP is to provide learning experiences to help children develop and maintain the basic skills necessary for successful school performance.

Massachusetts

The curriculum frameworks are intended to provide:

- guides for creating a detailed curriculum;
- guides for classroom assessment;
- guides for selecting instructional materials;
- guides for planning professional development;
- guides for restructuring schools to support learning;
- a presentation of critical issues that underlie learning, teaching and assessment; and
- support for teachers to try innovations and investigations that lead to high quality learning experiences for all students.

These curriculum frameworks are not intended to provide:

- detailed lesson plans or curriculum;
- items on which all students must be tested;
- directives for uniform programmes or texts; or
- mandates for specific methodologies or programmes.

The Massachusetts curriculum frameworks for pre-kindergarten to Grade 12 education establish three broad goals that are critical to lifelong learning and that frame the learning, teaching and assessment process. These are:

- **Thinking and communicating:** ways of making sense or meaning of the world and our experiences to ourselves and to others. Thinking includes being able to internalise new ideas and connect them to familiar concepts and prior knowledge. Communicating means putting learning into the language of speech or writing and requires reflection in such forms as examination, clarification, analysis and synthesis.

- Gaining and applying knowledge: involves pursuing ideas and experiences and applying new knowledge in real life contexts. This pursuit is interactive by nature. The more experiential it is, the more powerful the learning.
- Working and contributing: imply that student work is meaningful and purposeful and that the process and products of student work are valued contributions to the school and community. Imbedded in powerful learning experiences are notions of persistence, self-discipline, hard work and effort and pride in producing quality work.

These goals aim to set a vision for the curriculum frameworks and for creating dynamic classrooms in which learning, teaching and assessment reflect best practices.

Wisconsin

The state of Wisconsin recommends that the early childhood/kindergarten curriculum should be "developmentally appropriate". Developmental appropriateness has three dimensions: age appropriateness, individual appropriateness and cultural appropriateness. Age appropriateness is based on research which indicates that there are universal, predictable sequences of growth and change that occur in children during the first nine years of life. Individual appropriateness recognises that each child is a unique person with an individual pattern and timing of growth, as well as an individual personality, learning style and family background. Cultural appropriateness recognises the importance of the knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which children live to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for the children and their families. Both the curriculum and the teacher's interaction with the child should be responsive to individual difference

Is there balance across the curriculum?

See above in addition.

Kentucky

The pre-school programme in Kentucky (offered to disadvantaged children and children with learning difficulties aged three and over) is expected to offer children 'developmentally appropriate experiences' in all areas of child development:

- cognitive;
- communication;
- social;
- physical;
- emotional; and
- creative expression.

Massachusetts

Curriculum frameworks for pre-kindergarten to Grade 12 students have been established to cover seven discipline areas:

- mathematics;
- science and technology;
- social science/social studies (includes *US* and world history, geography, economics, civics and government);
- English language arts;
- world languages;
- the arts (includes dance, music, theatre and the visual arts); and
- health (includes health education, physical education and family and consumer science education).

Wisconsin

Under the Wisconsin educational standards, the state requires all schools to provide regular instruction in reading, language arts, social studies, mathematics, science, health, physical education, art, music and, in certain year groups, career exploration, vocational education and foreign language education.

Are children grouped in any particular way during each session?

Kentucky

The general philosophy in Kentucky is that children develop at different rates, with different needs and learning styles. As a result, in Kentucky's primary classrooms and in the kindergarten year for children aged five to six, students are grouped, at least part of the time, based on their skills and abilities rather than solely by age. Primary teachers typically guide children through lessons that are appropriate for their skills and abilities, then assign them to hands-on learning centres around the room that reinforce what is being taught. For example, one group of five- and six-year-olds might work on spelling words, while a more advanced group of five- and six-year-olds writes sentences and still another group works on paragraphs.

Wisconsin

In pre-kindergarten provision for three- to five-year-olds and kindergarten classes (for those aged five to six), children are usually placed in multi-ability classes, grouped by age.

Unfortunately, no further specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

At what age do children transfer to compulsory education?

Kentucky

Kentucky's compulsory attendance laws require that every child between the ages of six and 16 should be enrolled in school (or in some form of alternative provision). Most five-year-olds do, however, attend the local elementary school, in the pre-Grade 1 kindergarten year, passing automatically to compulsory elementary education at age six.

Maryland

In Maryland, education becomes compulsory at age six. Admissions criteria are determined by local and district policy, but a kindergarten experience (from age five to six) is generally required, unless parents feel that it is not in the child's best interest to be in school at age five.

Massachusetts

In Massachusetts, every child must attend school beginning in the September of the calendar year in which he or she attains the age of six. Each school committee may establish its own minimum permissible age for school attendance, provided that this age is not older than the mandatory minimum age.

Wisconsin

In Wisconsin, children proceed to compulsory education at age six. No child may be admitted to the first Grade (year one) unless he or she is six years old on or before 1 September in the year that he or she proposes to enter school.

Assessment Arrangements

What are the forms of assessment that take place?

National/general

Around one-third of American states require some form of pre-kindergarten standardised testing and the practice is widely pursued in others. Some states use standardised multiple-choice tests for this purpose, which are usually produced by private test-setting companies. The most frequent type of testing is teacher-developed examinations.

Many states are beginning to align their early childhood goals/assessment with state standards in order to give kindergarten children the mental tools and knowledge they will need for state-wide assessment during compulsory education. In many states, such compulsory assessment begins in third Grade (Year 3, aged eight to nine years).

Maryland

Maryland Model for School Readiness - kindergarten to Grade 1 assessment

In Maryland, children's readiness to proceed from the kindergarten year to Grade 1 is often assessed using the Maryland Model for School Readiness. This initiative, designed to support local school systems in their efforts to enhance school readiness amongst young children, consists of:

- a state definition of "school readiness";
- a vision and belief statement for primary level assessment;
- primary assessment outcomes and indicators for end of kindergarten "readiness" expectations;
- staff development modules for a two-year training programme;

- a primary assessment planning guide which matches curriculum, instruction, and assessment for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten with the primary assessment outcomes and indicators; and
- a systematic assessment method which supports classroom instruction.

The Maryland Model for School Readiness has been operational since September 1997, following a two-year field test. In the 1998-99 school year, 20 of Maryland's 24 local school districts took part in the initiative.

Work Sampling System - kindergarten baseline assessment

The Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) initiative was extended in the 2000-2001 academic year. As part of the Maryland State Department of Education's focus on improving services for children from birth to five, the Work Sampling System (WSS)- a component of the MMSR - was introduced, as a pilot, to assess the skills of children entering kindergarten. These baseline assessments comprise 28 selected performance indicators across seven curricular domains:

- social and personal development;
- language and literacy;
- mathematical thinking;
- scientific thinking;
- social studies;
- the arts; and
- physical development.

An initial report on the initiative was published in spring 2001; this details WSS baseline information for randomised samples of students. The major results indicate that some 40 per cent of kindergarten students in Maryland have been rated by their teachers as fully ready to do kindergarten work, whilst many others need targeted or considerable support in skills related to language and literacy, and mathematical and scientific thinking.

Further information on the MMSR and WSS initiatives is available via the Maryland State Department of Education website at

<http://www.msde.state.md.us/>

Wisconsin

Some schools use tests at kindergarten entrance. These are intended to be helpful in initial programme planning and information sharing with parents. They are not intended to be used to create barriers to compulsory school entry or to sort children into homogeneous groups.

Are these assessments used to identify special educational needs?

What arrangements are made for children identified as having a special educational need?

Kentucky

Three- and four-year-old children in Kentucky identified as having developmental difficulties are provided with an early years programme. Early years provision for most other children does not commence until age five.

Maryland

Pre-kindergarten

Each local school system's enrolment policies and practices determine the eligibility of four-year-old children to receive pre-kindergarten education as part of the Extended Elementary Education Programme (EEEP). Each local area does, however, aim to ensure that those children with the greatest educational need are enrolled in EEEP. Children who have limited English proficiency, or are homeless, for example, or who have previously been enrolled in a programme to assist disadvantaged youngsters, are automatically eligible. In addition, those children who have been referred from other school system programmes or local agencies, have emergency and health situations, or difficult home and family circumstances are given priority to be eligible for this programme.

Kindergarten

Parents may request that children start kindergarten a year later if they believe that delaying school attendance is in their child's best interest. To do this, they must obtain a 'level of maturity waiver' through the local superintendent of schools. This allows attendance in kindergarten to be delayed due to the child's level of maturity.

Wisconsin

Students in kindergarten to Grade 12 education (aged five to 17/18) can be retained in Grade if they are not considered to have made sufficient progress in the course of study established by local school boards. During kindergarten to Grade 8 education (aged five to 14), a child is retained if, at the end of the year, it is decided by administrators, parents and teachers that he or she has not made sufficient progress and should repeat the programme. However, retention in a year group is rare in Wisconsin, and particularly rare in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classes.

Are records passed on to the children's next setting?

Unfortunately, no specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Quality Assurance

What systems and procedures are in place for funded settings?

National/general

The United States Constitution does not mention education, which has historically been considered a state responsibility. However, the country provides universal general education and all states are required to operate schools meeting federal standards. The United States Department of Education, with the participation of more than 30 federal agencies, is responsible for activities in schools. State legislation establishes the regulations by which public (state) schools operate and the criteria by which private schools are accredited. The day-to-day operation of schools is primarily a local matter, with state-level administration varying widely in its impact on local school boards.

Education structure is determined at both the state and local levels, that is to say that responsibility for education is exercised by the legislatures of each of the 50 states and, within these policies, the operation of public schools is managed by some 16,000 local districts. Most states have a state Board of Education, either appointed by the governor or elected by the citizenry. The chief education officer of the state is either elected in a general election or appointed by the governor. Local districts have their own school boards of citizens either elected or appointed; school boards determine local educational policy and appoint a superintendent to administer the district's schools. School districts may be contiguous with the political jurisdiction, or they may be a portion of the jurisdiction. In some cases, districts serve more than one town or village.

Maryland

The role of the Maryland State Department of Education in curriculum development is to establish rigorous standards in content, identify research-based best practices in instruction, and provide models for the large- and small-scale assessment of students. As such, the state provides guidance to local school systems in determining goals and expectations for learning, for pre-kindergarten (children aged three and over) to Grade 12 education (aged 17/18). The state assists local school systems in the articulation of comprehensive programmes in English language arts, mathematics, science, environmental science, social studies, foreign language, English as a second language (*ESL*)/bilingual education, health, physical education, and the arts. Technical assistance targets the continuum of learning from early childhood and elementary school through to high school. The state supports the enhancement of curriculum and instruction through library media and technology, character education, and student service learning, and by addressing the diversity of Maryland students through multicultural emphases.

Unfortunately, no further specific data is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Staffing and Ratios

What is the average size of the group?

What is the pupil:practitioner ratio?

Kentucky

In Kentucky's specific early years educational programmes provided for children aged three to five who are disadvantaged or have learning difficulties, the maximum number of children per class is 20, with at least two adults (1:10 adult:child ratio), although smaller group sizes and additional adults are encouraged. Classes where more than half of the children have disabilities are required to be significantly smaller, with a much higher staff:child ratio.

In the kindergarten year (children aged five to six), the maximum number of children which may be enrolled in a class is 24. This maximum class size limit became effective in April 1998.

Maryland

Pre-kindergarten

Each site offering the Extended Elementary Education Programme (EEEP) for children aged four and above caters for 40 children and is staffed by one state-certified early childhood teacher and a qualified full-time assistant.

Massachusetts

State regulations specify that the class size for kindergartens shall not exceed an average of 25 children.

Wisconsin

There is a general recommendation that class size in all Grades below Grade 6 (children aged 11-12) should be restricted to no more than 25.

In addition, in 1995, the Student Achievement Guarantee in Education programme (SAGE) was introduced. Through this programme, additional funding is provided to certain school districts. The purpose is to improve academic achievement through implementation of four strategies:

- a 15:1 children:teacher ratio in kindergarten to Grade 3 classes, children aged five to eight/nine;
- family/community involvement;
- rigorous curriculum (high standards and expectations); and
- staff development and evaluation.

Do all staff have an early years qualification?

Kentucky

Early years education teachers are generalists. The qualifications system is complex and is currently being simplified. As a result, from autumn 2002, pre-school teachers in Kentucky (who can be teaching children as young as three) will generally be required to have the early childhood teaching certificate (or an appropriate exemption from this certificate, or a probationary early childhood certificate).

Maryland

Each site offering the Extended Elementary Education Programme (EEEP) for children aged four and above is staffed by one state-certified early childhood teacher and a qualified full-time assistant.

Massachusetts

State regulations specify that kindergarten classes should be taught by qualified teachers.

Wisconsin

State regulations specify that kindergarten and pre-kindergarten teachers must have a kindergarten licence, and preferably be qualified to teach kindergarten to Grade 3 children (aged around five to eight/nine years). Teachers can hold a dual certification in regular and special education. A new licensing structure, which is shortly to be introduced, will require kindergarten and pre-kindergarten teachers to have either an early childhood licence or an early childhood to middle childhood licence.

Bibliographical note

Readers may be interested in the following article:

ASSOCIATION FOR SUPERVISION AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT (ASCD) (2001). 'Cultivating kindergarten', *Curriculum Update*, **spring** (whole issue). [Online] at <http://www.ascd.org/framecupdate.html>