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I would like to submit my views on the current proposal by the Minister for ESC. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that the proposal should be carried forward and receive the necessary funding for two reasons – the system that it would establish and the “system” that it would replace. The proposal would establish a system of Early Years provision that would complement the current high standard of education provided by the DfESC. There is no doubt that children who receive a well-structured early years experience, based on sound principles of child development, are much more able to go on to successfully access learning opportunities in primary school and make more rapid progress in terms of their attainment. This experience may well take place in the home where a parent has the necessary skills and time resources to provide it. However, the reality is that economic and social pressures and conventions have now created a situation where most parents work. In this reality, the provision of quality early years education for all who wish to access it is essential.

The current situation is one of almost farcical disparity and inequality. The limited number of “free” States Nursery places means that competition for them is fierce. The admissions policy, whilst containing criteria intended to favour those in most need, actually compounds the problem as in reality it favours those articulate, educated parents who more often have the skills to access the system. Those children who are most in need of support in a structured Early Years environment are often denied a place through their parents not making the necessary application within the timescale required. A new system of universal “free” access would alleviate this problem. However, I would suggest that criteria of social and educational need should be maintained in allocating places at States Nurseries, so that those most in need have the greatest length of provision in a school setting.

Andrew Willis- Head Teacher, St John’s School

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