

The logo for StartBright, featuring the word "Start" in white, a colorful play button icon, and the word "Bright" in white. The background of the cover is a blue gradient with a yellow diagonal shape. In the top left, there is a photograph of two children's hands holding each other over a drawing of a family.

StartBright

Strategic Plan 2019 – 2023

SEPTEMBER 2019

Early Learning for Our Community



“We chose this service because we heard all positive things about the childcare and preschool. The childcare and learning is excellent.”

STARTBRIGHT ELC

Strategic Plan 2019 – 2023

SEPTEMBER 2019

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Acknowledgement

We would like to thank **StartBright Early Learners, their families and everybody on our team** for the use of drawings, photographs and quotations throughout this text.

Forward

Early years are filled with enormous wonder and joy for young children and their families. This precious and unique time deserves special recognition. Early childhood is when we are at our most inquisitive, open to learning and have the ability to enhance our natural talents with new experiences. Early childhood is also a time of great vulnerability. We need to be mindful that adverse early experiences can have serious and enduring impacts .

Our vision in StartBright is that all young children, particularly those living in communities experiencing disadvantage, should have equality of opportunity. By providing high quality early learning services StartBright is facilitating equality of opportunity for a wide range of children. We believe that all children have the ability to become confident and capable learners. StartBright encourages and supports early learners to become active citizens in their communities.

StartBright is a registered charity that provides excellent childcare and early learning services to over 300 children, from one to five years, in five different locations every day. Children in our service come from a variety of backgrounds. We particularly support children coming from communities experiencing disadvantage, children with additional educational needs and children from families with multiple disadvantage. We employ over 50 staff and our services are delivered in a safe, supportive and creative environment.

StartBright was founded over eight years ago when four community based early learning centres merged. This merger led to improved services and increased opportunities for our early learners, their families and our staff. We hope to significantly increase the number of young children accessing our services in the next few years. This will be achieved by enhancing our current service provision, possibly merging with other community service providers and examining the provision of services in communities where there is a need for services.

We, in StartBright, take pride in our services being: child-centred, non-judgemental, excellent and honest. StartBright prioritises building strong relationships and fostering emotional resilience in our young learners.

We consulted with a range of people in the drafting of this strategic plan. We would like to thank everybody who helped us. This plan outlines how we will champion early learning services, particularly in communities experiencing disadvantage. How we will continue to develop and expand our range of services. How we will communicate our vision and values more clearly – the name StartBright is part of our new communications strategy, we were formerly known as Dublin West Childcare & Early Learning Services. This plan also identifies how StartBright will develop and grow as a community-based early learning organisation. We will collaborate with many partners in delivering this plan. We welcome you to share the journey with us.

Siobhan Feehan,
StartBright, Chairperson

Elaine Mc Quillan,
StartBright, General Manager

¹ First 5 – A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028. (2019) Government of Ireland, Dublin.



“Excellent service and understanding of childcare needs. Supportive and engaging.”

‘Early childhood education and care has a profound and long-lasting impact on individual lives and on societies. It means that later learning is more effective and more likely to continue throughout life, lessening the risk of early school-leaving, increasing the equity of educational outcomes, and reducing costs for society in terms of lost talent and of public spending on social, health and even justice systems.’ European Commission.

‘StartBright actively supports our early learners to be active citizens in their communities. Our newly acquired eight-seater buggies have transformed how our early learners engage with communities. Venturing out into the community enriches the children’s experience and enables them to make real connections with the world in which they live. It broadens the curriculum beyond the walls of the traditional learning environment.

Our local community has become part of our learning curriculum in a fun and engaging way. The children bring this learning back the classroom and the experience has been really positive for all’. Elaine Mc Quillan, General Manager, StartBright



² European Commission (2011). Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow. Brussels: European Commission.

Our vision, values and mission statement

StartBright Vision

Our vision is that all children have equality of opportunity.

StartBright Values

The values that underpin our work and everything we do are:



Child Centred

Being child centred, nurturing healthy relationships, strengthening emotional resilience and empowering children to think, grow and explore in a fun and creative way.



Inclusive

Providing inclusive, accessible, affordable childcare and early learning services in communities experiencing disadvantage.



Non-Judgemental

Being non-judgemental and supporting each child to achieve their personal best. We prioritise communicating and developing strong relationships with both children and their families.



Excellence

Providing excellent services, that are externally validated and quality assured in a safe, secure, warm and happy environment.



Honest

Operating to the highest possible standards in terms of honesty, professionalism, transparency and accountability.

StartBright Mission Statement

We will develop, deliver and champion early learning services for children, particularly for those living in communities experiencing disadvantage. We will communicate our vision and values more clearly and develop our organisation so that we deliver excellent services in an open and honest way.

Service locations



‘The first five years of children’s lives are crucial to their development. During this period, children learn at a faster rate than at any other time in their lives. They develop basic cognitive and socio-emotional skills that are fundamental for future achievements in school and in later life. These skills are the foundation for general well-being. They determine how we cope with future successes and setbacks, both professionally and in our personal lives. In order to foster this development, children require ongoing interaction with, care and attention from parents and other caregivers.’³OECD

StartBright Strategic Goals

- Strategic Goal 1** Champion Early Learning Services particularly in communities experiencing disadvantage.
- Strategic Goal 2** Develop and deliver a range of excellent Early Learning Services.
- Strategic Goal 3** Communicate our vision and values more clearly.
- Strategic Goal 4** Develop and grow as a community-based early learning organisation.

³ OECD (2017) Early Years Matters <http://www.oecd.org/education/school/Early-Learning-Matters-Project-Brochure.pdf>

2019 Parents and Families Survey⁴

Comments on StartBright from parents and families

- “My friends told me their kids loved it and the staff were great..... all true”
- “The Outdoor area is a huge factor for the kids.
It is also affordable and I can continue to work part time.”
- “My child is attending school in September; I feel she is really ready thanks to the staff.”
- “What I like the best is the support system they have for the parents and the children.”
- “Both my children have benefited immensely, in terms of socially, routine, structure, building new relationships. I really can’t commend the service highly enough.”
- “Educating our child and preparing him for life and work.”
- “My son has something new to tell me every day when I collect him, he learns something new every day. Being homeless for nearly 2 ½ years he had started to become a little withdrawn, since he has been at StartBright Early Learning Centre his confidence has increased so much.”

Why parents and families choose StartBright?

- Children are better prepared for primary school.
- Children with additional needs are included.
- The quality of staff looking after children.
- Proximity to primary school.

In what way has StartBright made a difference?

- Developing social, confident and independent children.
- Early intervention, inclusion and support of additional needs are priorities.
- Language and communication development.

**“ It’s a happy place to visit.
Very open and friendly staff. My child
is happy and loves going to school.
I would highly recommend.”**

⁴ StartBright Parent & Family Survey Results (2018)

Strategic Goal 1

**Champion Early Learning
Services, particularly in
communities experiencing
disadvantage.**



**“An excellent location and setting.
They have gone above and beyond
what I expected to achieve
with my daughter.”**

The first national Strategy for early childhood First 5 seeks to ensure that babies and young children have ‘a strong and equal start.’

First 5 states that ‘high-quality early learning and care is particularly valuable for children who have challenges at home’

Social Justice Ireland 2019 Report states :

‘Despite progress there is still a large achievement gap between pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds and their more affluent peers.’ Pg. 182

‘Make the improvements of educational outcomes for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and disadvantaged communities a policy priority.’ Pg. 183

Rationale

StartBright is committed to breaking the cycle of educational disadvantage and increasing equality of opportunity. To achieve this, we will advocate for increased recognition of the importance of early learning and for improved services to be prioritised in communities experiencing disadvantage. We will research best practice in terms of approaches to early learning. We will continue to develop our relationships with a range of critical stakeholders. In terms of developing the StartBright footprint we will explore new opportunities to provide early learning services in communities without existing adequate early learning service provision and we will explore the possibility of merging with other community-based early learning service providers.

⁵ First 5 – A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019–2028. (2019) Government of Ireland, Dublin.

⁶ Healy, S; Bennett, C; Leahy, A; Murphy, E; Murphy, M; Reynolds, B. (2019) Social Justice Matters, 2019 guide to a fairer Irish society. Pgs. 186 – 192 Social Justice Ireland, Dublin. Pgs. 182 & 183.

Actions

1. Raise awareness of and advocate for improved Early Learning Services.

- Continue to be informed and participate in research studies that are relevant to our mission, for example Archways: How are they Doing Study?
- Forge relationships with key stakeholders throughout the early learning sector.
- Forge relationships with key stakeholders supporting children and families.
- Raise awareness of and promote the benefits of early learning in communities experiencing disadvantage.
- Advocate across a range of forums for improved, affordable, accessible community-based early learning services particularly in communities experiencing disadvantage.
- Establish StartBright as a model of best practice of community-based early learning service provision.

2. StartBright Organisational Growth

- Research and analyse the demand for early learning service provision particularly in communities experiencing disadvantage.
- Identify other community service providers that StartBright could collaborate and/or partner with.
- Expand StartBright delivery locations if demand and supports are in place.

Impact

By raising awareness of the importance of early learning in communities experiencing disadvantage parents/guardians and community organisations will better understand the importance of early education and the advantages it can bring in later life.

This will be evidenced by increased demand and engagement with our services from parents/guardians and other local community organisations.

The impact of enhanced relationships with key statutory, public and community organisations will be evidenced by: our participation on boards/working groups/networks; increased alignment of early learning educational policies; number of referrals and number of complimentary support programmes being provided. We will advocate for improved early learning services for communities experiencing disadvantage and particularly children who experience multiple disadvantage. Expansion of our service will result in increasing numbers of early learners accessing our services.



⁷ Archways, Blue Skies Initiative and The Genesis Programme: How are they doing? A Community Perspective on Child Well-Being, November (2017).

Strategic Goal 2

**Develop and deliver a
range of excellent Early
Learning Services.**



“My child is more independent and confident. The project leader is amazing with the kids.”

Social Justice Ireland Report Social Justice Matters: 2019 guide to a Fairer Irish Society cites a range of studies in its research and analysis of the early learning sector in Ireland:

‘Early childhood is the stage where education can most effectively influence the development of children and help reverse disadvantage.’ European Commission (2011)

‘Pupils who had access to quality early childhood education perform better on PISA testing than those who did not attend pre-primary education, even allowing for differences in their socio-economic backgrounds.’ OECD (2016)

Rationale

StartBright provides high quality childcare and early learning services to over 300 children, in five different locations, every day. We focus on providing services in communities experiencing disadvantage. We are committed to prioritising the most vulnerable children, those with additional educational needs, those requiring early intervention and those coming from families experiencing multiple disadvantage. With an expanding economy and a growing demand for high-quality, complex services StartBright is continuously looking for ways to expand and improve our services.

In order to continue delivering high quality early learning services it is essential that we adhere to the: Child Care Act (1991); Early Years Services Regulations (2016); Aistear (Early Childhood Curriculum Framework) and Síolta (National Quality Framework for Early Years). We are aligned to a number of statutory policies such as the: Child Protection and Welfare Strategy (2017-2022) ; Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2014 – 2020) and First 5 – a Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families (2019 – 2028).

⁷ Healy, S; Bennett, C; Leahy, A; Murphy, E; Murphy, M; Reynolds, B. (2019) Social Justice Matters, 2019 guide to a fairer Irish society. Pgs. 186 – 192 Social Justice Ireland, Dublin.

⁸ Tusla Child and Family Agency; Child Protection and Welfare Strategy (2017-2022).

⁹ Department of Children & Youth Affairs (DCYA); Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2014 – 2020).

Actions

1. Deliver StartBright Early Learning Services

- Continue to deliver high quality childcare and early learning services, across five locations, to 300 children from 1-5 years.
- Assess the changing needs for full-time, part-time and sessional programmes in order to meet the changing needs of children and their families.
- Increase the number of children accessing our services.
- Continue to prioritise supporting children with additional needs and families experiencing multiple disadvantage.
- Put in place an internal mentoring and quality assurance support for each of our services with a consistent StartBright early learning approach.
- Provide family supports at key educational transition points e.g. entry to early learning services and entry to primary school.
- Continue to improve service provision in line with best national and international early learning practice.

2. Improve StartBright Service Quality Indicators

- Appoint a Quality Mentor Support Officer.
- All centres will continue to deliver an early learning curriculum underpinned by Aistear.
- All early learning services will have improved their ECERS scores by 10%.
- All early learning services will obtain a Department of Education & Science (DES), Early Years Policy Unit, Certificate of Validation, Siolta, Quality Assurance Programme (QAP).
- All early learning services will be driven by their Siolta QAP to take ownership of and drive quality improvement as a continuous feature of everyday practice.
- Internal audits on quality and compliance will consistently be of high quality.
- Tusla inspections will continue to be fully compliant and consistent across the service.
- DES inspections will continue to be fully compliant and consistent across the service.

3. Develop the StartBright Childcare & Early Learning Services Operational Toolkit.

- This StartBright Operational Toolkit will provide an internal quality service checklist for all of our operations. The purpose of the toolkit is to provide detailed information ensuring consistency of service and approach across multiple service locations. This toolkit will outline our vision, values, mission, key strategic objectives, child pedagogy model used, checklist for how centres are run, how services are to be delivered, staff recruited and supported and how to engage with multiple stakeholders including, most especially children, parents and families.

4. *Improve the Physical Environment*

- Carry out an Environmental Audit of all StartBright Early Learning Centres.
- Maintain all centres to the highest possible standards.
- Research and develop national and international best practice in relation to physical environments and its impact on learning.
- Ensure that all outdoor play facilities attached to centres comply with best practice and provide the children with opportunities to creatively engage in outdoor play.
- Incorporate 2018 Universal Design Principles (UDP) across all premises.
- Explore funding options to implement a StartBright Infrastructural Development Programme.

Impact

StartBright will appoint a Quality Mentor to provide additional support to staff so that the quality of our childcare and early learning practice is consistent and continuously improving in all of our centres. With the support of the Quality Mentor and the Operational Toolkit the StartBright externally validated quality assurance indicators should improve. We in StartBright will continue to evaluate our service offering and how it meeting emerging family need. Services will be adapted to meet emerging need. We continuously draw from national and international models of best practice. StartBright plans to not only meet national early learning service regulatory standards but to exceed these standards in many instances. We will also target major funding sources in order to implement a building infrastructural development programme. All our centres will continue to be maintained to the highest possible standards providing child-centred, warm, creative environments which facilitate early childhood learning and development.

We are externally validated by ECERS (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale), ECERS is an internationally accepted quality assessment scale. ECERS scales are designed to assess process quality in early childhood groups. Process quality consists of the various interactions that go on in a classroom between staff and children, staff, parents, and other adults, among the children themselves, and the interactions children have with the many materials and activities in the environment, as well as those features, such as space, schedule and materials that support these interactions.

ECERS Process Quality is assessed primarily through observation and has been found to be more predictive of child outcomes than structural indicators such as staff to child ratio, group size, cost of care, and even type of care, for example child care centre or family child care home¹¹

¹¹ <https://ers.fpg.unc.edu/about-environment-rating-scales> accessed December 2018.

Strategic Goal 3

**Communicate
our vision and values
more clearly.**



“ Friendly and helpful staff members. Great indoor and outdoor environments. Our child is always happy after preschool.”

Rationale

StartBright will communicate its vision and values in a much clearer and consistent way. Our vision is that all children, particularly those coming from disadvantaged communities have equality of opportunity. Our values include being: child centred; inclusive; non-judgemental; excellent and honest. StartBright provides excellent, externally validated, professional childcare and early learning services in a range of communities. We want all of our stakeholders and the wider community to recognise our vision and values. As part of this communications process we are rebranding and adopting the name StartBright. We will promote not only our vision and values but also the impact and lifelong benefits of high-quality early learning. We will continue to improve our internal and external communication systems.

Actions

1. Rebrand StartBright

- Rebrand StartBright so that our name, vision and values are more widely recognised.
- Develop a series of StartBright Information Booklets.
- Promote StartBright locally, regionally and nationally taking account of diverse community needs.

2. Promote StartBright and the lifelong benefits of high-quality early learning using traditional and contemporary media approaches

- Promote the lifelong benefits of high-quality early learning throughout the community: in libraries, schools, community/ health/ sport/ cultural/ religious centres, shops and shopping centres etc.
- Promote StartBright particularly in key communities who experience multiple disadvantage, highlight the impact and lifelong benefits of high-quality early learning.

3. Improve StartBright communications

- Assess and regularly improve internal communications so that information flows freely and learning is disseminated throughout the organisation.
- Assess and regularly improve external communications so that our information is clear, consistent and focused with all of our stakeholders.
- Develop a StartBright e-zine, focus on improving on-line/social media communications with parents and families.
- Explore ways to make the voice of the child always visible in all StartBright communications.

4. Provide information on StartBright Services.

- Develop a StartBright Information Booklet for parents and families. Outline what to expect from our service and how to prepare children for our service.
- Develop a StartBright Signposting Booklet for parents and families. Identify what StartBright does and signpost to other child and family support services.

Impact

With improved communications more parents, families, communities and support agencies will recognise StartBright and appreciate the importance of early learning. Increased levels of referrals, additional funding streams, increased numbers seeking information and engaging with our services, particularly from target communities, will evidence the impact of improved communications. We will also develop our data analytical tools to capture increased recognition and engagement with our services. StartBright information and signposting booklets will help parents and families better prepare children for our service and improve access to other family support services. Sign-up to our e-zine, parent and family on-line discussion forums, attendance at information sessions and feedback from our annual stakeholder surveys will capture if our vision and values are clearly communicated and understood by our target group.



Strategic Goal 4

**Develop and grow as
a community-based early
learning organisation.**



Rationale

We need to ensure that our vision, values and mission statement are shared by all stakeholders in StartBright. We will support this strategic plan with a more detailed operational plan and individual staff action plans. StartBright, formerly known as Dublin West Childcare and Learning Services. StartBright is a registered charity. We recognise the need for charities to be well governed, open and transparent. We receive funding from a number of sources including: government departments, publicly funded agencies, philanthropic donations and parents and families. Our annual reviews will assess progress in relation to implementing this strategic plan.

Actions

1. Improve StartBright Governance

- Review Board membership, operations, sub-groups and participate in additional learning and development.
- Ensure annual audited accounts are clean, transparent and accessible.
- Complete Annual Risk Assessment.
- Review Strategic Plan annually, disseminate findings and act on findings.

2. Ensure StartBright is fully compliant

- Ensure full compliance with all statutory and voluntary regulatory bodies, for example: Charities Regulatory Authority; General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR); Code of Governance for Community & Voluntary Organisations and SORP Financial Accounts (Standards of Recommended Practice).

- Ensure full compliance with all statutory and voluntary support organisations, for example: Pobal, HSE, Tusla; Department of Children & Youth Affairs (DCYA); Department of Education & Science; Aistear (DES); Síolta and ECERS.

3. Invest in StartBright Human Resources

- Develop a comprehensive Staff Learning & Development Programme.
- Invest in our team to ensure that we have sufficient knowledge, skills and competencies to develop and deliver excellent early learning services in the communities we serve.
- Continue to support staff in their professional development.
- Enhance the Human Resource function within the organisation.
- Source and provide specialist Human Resource Management support where required.
- Celebrate achievements and acknowledge staff contribution.

4. Manage Finances

- Manage and report on diverse income streams for a range of funders.
- Broaden funding base and secure additional funding for specified developments.

5. Improve Evidence Gathering Skills & Organisational Efficiency

- Review ICT Systems and ensure consistency across service locations.
- Develop data analytical tools to gather, monitor, evaluate and disseminate information.
- Develop staff capacity to use ICT Systems.

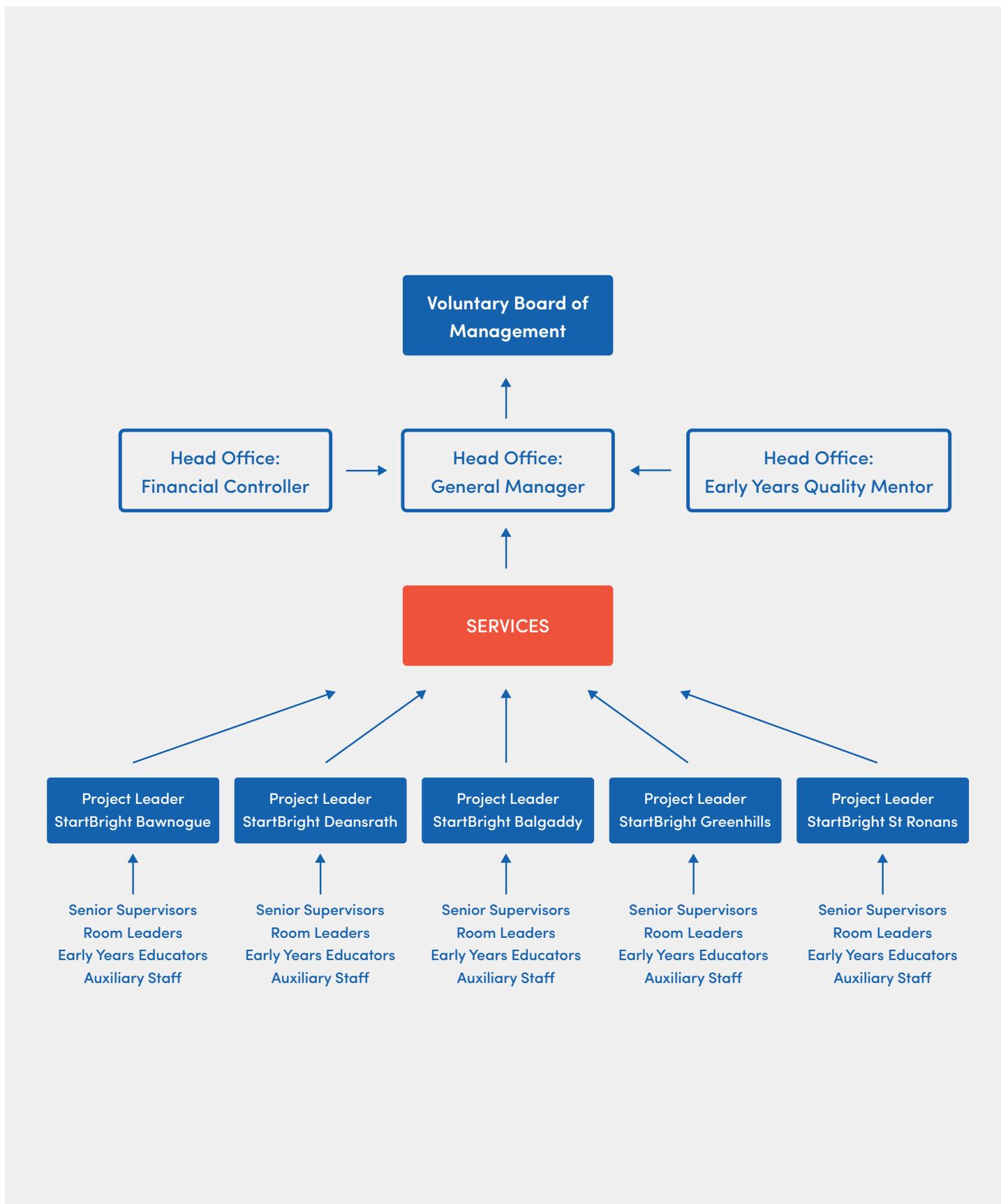
Impact

Through these actions StartBright, as an organisation, will grow and develop. The StartBright Board will continue to take a strategic leadership role in championing early education and monitoring the implementation of this strategic plan. The Board's Finance & Operations Sub-Group will continue to ensure that our funder reporting mechanisms are of the highest standard and that we secure a wider funding base to ensure sustainability and develop key innovative projects. StartBright will continue to ensure the highest standards of compliance with statutory and voluntary codes of practice. With an enhanced Staff Learning & Development Programme in place our Team will have increased capacity to meet the challenges they face on a daily basis and to deliver excellent childcare and early learning services. With improved internal tracking systems and enhanced data analytical tools StartBright evidence gathering systems will be more enhanced. The impact of StartBright organisational growth and development will be demonstrated with increased numbers of stakeholder engagement coupled, which includes increased numbers of early learners, together with improved external quality assurance.

Board of Directors

Name	Organisation	Role	Specialist Skill Area
Siobhan Feehan Chair	Tusla	Manager – Deansrath Family resource Centre	<i>Early Years</i> <i>Learning Advocacy</i> <i>& Strategy</i>
Susan Selfridge	Early Childhood Ireland	Deputy CEO Director of Operations & Membership Services	<i>Early Years</i> <i>Learning Finance</i> <i>& Governance</i>
Ailbhe McMackin	McKesson Ireland	Senior Manager, Head of Insights and Services	<i>Business</i> <i>Development</i> <i>Strategic Planning</i>
Adeline O'Brien	Blanchardstown Area Partnership	CEO	<i>Strategic</i> <i>Management Social</i> <i>Justice & Equality</i>
Margaret O' Donoghue	Institute for Technology Blanchardstown	Early Years Programme Coordinator	<i>Early Years</i> <i>Learning Policy</i> <i>& Practice</i>
Vincent Kirrane	Burke Oil	CEO	<i>Business</i> <i>Development</i> <i>Financial Management</i>
Ann Wilson	ESB	HRM	<i>Human Resource</i> <i>Management</i>

Organisational Structure



StartBright Early learning Centres encourages and supports early learners to become active citizens of the world.



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Available to download from <http://www.startbright.ie>