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Education News: Early years - Irish initiative to tackle sectarianism

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A programme that teaches pre-school children to respect differences is to be rolled out across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in a bid to tackle sectarianism and other prejudices.

The Media Initiative for Children was piloted among 100 children for six weeks in February 2004 and is set to reach another 2,500 in 100 settings by June.

Backed by Nippa, the Northern Ireland early years organisation, and the Peace Initiative Institute in the US, it uses resources linked to sectarian issues children are exposed to, such as religious parades.

Siobhan Fitzpatrick, chief executive of Nippa, said parents were also "centrally involved" as their attitudes needed to change too.

An evaluation of the pilot, carried out by Dr Paul Connolly of Queen's University, found the children were beginning to understand differences and how it felt to be excluded, compared to a control group of children where there was no change in attitude.

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