



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION INSPECTORATE

Information Note – 16 April 2021

[To be read in conjunction with DE Circular 0021/2021]

Follow-through Inspection: Information

Circular 0020/2021

Circular 0020/2021 sets out arrangements for inspection of Early Learning and Care (ELC) Settings from April to June 2021.

Follow-through inspections

The purpose of a follow-through inspection is to evaluate the progress an early learning and care (ELC) setting has made in implementing the actions advised from an earlier inspection where a written report has been published or issued to a setting. Follow-through inspections are identified as a feasible and valuable option at this time for a number of reasons. The inspector who carries out the follow-through inspection already knows the setting and will be in a position to draw on the previous evaluation experiences. As the actions advised in the initial inspection are focused, the time spent gathering evidence relating to the progress made by the setting is significantly reduced. In undertaking follow-through inspections, inspectors will take particular account of any innovative approaches used by settings to implement the actions advised in the initial report. Inspectors will also take note of and affirm any additional actions taken to provide for children in the context of Covid-19.

Information regarding the Follow-through inspection model

Information regarding the Follow-through inspection model is available in Appendix 2 of the *Guide to Early Years Inspections* published by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills in 2018. This guide is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/68fac2-guide-to-early-years-education-inspections/>

In summary, the Guide outlines the purpose of the follow-through inspection, and the processes involved. It also sets out the evaluation focus, and the continuum of language which will be used when reporting on progress. The Guide also provides an overview of inspection activities during a follow-through inspection. These activities include meetings before, during and after the inspection; observations and interactions with children; review of documentation, records and children's work; and review of resources and facilities. In addition, the Guide provides information on the processes involved for the setting and the Inspectorate, after the inspection.

Follow-through inspections in the context of Covid-19

The Inspectorate is committed to ensuring that activities undertaken during follow-through inspections accord with the prevailing public health guidance necessary to limit the spread of Covid-19.

Prior to follow-through inspections, inspectors will engage with owners/managers/lead practitioners in ELC settings, to tailor the approaches to inspection to be responsive to and respectful of the context of the setting and in line with all safety procedures.

Meetings before, and after the inspection will preferably take place remotely either using online meeting facilities or telephone contact. If onsite meetings are deemed necessary, these will be arranged following discussion between the inspector and the setting to ensure they can take place in a safe environment. Their duration will also be limited.

Opportunities to review documentation to support the evaluation may also be negotiated. This may include advance agreement on relevant materials that will support the evaluation e.g. records of children's learning or information for parents. These materials may be shared with the inspector remotely e.g. through temporary access to the setting's intranet or arrangements may be made for the safe review of these materials on site. In considering what and how materials are to be shared it is important to note that all data gathered as part of the evaluation will be processed in accordance with the Department of Education's Data Protection Policy which can be accessed at <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/data-protection/#accountability-data-protection-policy>. As a general rule no personal data should be shared outside the ELC setting. For further detail on how the Department of Education processes personal data please visit the <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/data-protection/#transparency>.

In consultation with the setting, inspectors will seek to minimise the time spent indoors in the setting. Insofar as is possible, inspectors will prioritise spending time in the outdoor environment. During onsite visits, inspectors will act in accordance with the setting's infection control measures, and, in advance of the visit, the inspector will adhere to the Inspectorate's guidelines on conducting on-site visits.

Follow-through inspection reports

To set the context of the follow-through inspection, an additional explanatory statement will be published on the front cover of the report, as follows:

This inspection took place in the context of public health restrictions necessary to limit the spread of Covid-19.

The following statement will be included in the explanatory note at the start of all reports:

Due to public health restrictions required to prevent the spread of Covid-19, it may not be possible to inspect the setting's progress in some of the actions contained in the original Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI) report. Where that is the case, it will be indicated in the report. Follow-through inspection on any outstanding actions may be progressed at a future date.

Where progress in relation to an action advised cannot be determined due to restrictions required to prevent the spread of Covid-19, this will be clearly explained alongside the text of the original action advised.