An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)
Final Report

Setting name	Rathcoole Playschool
Setting address	Rathcoole Mallow Co. Cork P51HF34
TUSLA registration number	TU2015CC338
DCEDIY number	09CC0033
Date of inspection	09-02-2022
Date of issue of report	18-05-2022**09-03-2022**

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

What is an Early Years Education Inspection?

The Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI) model is used to provide evaluative information, advice and support in relation to education provision in a pre-school setting participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. These inspections affirm good practice and advise actions, where appropriate, to aid the further development of education provision in the setting.

How to read this report

During this inspection, the inspector(s) evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

- Quality of the context to support children's learning and development
- Quality of processes to support children's learning and development
- Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements
- Quality of management and leadership for learning

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the setting's provision in each area.

Early Years Education Inspection

Dates of inspection	09-02-2022
Inspection activities undertaken • Pre-Inspection meeting with the setting owner/manager • Meeting with relevant Early Years Educators/others members of staff • Review of setting documentation and records of children's learning and development • Review of education resources and facilities • Observations of interactions during a number of sessions • Interaction with children • Feedback meeting with setting manager/owner and Early Years Educators • Individual feedback to Early Years Educators	

Context of setting

Rathcoole Playschool is a privately owned early years setting in the heart of Rathcoole village. Two early years educators provide education and care for a maximum of eight children during the morning session. The owner/manager sits in during the session as well. On the day of the inspection, five children were present. The setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised in this report, the setting chose to accept the report without response.

Area 1: Quality of context to support children's learning and development

- The quality of the context to support the children's learning and development is good
- A caring ethos and warm, welcoming atmosphere prevail. The educators welcome the children warmly, they show sensitivity and a positive regard for the children and their families. At drop-off and collection time, short informal chats with the parents are utilised to share information.
- A well-balanced daily routine is displayed for the children in pictures and words. It incorporates long child-initiated/led play times indoors and outside, interwoven with a short circle time. This routine was not followed on the day of the inspection. Instead adult-initiated/led activities, such as several whole-group arts and crafts activities and whole-group story time were carried out before and after snack time.
- During the indoor and outdoor play times, the children are very much active agents in choosing and organising their activities, following their own interests and line of enquiry. This good practice needs to be extended to all activities.
- Snack time is utilised well as a social occasion. The children and the educators sit, eat and chat together in a relaxed atmosphere.
- The children are very well supported to manage their own hygiene and personal care needs.
- Transition times are announced ahead of time. The children get eagerly involved in tidying up. While they wait to wash their hands or go outside, they are asked to stand on coloured circles on the ground, waiting for their turn. This happens several times throughout the morning. There are too many transitions and inactive waiting times.
- Relationships between the educators and the children are responsive, respectful and reciprocal. Good guidance towards the establishment of good habits for life is very effectively provided.
- The children's identity and belonging is nurtured well. Meaningful opportunities are provided for them to develop an appreciation of themselves as individuals and as members of groups. These include a signing-in chart, a birthday calendar and a family display in the individual learning

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to change the daily routine. Long, uninterrupted, child-initiated/led, active and interactive play times indoors and outdoors need to become the main medium through which the children learn and develop. These times need to outweigh adult-directed activity times, which instead can be interwoven and offered parallel to play time, so that the children can choose to participate or to continue their learning through play. This will also provide more autonomy and agency to the children to choose and organise their activities.
- The educators are advised to review transition times, and to eliminate inactive waiting times. For example, the children who are finished tidying up could proceed immediately to wash their hands and organise their snack. Equally once dressed to go outside, one educator could be outside and the children who are ready could go straight outside and start playing.

Area 2: Quality of processes to support children's learning and development

- The quality of the processes to support the children's learning and development is good.
- A broad-based long-term and medium-term curriculum plan is displayed, with links to *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. While the template of the plan refers to children's interests, ideas, and questions, the themes displayed on the plan are focused on the seasons and festivities of the time of year. The children's ideas are not reflected.
- A lovely 'my special book' is created for each child. It includes photos of the children engaging in activities with short descriptions of what the child is doing in the photo. It also includes some photos of the child's family and pre-school friends and an 'all about me' page. A group learning journal is created in a similar way, depicting the children engaging in adult-initiated activities. Learning goal links are printed out from the *Aistear* book and added, to highlight the learning. There is potential to develop the observation practices, and to incorporate the information which arises, into the setting's emergent curriculum and short-term plans.
- High-quality interactions between the educators and the children are evident. A range of appropriate interactions, such as active listening, prompting, asking open-ended questions are utilised to facilitate a broad range of learning experiences. The educators actively extend the children's thinking and language learning during play.
- The indoor and outdoor environments are well maintained and inviting. They are meaningfully structured and well-resourced to develop the children's curiosity, creativity, imagination and desire for exploration. A partly covered, safety surfaced outdoor area is used on a daily basis. The lovely natural environment outdoor area is not used over the winter months, even though full rain gear is available.
- The children's language, literacy and numeracy skills are fostered well through their engagement in play and the educators' co-construction of knowledge. High-quality books are available to the children to explore and some good opportunities for free mark-making are also provided. There is some evidence of the use of formal teaching methods, such as colouring-in and tracing letters and numbers. This is not conducive to the children's learning and development at this age.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to ensure that the information documented about the children's learning, reflects their development with due regard for their individual interests, needs and learning dispositions. Observations are best carried out during child-inititated/led play times, as children are displaying and following their interest and line of enquiry during these activities. The individual and group learning journals need to make clear links to learning and development outcomes and the children's interests and dispositions. This will then inform the emergent curriculum, which forms the short-term plan.
- The daily use of both outdoor environments is advised. The setting is encouraged to adopt an open-door policy, where the children can choose to play indoors or outdoors during the whole session; the setting's current layout supports this approach. The play value of the outdoor areas could be further raised by adding more natural, loose, versatile, open-ended and sense-rich materials, such as plenty of sand in a sandpit, earth in a mud kitchen and water.

- Instead of focussing on exploring literacy and numeracy concepts, such as letter and number tracing, or colouring within the lines, the educators are advised to prioritise the use of whole-body movement games, finger games, rhymes and poems. In addition, they need to offer the children plenty of opportunities for mark-making, free drawing, junk art and painting.

Area 3: Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements is good.
- The children demonstrate enjoyment in their learning. They are interested and motivated and show positive learning dispositions, such as initiative, resourcefulness, resilience and persistence.
- Particularly during the outdoor play time, the children's physical fitness and their gross motor skills are developed well. During this inspection, the children had great fun running, playing ball and using the slides.
- The children know and respect the rules and boundaries of acceptable behaviour.
- The children's personal and social skills are beginning to develop. The educators often solve problems and sort out conflicts for the children; this practice merits review.
- The children are skilled at using verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to share information, recreate roles and interpret experiences.
- During play times and during the interactive exploration of a story, the children express their ideas, thoughts, feelings and creativity very well. The art activities are very adult directed, closed and outcome oriented.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to familiarise themselves with, and utilise problem-solving and conflict-resolution strategies, which will enable the children to work out problems and conflicts more autonomously.
- The educators are advised to plan and offer art and craft activities, which afford the children a broad range of learning and development opportunities. The children need to be able to express their uniqueness, individuality and creativity through their art work. The focus needs to be on the artistic processes, rather than on the outcome, or final product.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- Management and educators regularly reflect on and review practice and procedures. A monthly team meeting is utilised to discuss practice and any issues arising. The outcomes of these meetings are documented, so they can be shared, acted upon and reviewed again. Daily informal meetings are also used to review the session.
- The *Aistear*, *Síolta Practice Guide* is utilised as the educators undertake the Leadership for Inclusion in the early years (LINC) course. It is not used systematically in the context of setting self-evaluation or to support the educators to become familiar with contemporary research and evidence-based theory.
- There is clarity around the roles and responsibilities of the educators with regard to educational activities. Each educator utilises opportunities to take a leadership role in promoting quality learning.
- The educators engage in regular professional development opportunities, such as the Leadership for Inclusion in the early years (LINC) course, Healthy Ireland – Smart Start programme and several online courses.
- Effective two-way channels of communication with the families are established. There are informal daily chats with the family members, photos and anecdotal notes are shared electronically, and the learning folders are shared with families regularly.

- Transitions into and from the setting are managed effectively, to ensure continuity of experiences and progression in learning. Very good working relationships with the local primary school are established.

Action advised

- The educators are advised to systematically engage with the pillars of the online *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide;* and to utilise the information shared in the various series of *Insights: Quality in Early Years Education.*

Summary of overall inspection

Area	Quality level
Quality of context to support children's learning and development	Good
Quality of processes to support children's learning and development	Good
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	Good
Quality of management and leadership for learning	Very good

Language used in Early Years Education inspection reports

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the language which is shown below.

Level	Description
Excellent	*Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of children.*
Very good	*Provision that is very good is highly effective in meeting the needs of children.*
Good	*Provision that is good is effective in meeting the needs of children but with some aspects to be developed.*
Fair	*Provision that is fair requires practice to be improved to meet the needs of children.*
Poor	*Provision that is poor is inadequate and requires significant improvement to meet the needs of children.*