An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)

Final Report

Setting name	Shining Stars
Setting address	50 Oaklawn West Leixlip County Kildare W23D903
TUSLA registration number	TU2015KE157
DCEDIY number	10KE0230
Date of inspection	03-12-2024
Date of issue of report	10-02-2025

What is an Early Years Education Inspection?

The Early Years Education Inspection model is used to provide evaluative information, advice and support in relation to the education of children aged birth to six years in early learning and care settings. The inspections will affirm good practice and provide advice to support internal quality development processes that optimise children's education experiences and outcomes.

How to read this report

During this inspection, the inspector 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	03-12-2024

Activities conducted during the Inspection

- Pre-inspection meeting with the setting owner/educator
- Review of setting documentation and records relating to the children's learning and development
- Review of the education resources and facilities
- Observations of interactions during an Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme session
- Interaction with children
- Interaction with early years educators
- Feedback meeting with the setting owner/educator and two early years educators

Context of setting

Shining Stars is a privately operated setting located in Leixlip, County Kildare. Established in 2010, the setting provides a morning and an afternoon ECCE session. There were ten children and three early years educators, one of whom is the setting owner/manager, present. The early years setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised of the report; a response was not received from the setting.

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 was very good.
- There was a welcoming and very calm atmosphere in the setting. The children and their parents were warmly greeted on arrival at the entry point.
- The daily routine was very flexible to accommodate a broad range of play and learning opportunities. At a set time during the session, there was a free flow of movement between the indoor and outdoor environments.
- Commendably, there were very few adult-initiated transitions in the daily routine. Those that did occur, were supported by the educators' use of auditory signalling and reminders.
- There was a seamless rolling-snack system in operation; the children chose when they had their snack. An educator supported groups of four children to take turns to use the snack table during this time.
- The educators used a key-person approach to nurture warm and positive relationships with the children and their families. Their engagement with children was intentional and respectful with secure bonds forming between the children and the educators. Many friendships had formed between the children.
- Among the strategies used by the educators to support the children's sense of identity and belonging were a noteworthy family album, personalised coat hooks, sketchbooks, and drawings folders. Cultural diversity was evident in some books and jigsaws.
- Community engagement events included walks in the local park, to the train station and on a canal trail. Parents were invited in to share their professions and hobbies with the children. One parent recently brought in a guinea pig to much excitement from the children. Some of these events briefly featured on the 'Wonder Wall' display.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to optimise snack time as a time to support the children to be more independent and to use their self-help skills.
- The educators are advised to optimise the learning potential of the community engagement and cultural diversity events they undertake by ensuring the children have continuous access to the related learning aids and displays throughout the year. The use of a group-learning journal for this purpose is encouraged.

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 was very good.
- The educators implemented a highly effective emergent inquiry and play-based curriculum that was informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. There was a strong emphasis on forming and maintaining strong attachments to the children and their families.
- The educators organised the curriculum planning into formal long and medium-term plans that were informed by educator-initiated learning goals, thematic topics and seasonal events. The informal short-term plans included some of the children's play interests.
- Among the strategies used by the educators to gather information about each child's learning experiences and to track progression in learning were observation records and learning journals.
- The educators used highly effective playful and language-rich interactions with the children that promoted early literacy, language, science and mathematics skills. They used rich descriptive language and thought-provoking open-ended questioning, and ensured there was a suitable balance between speaking and listening during these interactions.
- The layout and resources available to the children in the indoor learning environment were very considered and motivated the children to explore the many play and learning opportunities. These included manipulative, creative, multi-sensory and symbolic play.
- There were many natural and real play resources in the outdoor learning environment, as well as mark-making, construction and socio-dramatic play opportunities.
- The educators were very committed to providing an inclusive experience for all children. They had engaged with external agencies and an Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) specialist to optimise support for children presenting with additional needs.

Actions advised

- To plan more effectively for each child's learning progression, the educators are advised to record their established play interests and thereafter, ensuring these interests and the children's learning needs periodically inform formally recorded short-term curriculum plans.
- To support the provision of a more connected and holistic learning experience for the children, the educators are advised to share the observation records with the children and more regularly with the parents.

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

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements was very good.
- The children were highly motivated and displayed significant enjoyment and a positive sense of wellbeing. This was most evident during times when they freely moved between the indoor and outdoor learning environments and engaged in child-led play activities.
- The children enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy over their play and learning experiences. They spontaneously moved between playing alone, in pairs and small peer groups throughout the session.
- The children's voices, including verbal and non-verbal cues, were heard, respected and acted upon by the educators. They were learning how to communicate their emotions, listen to their peers, express empathy, and use problem-solving skills to resolve minor peer conflicts.
- The children experienced a sense of achievement through conversations with the educators about their past play and learning activities. This was supported by the educators using the 'Wonder Wall' display, and occasionally reviewing the learning journals with the children.
- The children were displaying many positive learning dispositions. While engaged in construction play, two children demonstrated initiative, sustained engagement, imagination, experimentation and co-operation skills.
- The children confidently and creatively communicated their thoughts and ideas through whole-body action songs, watercolour painting, playdough modelling and socio-dramatic storytelling.
- The children were making sense of their world through agentic, playful, and inquisitive exploration. Among the many schematic play interests they were displaying were containment, transformation, balance and gravity.

Action advised

- To further support the children to build an awareness of their learning progress and identify as competent and confident learners, the educators are advised to retain the learning journals for a two-year cycle and make them continuously accessible to the children. They are further advised to incorporate the children's reflective comments in the journals and involve them when implementing the plans to support their next steps in learning.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was very good.
- The owner/manager was also the lead educator. Alongside her educator team, she oversaw a highly effective programme of education and care and conducted formal monthly staff meetings to support the smooth operation of the setting.
- In previous years the owner/manager conducted formal support and supervision sessions with each educator, as set out in the associated policy.
- A minimum of two hours of non-contact time was flexibly built into the weekly schedule to enable the educators to carry out their planning and assessment tasks. A week at Easter time was also used as non-contact time.
- The educator team were highly committed to engaging with continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities and sharing their knowledge with one another. One educator was upskilling to a degree level, two had recently completed the Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years (LINC) programme and a third was currently undertaking the LINC Plus programme. Members of the team had also completed *Lámh*, and the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion and Hanen programmes.
- The educator team are dedicated to reflecting on and continuously improving the quality of their professional practice. They used guided monthly reflection sheets and occasionally used some of the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* self-evaluation tools to support these internal evaluations.
- Among the methods used by the educators to share information with parents was a messaging application and through conversations at drop-off and collection times. All parents had regular opportunities to avail of parent-educator meetings to discuss the children's learning progress.
- The educators used comprehensive strategies to support the children's transition into the setting and their transition to primary school. This included the use of a parents' handbook and the *Mo Scéal* transitioning resources. In addition, a local Junior Infants teacher sent the setting photographs of the primary school classrooms, library, and sports hall. The educators added additional related photographs to this rich-learning resource.

Actions advised

- To support educators in providing a high-quality learning and development experience for children, the owner/manager is advised to reinstate formal support and supervision sessions with each educator, as set out in the associated policy.
- To assist in future quality developments, the owner/manager and educators are advised to establish a more robust and recurring approach to internal evaluation. Engagement with the full suite of self-evaluation tools in the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* will support this practice.

Summary of overall inspection

Area	Quality level
Quality of context to support children's learning and development	Very good
Quality of processes to support children's learning and development	Very good
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	Very 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 setting using the language which is shown below.

Level	Description	Examples of descriptive terms
Excellent	**Provision that is excellent** is exemplary in meeting the needs of learners. This provision provides an example for other schools and settings of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Excellent; exemplary; outstanding; exceptionally high standard; with very significant strengths
Very good	**Provision that is very good** is very effective in meeting the needs of learners and is of a very high standard. There is potential to build on existing strengths to achieve an excellent standard.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful
Good	**Provision that is good** is effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to build on existing strengths in order to address the aspects to be developed and achieve a very good standard.	Good; of good quality; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; strengths outweigh the shortcomings; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Requires improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard** is not sufficiently effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is good or better.	Fair; less than effective; less than sufficient; evident weaknesses that are impacting on learning; experiencing difficulty; shortcomings outweigh strengths; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard** is not meeting the needs of learners. There is immediate need for significant action to address the areas of concern.	Weak; poor; ineffective; insufficient; unacceptable; experiencing significant difficulties; serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated; requiring significant change, development and improvement to be effective

The following resources can be used by ELC settings in their quality improvement:

Aistear Siolta Practice Guide

Department of Education Insights – Quality in Early Years Education webinars

Published February 2025/ Foilsithe Feabhra 2025