An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)

Final Report

Setting name	Giant Steps
Setting address	Charlotte Row Gorey Wexford Y25T3Y6
TUSLA registration number	TU2015WX051
DCEDIY number	24WX0310
Date of inspection	20-03-2026
Date of issue of report	08-06-2026

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(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.

The setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised in this report, and the response submitted on behalf of the setting can be found in the appendix of this report.

Early Years Education Inspection

Dates of inspection	20-03-2026

Activities conducted during the Inspection

- Pre-inspection meeting with the setting owner/manager
- 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 the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme session
- Interaction with young children
- Interaction with early years educators
- Feedback meeting with the setting owner/manager and early years educator

Context of setting

Giant Steps is a privately owned Early Learning and Care (ELC) setting located in the parish hall in Gorey County Wexford. The setting was established over twenty years ago and in 2025 it was taken over by its current owner, who had worked in the setting for many years as an educator. The setting offers school aged childcare and sessional ELC to children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. During the inspection, four educators, one of whom was the owner, and twenty-two pre-school aged children were present.

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 good
- A caring and affirming atmosphere was evident in the setting. At arrival times, the children and their parents were warmly greeted.
- Relationships observed between the educators and the children were positive and respectful. The educators used praise and affirmative gestures to support and motivate the children.
- The daily routine was visually displayed for the children in the learning room. It included opportunities for the children to engage in free play, work time, circle and snack time, activities and outdoor play. On the day of inspection, the documented routine was not fully followed.
- Snack time was a pleasant social occasion. The educators sat and ate with the children; they encouraged healthy eating and engaged in many general discussions.
- The educators effectively promoted the children's independence, personal-care and self-help skills. On arrival the children were observed placing their lunch boxes and drinks in the fridge. They also independently hung up their coats and bags, used the toilet facilities and washed their hands. In preparation for snack, all children retrieved their own placemats, and the helpers distributed lunch boxes and drinks to the group.
- To support the children to transition from one activity to the next, the educators occasionally used verbal and visual reminders. For example, 'now' and 'then' cards were sometimes used to draw children's attention to tidy up time.
- The educators recognised the children's identity through coat hook and family photographs, handprints and birthday charts.
- A small number of the children came from diverse cultural backgrounds. There was some evidence of the educators promoting cultural awareness within the setting. For example, cultural dolls were available, and the educators reported that special events celebrated by the children were discussed during circle-time activities. At the time of the inspection, it was noted that the educators had not yet participated in training related to inclusion or cultural awareness.
- To foster family engagement and to connect the children with the wider community, the educators invited family and community members to share their interests and professions with the children. Visitors included a paramedic with an ambulance, *a Garda*, a music therapist, post lady, and a Special Olympics team member. Families also brought in frogs,

tadpoles and birds and the North Wexford Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (NWSPCA) brought rescue dogs to visit. The children also took regular trips to the local library, park and shops. At the time of the inspection, opportunities for the children to reflect on these experiences were limited. It was also noted that while the children occasionally had access to their learning journals, only a small number of these activities were reflected within them or within the environment.

Actions advised

- To support the children's awareness and predictability of daily events, the educators are advised to consistently follow the daily routine, any changes to the routine should be communicated to the children in advance. They are also advised to be more consistent in providing the children with advance notice, and in the use of the' now' and 'then' cards to draw their attention to the end of an activity and pending transitions.
- To support the educators in strengthening their knowledge and confidence in promoting a culturally responsive environment, it is advised that they explore relevant training options to enhance their skills.
- The educators are advised to provide increased opportunities for the children to reflect on the parent and community activities that took place in the setting. This can be achieved by adding photographs, and samples of the children's work related to these activities to their individual learning journals. It is also advised that these journals be made freely accessible to the children.

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 good.
- The curriculum implemented within the setting was going through a phase of change; an approach informed by the Montessori Method of Education was moving to a play-based curriculum, aligned to *Aistear; the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.*
- Curriculum planning was organised on a medium-term basis. Planning for the children's learning was based around themed activities, seasonal events, visits from professionals and some of the children's experiences for example going to the opticians.
- Information on completed planned activities was documented in a group learning journal called the 'Green Folder.' This folder was located at the entrance door for parents to view.
- The educators used checklists, observations, individual and group learning journals to gather information on the children's learning and development. Observations recorded the children's engagement in activities, abilities and some of their interests. At the time of the inspection, the children's observations were not up to date, with some children having no observations completed for them.
- The educators viewed the children as competent and capable learners and encouraged their active engagement. They engaged with children at their physical level and use soft tones to convey messages in a respectful manner.
- Play was central to the children's learning. The educators had achieved a good balance between adult-led and child-led activities. Ample time was allocated for children to engage in spontaneous free play, and the educators followed the children's interests as they emerged. Adult-led activities were offered to the children as a choice.
- The learning environment was a shared space and used by other organisations when not in use by the setting. It consisted of a large learning room, sports hall and an outdoor area. While the children had direct access to the outdoor area, its use was weather-dependent. On the morning of inspection, the children did not play outside, instead the sports hall was used for gross motor activities.
- The learning room was arranged into interest areas. During the inspection it was noted that some of the areas for example, the home corner and quiet space were clearly defined. While construction resources were available, a construction area had yet to be developed. It was also noted that some similar areas of interest, for example, those for creative and sensory activities, were not grouped together.
- On the day of inspection, whilst a good range of resources for imaginary and pretend play, gross motor and sensory activities were freely accessible, open-ended art materials and water were limited. It was also noted that table top shelves were closed off for most of the session, which restricted the children's access to fine motor activities.
- The children's early language, literacy and numeracy skills were facilitated through the print-rich environment, good quality books, an interactive story-time and mark-making materials.

Stories, songs, and rhymes were incorporated into circle time and throughout the day in response to the children's interest and requests.

- The educators promoted an inclusive environment. Throughout the session, all children were supported to participate at a pace suitable to their developmental ability, and the educators were sensitive to their individual needs. The educators linked closely with parents and with external agencies to support children with additional needs and they availed of support under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) when required.

Actions advised

- To further support the implementation of a play-based curriculum, the educators are advised to review their approach to planning, observation, and assessment. They are advised to use more regular observations linked to the children's interests and their next steps in learning to inform short-term plans.
- The educators are advised to conduct a review of the indoor learning environment. It is advised that emphasis be given to introducing a construction area and placing like areas of interest together. The 'Learning Environment' pillar of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* would be a useful tool to support the implementation of this action.
- To support the children's exploration skills and to further enrich their play experiences, the educators are advised to introduce more open-ended art materials and water into the indoor environment, they are also advised to make tabletop resources available to the children throughout the session.

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 observed to enjoy their time in the setting. They presented as happy and were secure and at ease in the environment. Their positive sense of fun was often seen in their smiles and laughter.
- During the inspection, most children showed positive learning dispositions, such as high levels of motivation, concentration and persistence. Their self-regulation skills and their behaviour were also observed to be very good.
- On a small number of occasions some children required support to self-regulate and to take turns, the educators resolved these issues through redirection and the use of a timer. The owner reported that the behaviour management policy was currently under review.
- The children's social skills were observed to be developing very well. The children had formed positive relationships with one another and played together in differing social situations, intentionally alone, in pairs and in small groups.
- Throughout the session, the children's voices were heard and respected by the educators. For instance, the children had many opportunities to freely choose activities of interest and the educators spontaneously responded to these through playful engagement, comments, and praise. They also effectively captured the children's comments and quotes on their artwork.
- The children's sense of wonder, creativity, and problem-solving skills and their connection with the world around them was observed to be developing well. This was evident for example when they explored shells, old type telephones and when the used tools to manipulate screws, used cloths to polish, and investigated why sand was not flowing through the funnel. The limited use of open-ended questioning and sustained shared thinking conversations resulted in some missed opportunities to extend these interests and ideas and to scaffold learning.
- Many children demonstrated very good verbal and non-verbal communication skills. During the session, they were observed expressing themselves through gesturers, conversations, role play and mark making activities. They also voiced their opinions, asked and answered questions.
- The children were confident in their abilities and displayed very good levels of spatial awareness and gross and fine motor skills. For example, this was observed when they ran, cycled, and played football, and when they completed jigsaws, built with magnets, used mark making resources and engaged in tabletop activities.
- The children demonstrated strong literacy and numeracy awareness. They frequently referred to shape, colour, letters and numbers, enjoyed books and mark making activities and were also heard singing while playing. Some children's understanding of print as a way

of communicating was highly developed. For example, during role play, two children asked for help to write want they saw happening in the room, and to write a note to a friend.
- The children's awareness and sense of identity was observed to be developing well. For example, many children introduced themselves and others, chatted about family members and talked about the colour of their eyes. They also took pleasure in sharing their likes, interests, ideas and successes with others.

Actions advised

- The owner is advised to include the educators in the review of the behaviour management policy; this will support their understanding of the policy and the development of their behaviour management techniques. The educator's use of the timer to encourage the children's turn taking skills is not advised.
- The educators are advised to engage in more sustained shared thinking conversations with the children and to use open-ended questions for example 'why' and 'how' to develop the children's interest and to help foster their thinking skills.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was good.
- At the time of the inspection, it was noted that the change in ownership within the setting had resulted in a period of transition for the team. Whilst there was a clear vision for the settings future direction it was in the early stage of being embedded.
- Some of the educators, including the new owner, had worked together in the setting for many years. While new roles and responsibilities were being established, the owner continued to work alongside the team in her educator role. A key person role had recently been developed and was in the early stages of implementation.
- At the time of the inspection team meetings and self-reflections were not fully embedded. A team meeting took place at the beginning of the year, and self-evaluations and reflections were happening informally. Short ten-minute planning meetings took place at the beginning of each day.
- The owner reported that individual supervision meetings were schooled when required.
- At the time of inspection, the setting's policies and procedures were being updated by the owner; the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* was used to support this work. The educators, parents and children were not involved in the process. During the inspection it was noted that while some of the policies had been updated and were available to view, the old versions were still in the policy folder.
- The manager linked with the local county childcare committee (CCC) and early years support services for advice and training. The owner also networked with and supported other early years settings. There were plans in place for the setting to recommence engagement with the Better Start Quality Development Service.
- The educators had participated in mandatory training, and the manager had completed the *Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) in the Early Years Programme* and online workshops.
- Parents were informally consulted about their children's learning and development, through social media, informal chats and newsletters. They were also invited to a transition to school meeting at the end of the year. On the day of inspection, parents did not enter the learning environment and the exchange of information between the educators and the parents at arrival and collection times was limited.
- An effective settling-in policy supported the children's transition into the setting. Visits to the setting and an open day took place before the children started. Parents were also asked to share 'All about me' information for each child at the beginning of the year. A phased settling-in approach, adapted for each child was in place and parents were welcome to stay with their children until they settled.
- To support the children's transition to primary school, the educators engaged the children in group discussions and stories regarding the move. The *Mo Scéal* documents developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) were used to share information with the schools' the children moved on to. A video about the transition to primary school sent to children and parents by the local national school was shown in the setting to the full group of children. A transition policy had yet to be developed.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to continue to embed the key person approach to assist the process of planning, assessment and documenting of children's learning and development. It is also advised that the key groups be used for small group activities and the sharing of information with parents. To support the sharing of information between the key person and parents, it is advised that an open-door policy be introduced.
- The owner is advised to introduce regular team meetings and individual supervision sessions to support the educators during the transitional phase, in their day-to-day roles and with ongoing self-evaluations and reviews.
- The owner is advised to continue to use the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to support policy reviews and development. It is also advised that the educators, parents and children be consulted in the development of policies relating to them. It is further recommended, that a transition to school policy be developed and that old policies in the policy folder be replaced by the new ones

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	Very good
Quality of management and leadership for learning	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

Aistear - Nurturing Skills website

Department of Education Insights – Quality in Early Years Education webinars

APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

I acknowledge and respect all findings outlined within the inspection report and appreciate the time and professionalism demonstrated throughout the inspection process. I recognise the value of the recommendations provided.

As a setting we are fully committed to reflecting on the observations and implementing all the advised actions to further strengthen our quality of Early Years Learning and Education setting.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

The owner and educators have started reviewing the current behaviour management policy together and are working on a new behaviour management policy to ensure all staff have a clear and consistent understanding of positive management behaviour strategies which support the children's emotional development and encourage positive interactions without the use of timers for turn taking.

Educators have begun placing greater emphasis on sustained shared thinking during daily interactions with the children and are increasingly using opened questions to extend the children's thinking, language, curiosity and problem solving skills.

To further embed the key person approach, educators have begun reflecting on ways to strengthen communications and information sharing regarding children's learning and development. Key groups will be used regularly during small group activities to encourage meaningful interactions, support closer observations and planning and assessment of individual children's progress.

The children's learning journals have been moved in the room from their original place to make them more accessible to the children.

Regular team meetings and reflective discussions will become part of our monthly agenda to support educators, collaborate together, self-evaluate and reflect while also discussing roles and responsibilities.

The daily routine has been reviewed to support children's sense of security and predictability and changed of routine are communicated clearly to the children in advance. We are sourcing more multicultural books, dolls, posters and home items. Our educators look forward to participating in a cultural and diversity course.

We are currently reflecting on the Learning Environment Pillar of the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide and are implementing changes to the layout of the indoor leaning environment. The first areas being the arts and crafts and construction.