An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)

Final Report

Setting name	Catherines Playschool
Setting address	2 Leeview Court Cobh County Cork P24W265
TUSLA registration number	TU2015CC088
DCEDIY number	09CC0212
Date of inspection	29-05-2025
Date of issue of report	19-03-2026

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 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	29-05-2025

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 Programme session
- Interaction with children
- Interaction with early years educators
- Feedback meeting with the setting owner/educator

Context of setting

Catherine's Playschool is a private early learning and care setting operating in Cobh, County Cork. It was established in 1990 and provides a morning and an afternoon session for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the morning of the inspection, ten children, the owner/educator and two early years educators were in attendance.

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.
- A very warm nurturing atmosphere prevailed. Practices were in place that supported the children to develop strong emotional bonds and special relationships.
- The educators sat with the children and ensured that snack time was a social occasion and an opportunity to promote independence, relationships, well-being and a healthy lifestyle. One child gave out the photographs of the jobs for the day and the children then placed the photograph next to their own photograph on the jobs board. The children were confident and independent in managing their own lunch boxes and poured drinks when they wanted a refill.
- The times of transitions supported positive learning experiences for the children, they were managed very effectively and promoted continuity throughout the session. Visual and audio aids were used to give advance warning of upcoming changes.
- The children had opportunities to make positive social connections with other children and with the educators throughout the session.
- The educators showed respect for and recognition of the uniqueness of each child. The practice was child-centred and respectful. There were many photographs of the children on display in the room. There were no community or birthday displays.
- An opportunity was provided to bring together the children, their families and the educators at the end-of-year graduation.
- The educators organised opportunities for the children to get to know people in their community by welcoming visitors to the setting. The visits included paramedics and an ambulance from the Irish Red Cross, a fire truck, fire fighters and a dental hygienist.

Action advised

- The educators are advised to further develop the birthday display for the children and the setting's community display by including images and landmarks associated with the community. These need to be accessible to the children, so that they can review and discuss them.

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 curriculum was informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. It was documented and used to support the children's learning and development. The educators developed an emergent, enquiry-based curriculum. The emergent interests were captured in the short-term plans.
- An observation template was used to gather information about the children's learning. The observations were strengths based, with next steps for children's learning noted and linked to Aistear. The information gathered ensured continuity and progression in the children's learning. Several anecdotes were also recorded and placed in the observations folder. The learning journals were similar in content.
- The educators set high but realistic expectations for the children where they learned strategies for active exploration, thinking and reasoning.
- The educators recognised the children as active agents in their learning. The children were supported and encouraged to learn with and alongside others.
- The indoor and outdoor learning environments were well maintained, appropriate and inviting. They were purposefully organised to develop the children's curiosity and imagination.
- Play was the central medium through which the children learned and developed within the setting. There were regular opportunities for the children to plan for, talk about and think about their play experiences.
- The educators provided the children with regular opportunities to listen to and explore stories in the company of an affectionate and attuned educator. They had access to high-quality books, linked to their interests and play areas.
- An inclusive approach was adopted to ensure the engagement of all the children. Specific attention was paid to the learning of the children with additional needs. The educators made links with external agencies, with a view to optimising support for the children with additional needs.

Action advised

- The educators are advised to work collaboratively with each individual child to develop a unique learning journal. This will enable each child to make choices about their journal and reflect on their own individual creative activities and experiences.

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

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements was very good.
- The children demonstrated enjoyment and fun in their learning. They were motivated, interested and engaged in their learning experiences.
- The children were very effectively supported by the educators to build self-help skills, make choices and develop positive learning dispositions such as resilience, resourcefulness and persistence.
- The children discussed and shared aspects of their learning with others on what they did that morning during recall time, before going home. This supported them to recognise their own capabilities and achievements.
- The information documented about the children's learning reflected their achievements in a range of connected learning experiences appropriate to an early education context.
- The children developed personal and social skills which enabled them to respond appropriately to different situations. They took turns, co-operated with one another in play and built relationships.
- The children used language to give and receive information, ask questions and clarify their thinking, ideas and feelings.
- The children were encouraged and supported to respond creatively as they engaged in learning, template-based colouring-in, pre-writing skills activities, and adult-directed art were used. These did not give the children the opportunity to fully express their creativity and individuality.
- The children were aware of the natural environment and its features, materials, animals and plants. They were involved in planting seeds in the outdoor greenhouse and were mindful of relating their jungle theme to the animals in Fota Wildlife Park.

Action advised

- Educators are encouraged to introduce more open-ended, child-led art experiences that replace template-based colouring-in, pre-writing skills, and adult-directed approaches. This will empower children as independent, agentic learners to explore their creativity freely, fostering deeper self-expression and inquiry into their own ideas. Such experiences promote independence and inquiry-based learning, leading to richer outcomes in children's confidence, critical thinking, and artistic voice.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was very good.
- The owner/educator and the educators provided oversight and had responsibility for the programme of learning and care, in line with best practice and research. They reflected on and reviewed their practice informally on a weekly basis; they did not document their findings.
- An ethos of professionalism, teamwork, and collaboration was evident. The educators were aware of relevant research, policy and practice developments that impact on the quality of their work with the children.
- The stated philosophy and vision of the setting were evident in the practice of the staff. There was clarity around the educators' roles and responsibilities regarding educational activities.
- The educators were knowledgeable about the roles and functions of external professional and support services and how to access and engage with these services.
- Very effective strategies were in place to support and promote continuing professional development of all staff in the setting. The courses completed included Lámh, Hanen and Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI).
- The educators regularly shared verbal and documented information on the children's learning and achievements with parents and families in a spirit of openness, mutual respect and transparency.
- The educators gathered information from parents and families on the children's prior experiences when transitioning into the setting. This knowledge was used to ensure continuity of experiences and progression in learning for the children.
- The owner/educator and educators established a professional relationship with the principals of the local primary schools. They shared information that supported and promoted recognition of the children's experiences, achievements and progression in their learning using their own transition template.

Action advised

- The educators are advised to develop approaches to documenting the process of self-review and on-going reflection on practice. The self-evaluation tools in the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* may help in this regard. This will assist in affirming quality practice and support the educators to record and monitor the settings self-review processes.

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

APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

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

- Birthday chart has been laminated and put up for our new term.
- Community book will be a project we will do during the year. Have done previously as a display but will do in book form to keep.
- Children always have input in their 'memory book' – ensure going forward that learning journals are all very much individual works of art and keepsakes.
- Self-review and reflection on practice. This has always been completed verbally but will be documented on paper now and Aistear Siolta Practice Guide will be observed by all staff once time allows.

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