An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)

Final Report

Setting name	Maria Assumpta Preschool
Setting address	Pearse Road Ballyphehane Cork City T12HY44
TUSLA registration number	TU2015CC257
DCEDIY number	09CY0079
Date of inspection	08-05-2026
Date of issue of report	29-06-2026

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 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	08-05-2026

Activities conducted during the Inspection

- Pre-inspection meeting with the setting 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 a number of Early Childhood Care and Education Programme sessions
- Interaction with children
- Interaction with early years educators
- Feedback meeting with the setting manager and early years educators

Context of setting

Maria Assumpta Preschool is a community-based, urban early years setting in the heart of Ballyphehane. Seven educators provided early years care and education for thirty-six children during the two morning sessions and three of those educators provided early years care and education for sixteen children during the afternoon session. On the day of the inspection thirty-one children were present in the morning and eight children in the afternoon.

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 excellent.
- The educators embedded a highly caring ethos, and the atmosphere was very nurturing and affirming. Children and family members were warmly welcomed to the setting at drop-off and pick up times.
- Practice was very child-centred and based around respectful engagement with the children and their families. The educators implemented a meaningful key person approach. It was clearly evident that the educators knew the children very well and strong bonds and positive attachments of trust and respect were developed.
- The educators created a well-paced daily routine and focused on a relational pedagogy, where all the children's needs, temperaments and personalities were considered and supported. The daily routine plans were on display for the children to follow and featured photographs of the children from within the setting, engaged in the various activities throughout the sessions.
- The transition to snack time, as well as snack time itself, were used remarkably well as an opportunity to develop independence and self-efficiency. The children followed the good role model of the educators and tidied up the indoor learning environment. All the children and educators sat and chatted together in a very relaxed family-type mealtime atmosphere. Lovely small group conversations developed at both tables.
- Times of transitions were very well organised, announced ahead of time and managed very effectively and promoted agency and continuity in learning throughout the sessions.
- The relationships between the educators and the children were responsive and reciprocal and the educators demonstrated warmth and affection physically and emotionally in a highly respectful and positive manner.
- The educators fostered caring and respectful child-child relationships very effectively. They were authentic role models, worthy of imitation and gave clear, consistent, affirmative feedback to the children around positive behaviour and good habits for life.
- The children's identity and belonging was nurtured commendably well. A broad range of opportunities were provided to the children, which supported them to appreciate themselves as individuals and as members of groups. Their unique and creative artwork was displayed in a very respectful way, with lovely comments of the children captured on them. Family and community members regularly visited the setting and shared their interests and skills with 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 excellent.
- The educators were very knowledgeable and skilled in the development and implementation of an emergent, inquiry-based curriculum. The plans took account of the children's varying interests, values, attitudes and learning dispositions, as well as incorporating themes derived from the medium-term curriculum plans.
- The information the educators documented, reflected the children's achievements and learning effectively and took due regard for their individual interests, needs and learning dispositions. This information was regularly shared with the children and their families.
- Child-initiated/led, active and interactive play was consciously and consistently used as the main medium through which the children were learning and developing throughout the sessions. This play was meaningfully supported by the attentive, attuned educators, who became play partners and through their skilful interactions, co-constructed knowledge with the children.
- The educators created highly effective indoor and outdoor learning environments, which ensured that the children were learning in a variety of contexts throughout the sessions. The educators are to be commended for the creation of an inspirational outdoor learning environment, which offered very high play value to all the children. This included a broad range of sensory play options, the use of wheely toys, a beautiful flower garden, some balancing options and pretend play and artwork under the covered areas. Running and ball play was afforded on the school yard.
- The children's language, literacy and numeracy skills were fostered remarkably well. Rich, varied opportunities for mark-making and art and craft activities were offered and used throughout the sessions. High quality books were interactively explored and songs and rhymes were enjoyed by the children. The educators provided many opportunities for children to engage with activities that built early positive dispositions towards science, engineering, the arts and mathematics through hand-on, active experiences.
- The educators consciously provided time and space for all the children, irrespective of their age or stage of development to freely explore the indoor and outdoor learning environments. The broad range of activities afforded to the children, ensured that equitable opportunities were provided to all the children. An inclusive approach was adopted and the setting had secured support under the Access and Inclusion in the Early Years Model (AIM).

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

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements was excellent.
- The children presented as very confident and competent. They showed ownership over the setting and were very secure and at ease. The atmosphere was very calm, yet all the children were very busily engaged in their play and exploration, indoors and outside.
- The children were enabled to use trial and error, and through active exploration achieved fulfilment, success and mastery during their activities. They showed great pride and joy in their achievements.
- It was very commendable, how well the children's voices were sought and respected, this included verbal and non-verbal cues, ideas, thoughts and feelings which were acted upon. One example was that the children acted as book critics and had rated several books and fairy tales on a scale from one to five. Their comments were captured and displayed across the indoor learning environments.
- The children showed great concentration, exploring materials and resources by themselves or with an educator. Their play in pairs and small groups, demonstrated their well-developed personal and social skills, such as self-regulation, turn-taking and cooperating.
- The children were skilled communicators, using their verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to give and receive information, to negotiate and navigate play situations.
- The children used the broad range of activities provided to them to express their thoughts, ideas, feelings and their creativity. The sand play areas and sensory play options, such as play dough modelling, indoors and outside were never idle. Painting was another well enjoyed activity, as was mark-making in general. This was also captured in their unique, expressive and creative art and craft work on display and in the photographs in the children's learning journals.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was excellent.
- Management ensured that appropriate systems for the smooth running of the setting were in place. During short daily informal reviews and termly whole-team meetings, practice and procedures were reviewed and reflected upon.
- An ethos of professionalism, teamwork, collaboration and partnership was very evident and the stated philosophy of the setting was clear in practice. There was clarity around the roles and responsibilities of each educator with regard to educational activities and the interactions. Each staff member took a leadership role in promoting quality learning.
- The manager provided a commendable role model, and together with the highly dedicated, agentic educators they promoted high standards and followed a clear vision and direction for the work of the setting.
- It was clearly evident that practice was informed by evidence-based research and current best practice guidelines. All of the educators had engaged in various professional development opportunities over the last few years. The staff were familiar with the new *Aistear*: *the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and had undergone training.
- The setting established a broad range of effective two-way communication channels to exchange information relevant to the children and their families in a spirit of openness, mutual respect and transparency. These included daily informal chats, newsletters, an in-depth handbook, parent-educator meetings, phone calls and the use of electronic media.
- Transitions into and from the setting were managed effectively to support continuity of experience and progression in learning for the children. Gradual, sensitive and child-friendly settling-in procedures were in place. The setting had established very good working relationships with local primary schools, especially the neighbouring school, where mutual visits were common practice. Some teachers and principals visited the setting and the Mo Scéal forms were used to share relevant information.

Summary of overall inspection

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

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 Síolta 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

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

I feel the report reflected the excellent teacher and child relationship that is promoted here at Maria Assumpta Pre-school. Being a positive role model, and developing relationships with children, parents and families and taking a genuine interest in the well-being and learning of each child shows a dedicated and enthusiastic staff who take their working environment to a higher level.

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