An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)

Final Report

Setting name	Tots to Teens
Setting address	Tooreen Ballyhaunis County Mayo F35YA33
TUSLA registration number	TU2015MO125
DCEDIY number	09MO0068
Date of inspection	11-03-2026
Date of issue of report	19-06-2026

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 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.

Early Years Education Inspection

Dates of inspection	11-03-2026

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 one Early Childhood Care and Education Programme session
- Interaction with children
- Interaction with early years educators
- Feedback meeting with the setting manager and an early years educators

Context of setting

Tots 2 Teens is a community-based early learning and care setting located in Tooreen, Ballyhaunis, county Mayo. It offers sessional and school-age care, including a morning session for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. This inspection focused on the ECCE programme. Twenty children, the setting manager/educator and one early years educator 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 very good.
- The educators created a warm and welcoming atmosphere. It was evident that they had formed caring and responsive relationships with the children. At the time of inspection, the educators had yet to introduce a key-person approach.
- The educators maintained a consistent daily routine that included extended periods of child-initiated learning, optional educator-led activities, circle time, and snack time. During large-group experiences, such as story time, some children found it difficult to remain engaged due to the size of the group, limited visibility of the storybook, and the level of noise generated by the large group.
- Snack time was a social occasion and an opportunity for the children to develop independence, relationships, wellbeing and a healthy lifestyle. The educators sat with the children and successfully supported them to engage during these times.
- The educators ensured transition times were responsive to the children's needs and they supported them through a range of strategies. Visual cues, such as displays showing the different play areas, prompted the children to choose where they wanted to play. Verbal prompts, songs, and discussions were also used by the educators to help guide them during these times.
- The educators created meaningful opportunities for the children to express their developing sense of identity and belonging by incorporating family photographs and images that reflected both the local community and the wider world. These commendable practices supported the children to see themselves as part of a broader, interconnected community. This was evident when children gathered around one of the child-height displays, discussing who in the village owned John Deere tractors, which very effectively encouraged engagement and shared thinking.

Action advised

- The educators are advised to implement a key-person approach and review the organisation of some large-group activities, such as story time. This should include considering the size of the group, how children are positioned, how materials are presented, and how the environment supports the children to see, hear and participate comfortably.

Making these adjustments would help ensure that every child is supported to sustain attention and engage meaningfully.

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 educators implemented a broad-based curriculum informed *by Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* to support the children's learning and development. They effectively provided the children with a range of learning experiences where play was the central medium for education.
- The educators planned effectively for the children's learning on a long-term, medium-term, and short-term basis. They selected themes to guide short-term plans for whole-group activities and included some of the children's emerging interests.
- The educators had initiated strengths-based assessment practices, using observations and developmental checklists to gather insights into the children's learning experiences and achievements. They shared this information with the parents through a messaging application and parent-educator conversations. At the time of the inspection, the educators were working to support each child's individual progress and to learn more about their patterns of behaviour and preferred ways of learning. The clear links between what the educators observed in the children's learning and how they planned the curriculum were still being developed.
- The two interconnected indoor learning environments were spacious, bright and well organised. The educators created defined interest areas that supported the children's independent exploration and sustained engagement with a wide range of resources. These included resources to support construction, socio-dramatic play, small-world play, and mark-making. Varied sensory resources were accessible in both learning rooms.
- The outdoor learning environment had equipment for gross-motor play and exploratory learning. Due to weather conditions and ongoing redevelopment, the children accessed this area only briefly on the day of inspection.
- The educators created a reading area that supported early literacy development. The space was comfortable, inviting and well resourced, with a wide range of relevant and culturally meaningful literature, including Irish-language texts. This area successfully nurtured the children's enjoyment of books.
- The educators promoted an inclusive and supportive learning environment. They engaged with parents and external professionals where appropriate to ensure that all the children's individual needs were recognised and supported.

Actions advised

- It is advised that the educators further develop the emergent and enquiry-based approach to curriculum planning. In doing so, they should ensure a clear distinction between group curriculum plans and individual learning plans. These plans should reflect each child's unique interests, dispositions, abilities and needs, with the child's voice clearly visible throughout the documentation.
- It is advised that the educators enhance the quality and detail of individual observations and consistently identify the next steps in each child's learning to inform planning.
- The educators are advised to increase opportunities for learning outdoors to support the development of the children's fundamental movement skills and provide them with opportunities to connect with the natural world.

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

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements was very good.
- The children settled quickly and demonstrated a strong sense of ownership over the learning environment. They showed enjoyment, fun and enthusiasm throughout the session. The children confidently selected their own play and learning activities and showed high levels of motivation. They displayed curiosity, independence and sustained engagement.
- The children were developing personal and social skills as they co-operated, took turns, built friendships and responded appropriately to a range of social situations. These interactions supported their emotional wellbeing and strengthened their confidence.
- The children were developing their physical abilities as they engaged in expressive mark-making and creative activities. They used their developing motor skills with confidence

and strengthened their co-ordination and control. They expressed themselves creatively through spontaneous painting activities inspired by displayed images of artwork by Van Gogh, Joseph Stella and Paul Klee.
- The children interacted confidently with the educators and with one another. They collaborated effectively and demonstrated a strong sense of shared achievement during their activities. Their schema-based play, such as lining up and transporting dinosaurs, showed purposeful exploration and emerging problem-solving skills.
- The educators developed an individual learning journal for each child that included samples of their creative work. However, many of the samples were similar in theme across children, which limited opportunities to capture and reflect each child's unique interests, strengths, and learning journey. During the inspection, the journals were stored in a cupboard and were not readily accessible to the children. As a result, the children had reduced opportunities to freely revisit, recall, and fully reflect on their individual learning journeys.
- The educators supported the children's understanding of Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics (STEAM). For example, the children engaged in an enquiry-based learning experience using an incubator to hatch chicken eggs. They observed changes, monitored development and had used a special lamp to look for signs of life. This experience generated anticipation and excitement as the children explored the natural cycle of life and deepened their understanding of growth, change and care for living things. The activity supported the children's curiosity, connection to the natural world and engagement with their local community.

Action advised

- It is advised that the educators enhance the individual learning journals so that they more clearly reflect the breadth of each child's unique interests, strengths, and learning experiences. The journals should be made easily accessible to the children to enable them to independently revisit, recall, and reflect on their individual learning. This approach will support the children in developing a stronger sense of ownership and achievement.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was good.
- The manager provided purposeful and effective leadership. They cultivated a positive, supportive learning environment and promoted warm, respectful interactions. Daily routines operated with clarity and efficiency, and the educators worked cohesively, demonstrating a commitment to the children's wellbeing and learning.
- The educators engaged in reflective practice and used their observations to adjust the learning environments. However, they had yet to embed a structured, ongoing approach to self-evaluation, formalise staff meetings, and establish a defined support-and-supervision process to enable systematic professional reflection and development.
- The educators established two-way communication with parents. They shared verbal and some written information about the children's learning and achievements in a transparent, respectful manner. Parents received clear and accessible information on the setting's policies, procedures and curriculum, and the educators provided updates during daily arrival and collection times and through a messaging application.
- The educators implemented an effective settling-in process. They invited the children and the parents to visit the setting, and the manager provided a comprehensive parent booklet to support parents. The educators gathered detailed information on each child's interests, preferences, and needs through the enrolment form, enabling a responsive and individualised transition into the setting.
- The educators supported the children's transition to primary school effectively through targeted resources, purposeful discussions about school, a graduation event and visits from teachers. They had previously used the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment *Mo Scéal* transition report and were reviewing their approach to transition reports but had not fully established a consistent process to support the children's continuity in learning.

Actions advised

- It is advised that the manager and the educators formalise structures for staff meetings, curriculum-related decision making, and support and supervision. They should also embed a systematic approach to reflective practice and self-evaluation. These steps will strengthen

professional learning, support regular feedback, and enable purposeful improvements. Mentoring support from the Better Start Quality Development Service will assist with this action.

- It is advised that the educators collaborate with the parents and the children to complete transition reports for each child during the transition to primary school. This will build on the existing transition practices and provide parents with clear information on their child's strengths, experiences, and learning progression information that they may then share with their child's primary school to further support continuity in their learning.

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	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

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