An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)

Final Report

Setting name	Grovelands Childcare
Setting address	IDA Business Park Dublin Rd. Athlone County Westmeath N37NN90
TUSLA registration number	TU2015WH052
DCEDIY number	09WH0078
Date of inspection	28-05-2025
Date of issue of report	14-10-2025

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	28-05-2025

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 young children
- Interaction with early years educators
- Feedback meeting with the setting manager, supervisor and each of the four room leaders

Context of setting

Grovelands Childcare is a privately owned and operated early learning and care setting. Established in 2003, the setting is part of the Grovelands Childcare group based in the midlands. It offers full day, sessional and after-school services. The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme is provided across four learning rooms, each of which were visited as part of the inspection process. Over the duration of the inspection, there was an average of seventy-two children and twelve educators, three of whom were made available through the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM). 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.

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.
- Management and educators created a very warm and welcoming atmosphere where parents and children were greeted on arrival. The children hung up their coats and placed their bags in their individual cubbies before becoming involved in the learning programme.
- The daily routines provided a wide variety of experiences including generous time for child-initiated play experiences, opportunities for both indoor and outdoor exploration, mealtimes and small group experiences.
- The children were provided with commendable levels of agency where they consistently and regularly had choices and made decisions about their learning. As a result, children demonstrated great autonomy to follow their interests and curiosities throughout the learning environments.
- Mealtimes varied between learning rooms. Sessional rooms effectively facilitated rolling snack times where the children chose when they wished to sit and enjoy their meal. This promoted the children's independence and their ability to show responsibility while also supporting the freedom of continuous play. Set mealtimes, where all children sat together, were observed in the rooms that offered both the ECCE Programme and full daycare. Children were observed engaging in natural conversations during this time. There were some missed opportunities for learning where educators were involved in the preparation of the meal, separate from the children.
- Movement between environments and experiences were very effectively supported. Various strategies were used, including verbal and auditory, to successfully prepare the children for a change in the routine. Educators were very mindful of their roles during this time and therefore minimised waiting times for children. This ensured times of movement were purposeful for all involved.
- Highly commendable relationships between the children and the educators were consistently evident. Educators were warm, kind and caring towards the children. They regularly showed affection towards the children and were very attuned and responsive to their individual needs.

- Children's sense of identity and belonging were strongly supported throughout each of the sessions. Each child and their families were clearly represented throughout the various learning environments. These were observed in the many displays, photographs, books and artwork. Educators further supported this through the many natural and free-flowing conversations that were had with the children about their real-life experiences and the "news" that they regularly shared.
- The rich diversity throughout the setting was celebrated in both the learning environments and learning programmes. Individual home-made books in each of the rooms gave visibility to each child, their culture, home languages, festivals and favourite foods. Educators commendably engaged with parents regularly to gather further information in relation to their cultures and customs.
- Links had been established with the local community and opportunities were provided for the children to familiarise themselves with community members. Previously, members of an *Garda Síochána* and fire fighters visited the setting to meet with the children. At the time of the inspection, children in their second year of ECCE were about to embark on their annual tour which they demonstrated great excitement about.

Action advised

- Educators are advised to review the facilitation of mealtimes. It is important that all educators capitalise on the learning opportunities available during this time and how children's independence could be further built upon. In doing so, educators would benefit from reviewing their roles so as to consistently support high quality interactions and experiences.

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.
- A broad-based curriculum, informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* was very comprehensive and well established. It consisted of play based learning with influences from the Reggio Emilia Approach, an educational philosophy.
- Educators were knowledgeable and confident in implementing the curriculum plans which were both emergent and enquiry-based in nature. For example, one child's recent camping experience saw a wider interest emerge amongst a group of children. This led to educators creating an attractive camp site in the environment where conversations and experiences were informed by the emerging interest. Mind maps were very effectively used as live documents that educators updated throughout the day to capture children's voices, their thoughts and ideas. This in turn informed the short-term plans throughout the week.
- A wide variety of assessment approaches were used by educators to gather information about the children's learning experiences and achievements. Educators were knowledgeable about the purpose of the various approaches and how they were used to make young children's voices and interests visible. Children in their second year of the ECCE Programme had individualised 'memory books'. These consisted of mostly children's creative achievements with some anecdotal notes and photographs included.
- Educators fostered many effective interaction strategies with children. These included actively listening to the children, being attentive to their needs and encouraging children to learn with others. Occasionally, there were some missed opportunities by educators to scaffold and extend the children's learning.
- The indoor environments were purposefully structured and organised to support and promote children's curiosity, creativity and imagination. Educators consistently considered the presentation of the various defined interest areas, ensuring they were both inviting and aesthetically pleasing. The wide array of high-quality resources and materials, including natural, real, open-ended and sensory were noteworthy.
- The outdoor environment provided many opportunities for physical play. These included swinging, sliding, crawling, running and balancing. A sheltered place supported children's engagement in the outdoors in all weather conditions. This space provided some opportunities for other play types such as socio-dramatic play and construction play.
- Educators recognised and valued play as central to children's learning and development. The daily routines allowed for generous uninterrupted time for children's play. During this time, educators skilfully joined in as play-partners in supporting and guiding children's engagement, learning and development.

- Children's early literacy, numeracy and mathematical skills were promoted through a variety of appropriate resources in the environments. Examples included puzzles, peg boards, magnetic shapes, blackboards, writing notebooks and paint. Print-rich environments also supported the children's emerging literacy and language skills.
- Many highly effective inclusion practices supported the involvement of all children within the setting. An inclusion co-ordinator was in place and offered support and guidance to educators in preparing and reviewing individualised goals for children with additional needs. The setting was also engaged with a mentor from the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) and maintained regular communication with parents. Links had also been established with a range of external agencies with a view to ensuring there were equitable opportunities for all children in the setting.

Actions advised

- Educators are advised to build on the range of interaction strategies used with children. Extending, appropriately provoking and challenging the children's thoughts and ideas would support children to think critically and to further develop their own understanding. Furthermore, regular use of open-ended questions, comments and prompts would also assist in this regard.
- Educators are advised to review the resourcing of the outdoor learning environment. Consideration for early numeracy, literacy and a variety of multi-sensory experiences would further enhance the quality of experiences available to the children.

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

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements was very good.
- Children were very content and happy in the setting. They displayed great enjoyment in their learning and often remained engaged in experiences for prolonged periods of time.
- Children displayed a developing awareness of their achievements. They called on educators to share aspects of their learning. Through educators positive and affirming language, children were also supported to recognise their own capabilities and to experience success. Documentation throughout the environments, including the children's artwork and many 'memory books', enabled children to reflect on their achievements. Documented observations and learning records were not accessible to the children and therefore resulted in some missed opportunities for the children to reflect and recall on their learning.
- Many children demonstrated a strong sense of self and a confidence in their own identity. They talked about family members and shared real-life experiences. During the inspection, a popular conversation amongst the children was their age and their upcoming birthdays.
- Children were developing personal and social skills to assist them to respond appropriately to different situations. Educators consistent use of highly effective strategies, that empowered the children to independently resolve minor disagreements, was highly commendable. During the inspection, one child independently went in search of a sand timer to initiate turn-taking with another child. Both children understood that once the sand had gone it was time for the child to give another child a turn. This worked very effectively with very little involvement from an educator.
- Children were highly effective communicators. They successfully used verbal and non-verbal strategies to express themselves, their likes and dislikes. Many children were very articulate in making their interests, thoughts and ideas known. The strong emphasis on creative expression is noteworthy where children's creative drawings and paintings were displayed throughout the environment with their thoughts and ideas respectfully documented alongside them.

Action advised

- Educators are advised to create 'memory books' for all children. Consistently including the children's observations, photographs and anecdotal notes, alongside their creative achievements. This would further enhance the opportunities provided for all children to reflect and recall their learning. Such documentation would also provide another opportunity for children to recognise their learning achievements and successes.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was excellent.
- A strong sense of teamwork was clearly evident. Members of management and many educators were with the setting for many years. An ethos of professionalism was strongly evident with an undeniable commitment and loyalty to the children, parents and organisation.
- Well-established processes were in place to support and promote internal review, self-evaluation and reflection. Management and educators regularly engaged with the self-evaluation tools in the *Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide* to guide and inform best practice.
- Management and educators were very receptive to upskilling and remaining informed with current practice. Previously, the setting had engaged with an early years specialist from the Better Start Quality Service and more recently, educators were in receipt of some support from a mentor through the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM). An in-house trainer also tailored professional learning opportunities to the needs of educators as well as contributing to the induction processes.
- The setting manager was a long-standing member of the team. She promoted high standards and articulated a clear vision for the setting.
- Various channels of communication were adopted to facilitate partnerships with parents. These included the use of a digital application, face-to-face communication, text messages and newsletters. Opportunities were also provided to parents to visit the setting, these included coffee mornings, a Christmas concert and a parent day. Documentation about children's learning was shared regularly with parents and 'memory books' went home at the end of the ECCE year.
- Settling-in procedures were in place to support new children starting in the setting. This included an open day during the Summer, where children had an opportunity, in small groups, to visit the setting, meet their educators and to become familiar with their new environment.
- Management and educators supported the children's transition to primary school. They facilitated visits from two local teachers to the setting, prepared social stories and completed the *Mo Scéal* transition templates which parents were encouraged to share with their child's teacher. At the annual graduation ceremony each child's time in the setting was celebrated. An attractive visual display in the lobby outlined the schools the children were attending alongside relevant information for parents.

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	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 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

While we would have loved to have received 4 Excellents we welcome the inspection report and appreciate the clear, supportive guidance provided.
The advised actions have highlighted key areas of practice that, when enhanced, will further support the provision of a high-quality, child-centred learning environment.
We view these advised actions as opportunities to deepen the quality of experiences we offer, ensuring that all children are supported in becoming confident, capable, and independent learners. Our team is fully committed to implementing these recommendations through reflective dialogue, intentional planning, and sustained professional development.

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

Area 1

1. **Team Reflection and Review:** We have held a staff meeting to collectively reflect on our current mealtime routines, with a focus on identifying opportunities for meaningful interactions and increased child autonomy.

2. **Role of Educators:** Educators are reviewing their roles at mealtimes to ensure they:
    - Actively engage with children in sustained, high-quality interactions
    - Use mealtimes as a context for language development, social learning, and positive relationship-building
    - Model respectful communication and table manners

Area 2

Following the inspection, we have initiated a review of our interaction strategies with a particular focus on:

- **Professional Reflection:** Educators will engage reflective discussions to evaluate how we currently engage with children during play and learning, identifying areas where deeper questioning and extended conversations can be implemented.
- **Use of Open-Ended Questions and Prompts:** Actively working to increase our use of open-ended language. Educators are incorporating more prompts such as “I wonder what would happens if…”, “Tell me about…”, and “What do you think we could try next?”
- **Reviewing the Outdoor Learning Environment:** We value outdoor play as a core part of our curriculum and are committed to further enhancing the learning experiences it offers.
- **Resourcing for Numeracy and Literacy:** We are in the process of expanding our outdoor resources to include:
    - Natural materials for counting, sorting, and measuring
    - Further outdoor mark-making opportunities
    - Story stones and letter games to promote emergent literacy
- **Sensory and Multi-Modal Experiences:** We are enhancing our outdoor space to include more sensory elements such as:
    - Additional Sand & Water play experiences
    - Musical instruments and natural elements
- **Child Voice and Interest-Led Planning:** Children are being actively involved in co-constructing the outdoor space by voicing their interests and contributing to planning and decision-making.

Area 3

Introduction of Memory Books

We are in the process of including individual memory books for year one ECCE also. Educators will work collaboratively to regularly update each child’s memory book. This will be embedded into our weekly planning to ensure consistency across the setting.

Child Involvement and Reflection

Children will be actively involved in creating and reviewing their memory books. They will be encouraged to:

- Select items they wish to include
- Talk about their work and experiences
- Reflect on past activities, fostering a sense of progression and pride in their achievements