An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)

Final Report

Setting name	Imagination Station
Setting address	Rooms 9 &10 St Angela's National School The Lawn Castlebar County Mayo F23YD79
TUSLA registration number	TU2019MO002
DCEDIY number	18MO0214
Date of inspection	06-02-2026
Date of issue of report	18-06-2026

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	06-02-2026

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 one 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

Imagination Station is a privately owned early learning and care setting based in a designated classroom within St. Angela's National School in Castlebar, County Mayo. It provides a sessional service for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. The facilities include two interconnecting learning rooms and a dedicated outdoor play area. On the day of the inspection, the owner and three educators were present with nineteen children.

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 caring ethos and a warm, nurturing, affirming atmosphere was evident. The educators were knowledgeable about the children's personalities, temperaments, needs and individual preferences.
- An effective key person approach was in place, where the educators were responsible for the completion of children's learning journals, observations and engaging with parents about their children's learning and development.
- Throughout the morning, routines were calm, predictable, and well-paced. The daily routine was displayed visually, giving children clear cues about the sequence of their day and helping them navigate upcoming activities. While this supported their understanding of transitions, some visual elements, such as the helper-roles chart, were presented without images to show what each task involved, and a small number of the children required prompts to help them to identify or remember their role.
- Snack time was a social and engaging part of the session. The educators supported the children to build independence, strengthen relationships, and develop healthy habits.
- The educators provided opportunities for all the children to value themselves as individuals and members of their family and community. They used discussions, family-wall displays, learning journals, and books. They strengthened community links through library visits, posting letters, Garda visits, parent-supported picnics, and shared events with the adjoining primary school. Parents contributed their cultural traditions, interests and work experiences, helping every child feel recognised and valued within this developing community.

Action advised

- The educators are advised to enhance the existing visual supports by adding images or symbols to the helper-roles display to assist all the children to easily recognise and understand their assigned tasks. This would strengthen their independence and further support their ability to engage confidently with daily routines.

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 educators implemented a broad-based curriculum informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* that supported the children's learning and development. They provided the children with a range of learning experiences that focused on play as the central medium for education.
- The educators planned effectively for curriculum implementation on a long-term, medium-term, and short-term basis. They decided on the themes that guided the planning process, with short-term plans focused on group and individual learning activities that incorporated some of the children's interests.
- The educators had completed strengths-based assessments, using observations and developmental checklists that gathered insights into the children's learning and achievements. At the time of inspection, they were working to support each child's individual development, including their schemas and dispositions for learning. The explicit links between assessment and curriculum planning were still emerging.
- The educators viewed the children as competent and capable learners. They responded to the children's interests through playful engagement and encouragement. The educators used open-ended questions that supported the children to explore their interests.
- The educators fostered the children's development in literacy, numeracy, and overall wellbeing by creating bright, spacious, and well-organised indoor environments that encouraged exploration, co-operation, and independent decision making. The children were building confidence, developing their social skills, and engaging meaningfully in their learning through stories, rhymes, informal counting, and varied interest areas including the home corner, construction materials, table-top activities, and a cosy reading space.
- The educators promoted an inclusive environment. They linked with the parents and external professionals to support children, where appropriate.

Action advised

- The educators are advised to continue to develop their planning and assessment cycle by clearly recording and linking observations to plans for the children's next steps in learning. This would support continuity and progression in each child's development.

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

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements was very good.
- The educators supported the children to engage enthusiastically in play-based learning, where they worked confidently in pairs and small groups while building independence, co-operation, curiosity, persistence, resilience, problem-solving, empathy, and respect. Commendably, they showed respect and empathy for one another.
- The children managed their self-care needs confidently and demonstrated well-developed self-help skills, reflecting growing autonomy in completing daily tasks.
- The children confidently demonstrated the ability to plan and lead their own learning. As they playfully engaged and participated in activities, they displayed high levels of curiosity and imagination. In the outdoor space, a high standard of collaborative play flourished at the sand pit, where the children worked together in harmony. Their shared goals fostered a supportive community spirit and enhanced their abilities to follow instructions, exercise self-control, listen, and take turns.
- The children developed their fine and gross motor skills through a variety of indoor and outdoor activities. Sensory-rich activities like scooping sand, pouring water, threading, mark making and manipulating small objects strengthened the children's fine motor skills. Their gross motor skills were developed through running, cycling and moving large play items, which promoted the children's co-ordination, strength, confidence and independence.
- The children enjoyed singing and storytelling. Circle time was inclusive, with most of the children engaging confidently. However, the structure of large group activities such as story time did not always sustain all the children's interest or engagement.

Action advised

- The educators are advised to review the organisation of some large group activities to help meet the needs of all children. Offering smaller group sessions this would promote greater engagement.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was very good.
- An ethos of professionalism, teamwork, collaboration and partnership was evident. The owner/educator provided a good role model for the team, promoted high standards and articulated a clear vision and direction for the work of the setting.
- Commendably, the educators had initiated the use of the *Aistear Siolta Practice Guide* to review aspects of their practice. This engagement was at an early stage and was under review to systematically inform action planning, monitor progress and embed improvements into daily practice.
- The educators had established links with their local county childcare committee and external agencies, as needed. They engaged in continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities and completed the Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years (LINC) programme.
- The educators shared information about the children's learning and achievements with the parents through informal conversations, a messaging application, observations and parent/educator meetings.
- The educators supported the children's transition into the setting effectively by gathering relevant information about each child on the setting's enrolment form. Visits to the setting by the children and their parents supported the settling-in process. The parents were provided with an overview of the general practices in the setting.
- Commendably, the educators had established strong links with the adjoining primary school. The educators talked with the children to prepare them for this transition. To further support the transition to school the educators had previously completed the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment *Mo Scéal* report template, in partnership with the parents and the children. The educators had recently been invited to and engaged with the *Tús Maith* Transition Programme.

Action advised

- To educators are advised to review and document their practices and procedures using the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide*, with a view to ensuring that reflection, action planning, and implementation become ongoing features of practice.

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

Aistear - Nurturing Skills website

Department of Education Insights – Quality in Early Years Education webinars

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