An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)

Final Report

Setting name	First Friends Rathpeacon Pre-School
Setting address	Rathpeacon Community Centre Sweeney's Hill Old Mallow Road Rathpeacon County Cork T23Y472
TUSLA registration number	TU2016CC029
DCEDIY number	23CY0280
Date of inspection	13-11-2025
Date of issue of report	23-02-2026

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(s) 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	13-11-2025

Activities conducted during the Inspection

- 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/manager

Context of setting

First Friends Rathpeacon is situated in Rathpeacon, County Cork. On the day of the inspection three educators and sixteen children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme were present. 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.

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 requires improvement to achieve a good standard.
- There was a friendly and calm atmosphere in the setting. The educators greeted the children and their parents on arrival to the setting.
- The educators demonstrated kindness, care and affection towards the children.
- The daily routine was broken into different activities including indoor play, snack time, planned activities and play in the community hall. The varying periods of indoor play offered children the opportunity to move about their environment and play with their friends.
- Snack time was enjoyed as a social occasion; the educators sat with the children and engaged in natural conversations. The educators completed a range of tasks for the children during snack time. There were missed opportunities for the children to take responsibility for self-help tasks.
- Relationships between educators and children were warm and attentive. Educators knew the children and their families well,this was apparent in their engagement with the children.
- Among the strategies used by the owner/manager and educators to support the children's sense of identity and belonging was the use of their names in their interactions with them and their photographs above their coat hooks. There were some photographic displays of the children and their families; they were incomplete.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to ensure that the play periods promote deeper engagement, learning and development experiences for all children.
- The educators are advised to optimise snack time as a social occasion and as a time to promote children's self-care and care of the environment skills. They are advised to sit with the children and engage in conversations about topics of interest with them, and to involve them more in the preparation, serving and clean-up tasks.
- The educators are advised to display visual representations of each child's family and the community in the learning environment. The displays could include a map or a photographic display of local landmarks, people and amenities. In addition, it is advised that children have the opportunity to interact with local community members to further support their sense of identity and belonging.

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 requires improvement to achieve a good standard.
- A play-based curriculum aligned to *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* was in place.
- Planning consisted of long, medium and short-term plans. The educators demonstrated limited knowledge and understanding in implementing an emergent and enquiry-based approach.
- An observation template was used as the main assessment approach; this was used to gather information about children's learning and experiences. This information was not used to inform the development of an emergent curriculum.
- The indoor environment featured sociodramatic play, creative play and construction spaces. These were resourced with mostly plastic materials with a small selection of wooden and sensory materials also available.
- There were affirming interactions between the educators and the children as the children heard praise and encouragement throughout the day. The educators were responsive to the children as they spent time at the children's level and used eye contact with them. Interactions took place mainly in the form of conversations and chats with the children, as the educators informed the children of the next activity and asked questions.

Actions advised

- Educators are advised to streamline planning and assessment processes where there is equal consideration given to both the individual child and the group of learners. Educators are advised to give greater consideration to children's dispositions, values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding.
- Educators are advised to review the layout of the indoor learning environment. The creation of clearly defined spaces, that are inviting and richly resourced, would strengthen the learning experiences offered.
- A consistent approach to implementing quality interaction strategies with all children is advised. The educators are required to comment, extend learning, listen, use open-ended questioning and to respond meaningfully to all children.

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

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements requires improvement to achieve a good standard..
- The children presented as happy and content. They had fun at times during their learning day.
- The educators planned art and craft activities for the children to complete. These activities were adult led. There were no dedicated mark-making areas or creative space available in the learning environment.
- The children heard praise and encouragement during the day as they completed various tasks.
- A few of the children showed a desire for feedback and reassurance from the educators as they approached them to show the art work they had completed. The children did not have easy access to documented information about their individual learning and achievements.
- The outdoor environment consisted of a large patio. Resources in the outdoor area included a tuff tray and ride-on vehicles. At the time of the inspection, the light rain meant the children did not go outside.

Actions advised

- To ensure all children have access to creative spaces, the educators are advised to begin establishing mark making and creative areas. Creative experiences should offer more process art experiences and open-ended materials to the children.
- Educators are advised to consistently prepare 'invitations to play' throughout the learning environments where materials and resources are set up to encourage and invite children to play in their own chosen way. It would be important that these 'invitations' were enticing, inviting, sensory rich and aesthetically appealing to children and educators alike.

- The educators are advised to take steps to support the children to reflect on their own learning and growing competencies. They are encouraged to develop individual learning journals collaboratively with the children.
- The educators are advised to develop an outdoor play policy and procedures, and for these to be shared with parents and detail the intention to go outside in most weather conditions.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning requires improvement to achieve a good standard.
- The ownership of the setting has recently changed, the owner/manager has a clear vision for the setting.
- The owner/manager and educators used a variety of communication strategies to exchange information with parents.
- Each educator was familiar with the daily routine and their responsibilities.
- The owner made links with local organisations and sought support when needed.
- A clear sense of teamwork was evident amongst the team. This helped support ongoing communication and professional dialogue.
- To support continuity in the children's learning, the educators completed any forms supplied by the primary schools.

Actions advised

- In order to implement the actions advised outlined in this report, the owner and educators are advised to engage with an early years specialist through the Better Start Quality Development Service. In light of the changes to ownership the owner is advised to review the setting's mission statement, and to review, consolidate and embed practice, policies and procedures.
- The educators are advised to use the *Mo Scéal* transition resources for all the children who have completed the ECCE programme and are preparing to move to primary school.

Summary of overall inspection

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

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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