An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)

Final Report

Setting name	Honey Bees
Setting address	Main Street Muff County Donegal F93E2VN
TUSLA registration number	TU2016DL003
DCEDIY number	16DL0199
Date of inspection	19-03-2026
Date of issue of report	03-06-2026

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	19-03-2026

Activities conducted during the Inspection

- Pre-inspection meeting with the setting owners/managers
- 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 three Early Childhood Care and Education Programme sessions
- Interaction with children
- Interaction with early years educators
- Feedback meeting with the setting owners/managers

Context of setting

Honey Bees is a private, co-owned early learning and care setting, located in Muff, County Donegal. The setting offers part-time care and three morning sessions for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The inspection was conducted in the three ECCE sessions. On the day of the inspection, the co-owners/lead early years educators, one lead early years educator, five early years educators, and forty-seven children 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 caring atmosphere when engaging in respectful interactions with the children. They engaged in timely conversations with the parents at the door at arrival, which supported a sense of connection.
- The educators displayed a visual daily routine in two of the learning rooms. The educators in these rooms used the visuals effectively to support the children's understanding of transitions and activities to which they were transitioning. The transitions in the routines were minimal across the three learning rooms, which supported the children to engage in play and learning for extended periods.
- The educators used the snack time experience to support and develop the children's self-help skills and independence. They encouraged the children to manage their own lunch boxes and helped them when it was needed. Two of the learning rooms had established a visual helpers board, which supported the development of the children's dispositions of responsibility and care.
- There was a key person policy in place in the setting. Each educator had the responsibility of recording observations for a designated group of children and for interacting with them in small groups for arts and crafts. At the time of the inspection, the educators had not established meetings between the key person and the parents.
- The educators provided personal spaces, such as a coat hook and individual drawers for children's belongings. They displayed some of the children's family photographs and the children's birthdays. Some learning rooms displayed a range of the children's arts and crafts.
- One of the learning rooms had an inviting community display, which used photographs to show familiar places in the locality. At times, some community members, such as a local author and the RNLI, visited the setting. There were few opportunities for the parents to come into the setting on a daily basis and to share their skills and occupations with the children.

Action advised

- To further support the children's identity and belonging, it is advised that the educators encourage parents to participate in the daily life of the setting and to extend parental involvement in planned activities and events.

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 completed long-term, medium-term and short-term plans across two of the learning rooms. The plans outlined the adult-led activity each day, for example flower and lamb lifecycles. The educators made links to *Aistear* learning goals and noted the children's interests across the three learning rooms. There was a need to develop consistent planning that focused on the children's holistic development and emergent interests. At times, the educators planned pencil work and cutting activities to support the children's fine motor skills.
- The educators recorded the children's learning using childcare management software. The records varied in frequency across the learning rooms. The educators generally recorded learning stories for each child on a termly basis and supplemented these with photographs of them engaging in a variety of play experiences.
- The educators provided an appropriate balance between adult and child-initiated learning and development activities. They knew the children well and were playful and responsive in their approaches. Some of the educators used strategies such as open-ended questions to support the children to reflect on their play and learning.
- The indoor environments were very well defined across two of the three learning rooms. All of the rooms provided opportunities for small-world play, table-top play, a book area and role-play opportunities. Some rooms created invitations to play with planting resources, such as spades, soil, pots and flowers, and a well-resourced construction area with foam blocks to support children's imagination and exploration.
- The educators provided all of the children with the opportunity to play outdoors during the inspection. The outdoor area was large and beautifully arranged and presented by the educators to support the children's exploration and investigation. A tree-covered area provided the children with shelter, opportunities to hide, and the children developed their gross-motor skills by climbing the trees with their peers. The mud kitchen provided the children with real flowers, twigs, leaves, pinecones, pots, pans and utensils to explore in a very inviting space. There was a water wall, a real drum set, a water tray, paint brushes and water as well as a slide and swings for the children to play on.
- The educators supported the children to express their ideas and views during conversations and provided a print-rich environment to support their language and literacy development. One educator had created a bus timetable to prompt discussions around the children's interest in transport. The children had access to some mark-making materials. The resourcing of these experiences varied across the three learning rooms.
- Both of the owners/lead educators had completed the Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years Training Programme and supported an inclusive approach. The educators had recently requested words and phrases from a child's home language to encourage understanding and a sense of belonging in the setting.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to develop an emergent, enquiry-based curriculum that connects the children's recorded interests, individual learning needs and next steps with the planned activities. Evaluating the children's learning experiences each week will support connections to the planned activities.
- It is advised that the educators support the children's language and fine motor development through more playful pedagogical approaches. Adding books and mark-making materials to a wider variety of areas and minimising the use of pencil control worksheets and cutting templates, will enhance this area of practice.

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

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements was good.
- The children enjoyed a range of activities such as the playdough, role-play and table-top activities in the indoor-learning environment. They explored the water-wall pipes and balls in

the outdoor environment, beating the real drum and making ‘soup’ and ‘muffins’ in the mud kitchen.

- The majority of children were developing positive social skills that supported them to play co-operatively and to have fun with their peers. The children collaborated to make roads in the outdoor sand pit and to feed their babies ‘soup’ in the outdoor kitchen. They responded well to strategies such as timers to take turns with resources.
- Some of the children showed an awareness of their developing physical skills in the outdoor environment. One child proudly said, ‘I am strong’ and another child used a crate to create a step to reach the trapeze and to competently hang from it, which brought an innate sense of achievement. The educators affirmed the children for their efforts during the session.
- In two of the learning rooms, the children each had their own journals. These contained examples of their comments on process art and drawings, pencil-control sheets, some of their crafts, and one room included a child voice template to record the children’s comments during the year. There were few records of the children’s achievements and progression in learning in their journals and on the online software. There were few photographs in the rooms to support their reflection on learning.
- The children were developing a sense of identity and belonging in the setting. Some of the children demonstrated this by sharing stories confidently about who was picking them up, who was at home, such as baby siblings, and talking about their recent birthday celebrations. Some of the children had opportunities to go for walks with the educators in the community.
- At the time of the inspection, the children were learning about the plant lifecycle and Spring animals. Some of the children shared their knowledge that ‘snakes were venomous’ and that ‘bees eat nectar’. At times, the educators used digital technology to explore topics with the children. Some children showed their problem-solving skills as they wondered why some buckets created moulds with sand and others didn’t.

Actions advised

- It is advised that the educators create further opportunities for the children to recognise and become aware of their successes and achievements as learners. Using the children’s process art and comments, as well as photographs of them engaging in meaningful learning experiences, will support the development of this skill.
- The educators are advised to record meaningful observations of the children’s individual learning and development journey. Providing a holistic overview of their learning experiences and making connections to what is important to them, will support the creation of richer records

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was good.
- There was an ethos of collaboration and teamwork in the setting. The educators were aware of their roles and responsibilities across all of the learning rooms, which supported the smooth organisation of sessions.
- The owners had requested support from Better Start Quality Development Service to review and develop practices and strategies around positive behaviour management in the setting. The setting had previously completed a self-reflection tool on inclusive environments.
- The owners conducted team meetings on a termly basis. Meetings occurred more frequently between the educators in each learning room, and the owners supported the educators in their role informally, through daily conversations.
- The owners conducted annual appraisals and completed one-to-one meetings with educators, as the need arose.
- There was a staff training policy in place that outlined the educator’s role of participating in ongoing continuing professional development. At the time of the inspection, this was not implemented across the team consistently.
- The educators communicated with parents at arrival and collection times and used the childcare management software to share information about the children’s learning and play experiences. There were no formal opportunities for the parents to meet with the educators to discuss their child’s ongoing learning and development.
- The owners organised an annual open day in the setting for the parents and children to support the settling-in process. This was followed by a parents’ night to outline the general

processes in the setting and to provide a tour of the indoor and outdoor learning environments. The parents were provided with a welcome pack and a registration form.
- The educators managed the children's transitions between the learning rooms in the setting by supporting groups to play together and by visiting the new room prior to their transition.
- The principal of the local primary school had visited the setting to meet the children prior to their transition to school. The educators and the children were invited to the school to get a tour and to meet the teacher of junior infants. The educators in the senior pre-school room completed a summary transition report before the children transitioned to primary school and shared it with parents, who were encouraged to share it with their child's school.

Actions advised

- The owners are advised to provide regular opportunities for the educators to engage in continuing professional development and consistent self-evaluation of practice. Using the Nurturing Skills Learning Hub and obtaining mentoring support from Better Start Quality Development Service will support this area of professional practice.
- It is advised that the owners develop measures for the key person to meet with the parents of their group of children to support the transitions into, between and moving on from the setting to primary school. Using the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment *Mo Scéal* transition report will support the children's continuity in learning as they progress to primary school.
  d

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	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

Published June 2026/ Foilsithe Meitheamh 2026