An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)

Final Report

Setting name	Cois Cairn
Setting address	Cois Cairn Youth & Community Facility Old Connaught Avenue Bray County Wicklow A98AX60
TUSLA registration number	TU2015DR147
DCEDIY number	15DR0297
Date of inspection	29-04-2026
Date of issue of report	18-09-2026

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.

The setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised in this report, the setting chose to accept the report without response.

Early Years Education Inspection

Date of inspection	29-04-2026

Activities conducted during the Inspection

- Pre-inspection meeting with the setting room leader/early years 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 (ECCE) Programme session
- Interaction with children
- Interaction with early years educators
- Feedback meeting with the setting early years educators

Context of setting

Cois Cairn Community Playgroup is a long-established community Early Learning and Care (ELC) setting located in a community centre in Bray, County Wicklow. The sessional setting provides a morning session for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the day of the inspection eleven children and two educators were present. The setting is one of two pre-schools overseen by the current manager and voluntary board of management.

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 good.
- A relaxed and welcoming atmosphere prevailed in the setting. The educators had created an inviting learning environment for children and exchanged in a brief handover with parents at arrival and collection times.
- A slow and flexible routine was observed throughout the session. The children moved freely between the indoor and outdoor learning environments and were consulted about planned activities, demonstrating choice and agency in their play.
- The minimal transitions within the daily routine were announced in the moment by the educators. They assisted the children with tidying up and praised them for their efforts.
- Mealtimes were a social occasion, the children all sat together chatting about their favourite foods and their weekend plans. One child was selected as the "toast helper", moving around the table and offering a tray of toast to the children to select from. The educators were not observed sitting with the children during this time.
- It was evident that educators had developed close relationships with the children. They provided guidance and reassurance through playful interactions and consistent positive tones and affirmations. A key-person approach was not implemented by the educators.
- The educators used wall displays which featured a selection of the children's artwork and photographs of their families and previous learning experiences to support the children's growing sense of identity and belonging.
- The educators invited parents and local community members into the setting from time to time to discuss their occupations and community roles with the children. Recent visitors included the local postman and a member of *An Garda Síochana*. Parents and families were also invited in for Christmas and Graduation celebrations.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to develop and implement a consistent approach to supporting children with navigating transitions within the daily routine. The inclusion of visual and verbal prompts will support the children to understand the upcoming transitions and the sequence of daily activities.
- The educators are advised to consistently sit and engage with the children during mealtimes, role modelling positive social interactions and promoting language development.

- In order to build on the relationships that exist amongst the educators and the children, the educators are advised to implement a key person approach in the setting.

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 play-based curriculum broadly guided by the principles of *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2009)*.
- Curriculum planning was organised on a long-term, medium-term and short-term basis. The short-term plans described daily educator-led activities, intended to promote the current theme being explored. While efforts were made to spontaneously follow the children's interests within the learning environment, links had not been established between the children's interests and the short-term curriculum.
- The educators documented the children's learning and development using individual scrapbooks. These contained photographs of learning experiences and samples of children's artwork and mark making over the course of the year. The educators did not document any written observations.
- The indoor learning environment was organised by the educators into defined interest areas to support children's engagement in play. The resources available included playdough, sand, water, mark making materials, construction resources, small world items, dolls and a home corner. There were a very small number of real-life, recycled items for socio-dramatic play available in the home corner.
- The children had access to two outdoor areas consisting of a wide range of equipment to promote children's gross and fine motor skills such as slides, climbing frames and balance equipment, bikes, and ride on cars. Sand, water and mark-making items were freely accessible to the children outdoors.
- The educators viewed play as being central to children's learning and development. They provided ample time for children to bask in their freely chosen play experiences. They were observed engaging as play partners and creating lovely opportunities for group play, allowing the children to lead and co-create their learning in a purposeful way.
- The children's emergent literacy and numeracy was encouraged through engagement in circle time conversations, songs and storytelling. The educators promoted the children's awareness of the Irish language by casually using phrases throughout the morning.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to review their short-term curriculum plans with a view to developing an emergent and enquiry-based curriculum that is responsive to children's interests and needs. Engagement with *Better Start Quality Development Service* is encouraged to support educators with embedding an emergent curriculum.
- The educators are advised to develop their assessment practices to take greater account of children's learning dispositions, interests, skills and knowledge. The resources available from the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* will support educators with documenting a continuous cycle of noticing, nurturing, responding to and reflecting on children's learning.
- To further enrich the children's learning through active exploration and enquiry, the educators are advised to increase the children's access to a broader range of real life and recycled materials in the learning environment.

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

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements was very good.
- The children demonstrated positive dispositions for learning throughout the morning. As they playfully engaged and participated in activities, they displayed high levels of enjoyment, motivation and concentration skills. They thoroughly enjoyed active movement games such as musical chairs and equally enjoyed listening to a story read by the educator.
- The children were developing their sense of independence and autonomy. They used a self-check-in board on arrival into the setting and confidently took on responsibilities throughout the morning such as folding blankets in pairs. They competently managed their self-help skills as they retrieved their bags and packed them away after mealtime. They managed their personal care routines such as toileting and hand washing and tidied away after themselves with care and attention.
- The children were developing their capacity for co-regulation and were frequently heard naming feelings and emotions as they resolved minor conflicts independently. There were many instances observed of children's developing social skills and positive regard for one another too. For example, as one child arrived her peer greeted her with a smile and said, "*I love your hair today".*
- The children were provided with a vision of their individual learning through their individual scrapbooks and the wide selection of photographs on display in the learning environment. The children's comments and descriptions were not consistently captured on their artwork or in their scrapbooks.
- Various resources for the children to creatively express themselves were freely accessible such as mark-making, playdough, pasta and lentils, water and sand. Other tactile sensory resources were accessible to the children in small baskets, such as sand timers, massage rollers and magnets. These highly effective activities built early positive dispositions towards science through hands-on, active experiences.

Action advised

- The educators are advised to recognise and document the children's voice and reflections on their own learning. For example, on their artwork and in their individual learning journals.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was good.
- The setting was governed by a board of management while the day to-day operations were overseen by a manager who shared her time between two settings. On the day of the inspection the manager was not present. One of the educators held the title of room leader and acted as the main contact point for parents.
- The two educators demonstrated a commitment to providing quality experiences for the children and their families that attended the setting and they worked and communicated seamlessly together.
- There were some two-way channels of communication established between the parents and the setting. These included brief, daily informal chats at arrival and collection times, and general updates were posted on a messaging application, along with images of the children engaged in activities. Formal meetings were available between educators and parents upon request.
- Informal meetings occurred between the manager and the educators on an ad-hoc basis. No formal team meetings occurred to discuss, develop or review practice. Support and supervision sessions were not organised throughout the year to review the needs identified or to implement a planned approach to the educators ongoing professional development.
- The educators had completed mandatory training requirements and some additional continuing professional development (CPD) courses over the last number of years such as *The Rights of The Child* and *Learning Environments in the Early Years.* They expressed an interest in attending training related to the updated *Aistear* Curriculum Framework (2024).
- Transitions into the setting involved a successful child-centred, settling-in approach. Parents and children were invited to an open morning and completed a detailed registration form to support the educators to get to know each child. A parent handbook was circulated to families.
- Transitions out of the setting were also effectively managed by incorporating transitions into the curriculum. The educators had developed relationships with the Home School

Community Liaison Co-ordinators and completed the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) *Mo Scéal* reporting templates to transfer information on children's learning and development to the relevant schools.

Actions advised

- The manager is advised to embed formal structures to support the educators in their professional development and roles such as; regular team meetings and individual support and supervision sessions.
- The manager and the educators are advised to engage with the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to support them with their internal review and development processes. Engagement with external training related to *Aistear* is further advised.
- The educators are advised to introduce further opportunities for the two-way exchange of information with parents. For example, by welcoming parents into the setting each morning and by regularly sharing written observations regarding children's individual learning and development.

Summary of overall inspection

Area	Quality level
Quality of context to support children's learning and development	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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