An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)

Final Report

Setting name	Star's Academy
Setting address	Main Street Newtownforbes Co. Longford Newtownforbes Longford N39D9W7
TUSLA registration number	TU2015LD019
DCEDIY number	09LD0021
Date of inspection	16-10-2025
Date of issue of report	09-01-2026

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.

Early Years Education Inspection

Dates of inspection	16-10-2025

Activities conducted during the Inspection

- Pre-inspection meeting with the setting owner/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 owner/manager and early years educators

Context of setting

Star's Academy is a privately owned Early Learning and Care (ELC) setting. It provides two morning sessions to children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The setting is located in the village of Newtownforbes, and this year is celebrating twenty-two years since first opening. On the day of the inspection, there were eighteen children, three educators and the owner/manager present. 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.
- A very friendly atmosphere was evident in the setting. Parents, grandparents and children were warmly welcomed on arrival. Children independently entered the setting where they hung up their coats and placed their bags in their cubbies.
- Mealtimes were relaxed occasions where children were actively involved in preparing the table. Children and educators sat together and engaged in natural conversations.
- Educators sometimes provided the children with notice of a change in the routine. On other occasions, there was no prior notice provided and therefore many of the children were not ready to move on from what they were engaged in.
- Relationships between educators and the children were consistently kind, caring and attentive. The educators knew the children well and were respectful of their individual needs and temperaments.
- Various efforts were made to recognise each child and support their sense of belonging. These included displays of the children's family photos, children's names on their individual cubbies and photographic documentation which reflected the children and their engagement in the various learning experiences on offer. Acknowledgement and celebration of the diversity amongst the children was fostered through some cultural days and in previous years, visits from parents who had read stories in their home languages.
- Many effective links had been made between the setting and the local community. Members of the community visited the setting throughout the year. These included the local football team, grandparents, a member of an *Garda Síochána*, a teacher and a nurse. The children also had regular opportunities to explore their local village, to visit the local services, to participate in the St. Patrick's Day parade and to perform their Christmas play in the local church.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to build on how they recognise and celebrate all children. Reintroducing opportunities for parents to visit the setting, to share their cultures, traditions and home languages, would assist in this regard. Consideration for diversity in its broadest

sense would also be beneficial. For example, this could include social class, gender, disability/ability, family status, or different family structures.
- Educators are advised to plan for how children move from one activity or area to another. Consistent use of auditory cues combined with visual cues would be helpful in preparing the children for a change that is about to happen.

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.
- A play-based curriculum with many links to *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* was in place.
- Planning processes included monthly plans which were organised into individual weeks. These plans listed adult-chosen themes, seasons and activities. In practice, educators were observed responding to the children's interests.
- Assessment approaches were in their early stages of development in the academic year. At the time of the inspection, they consisted of anecdotal notes capturing the child's voice, and "Our Class Learning Journal" which gathered information about the group and their varied learning experiences during their time in the setting.
- Interactions between educators and children were attentive and responsive. While there was a small number of open-ended style questions and prompts used, most educators were regularly observed using both closed and testing questions in their engagement with the children.
- The indoor learning environments consisted of some defined interest areas. These areas offered a variety of resources and materials. The large number of tables throughout the setting impacted on the ways in which the children could engage and explore with the various compact spaces.
- Daily opportunities were provided to the children to engage in the outdoor learning environment. This space was generous in size and provided a wide variety of experiences including gross motor development, imaginative play and sensory learning. On the day of the inspection, the manager and a number of children were using a magnifying glass to search for spiders. This experience, along with the bug hotel, lead to a rich conversation about insects.
- Play was recognised as the main medium to support and promote the children's learning and development. A variety of play types were provided for and at times, educators were observed engaging as play partners in order to support the children's learning and development.
- Emergent language and literacy skills were fostered throughout the sessions. For example, rhymes and songs were occasionally facilitated and the children had access to a variety of high-quality books.
- Some efforts were made to support the inclusion of children with English as an additional language. The manager reported using visuals to assist in communication with children. Key words in the children's home languages were also sought from parents and where necessary, it was reported that educators translated key words.

Actions advised

- Educators are advised to further develop the anecdotal notes, which capture the children's own words, and to expand on these to create regular narrative observations. Using the information gathered through these observations, educators are advised to prepare a weekly short-term plan for each session that builds on small group interests, previous experiences and achievements.
- Educators are advised to further develop their interaction strategies. Minimising the use of closed and testing questions while building on the use of open-ended questions, comments and prompts would actively extend the children's communication skills, thinking and language learning through play. Engagement with the 'Relationships and Interactions' pillar in the online *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* would support the development of this practice.
- Educators are advised to review their indoor learning environment layouts. Reducing the number of tables would support the structuring of many clearly defined and well-resourced interest areas.

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

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements was good.
- The children presented as content and secure in the setting. They demonstrated interest and enjoyment in their learning. On the day of the inspection, this was particularly evident in the outdoor learning environment.
- Many children displayed a sense of achievement. This was supported by positive and encouraging language from educators who encouraged the children during their play.
- Many children showed a developing awareness of their identity. In conversations with others, the children confidently introduced themselves, referred to family members and discussed personal experiences.
- Children engaged with one another and displayed their abilities to form relationships. Occasionally, children found it difficult to respond to different situations. During these times, educators often resolved the situation, resulting in missed opportunities to empower the children with the necessary skills so that they could independently respond.
- Children communicated in various ways with others. They asked questions, sought help and shared stories with their peers and educators. Opportunities for creative expression were limited due to the frequent use of colouring pages and adult-led crafts.
- Some children displayed a curiosity about print and letters. For example, during the inspection, children identified letters in the environment that they too had in their names.
- Various opportunities were provided for the children to develop an awareness of the natural world. For example, throughout the learning programme, the children had opportunities to plant, to research animals and to learn about the various seasons and their features.

Actions advised

- Educators are advised to further support the children's personal and social skills by empowering them with the necessary skills to respond appropriately in different situations. An agreed set of effective strategies that could be used consistently by all educators would assist in this regard.
- Educators are advised to provide a wide variety of ways in which the children could express themselves, their feelings, thoughts, ideas and creativity. In doing so, educators are advised to minimise the use of product focused art, which places the emphasis on the end product, rather than the process itself.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was good.
- The manager and educators reflected on practice on a regular basis. Formal self-evaluation practices, where the manager and educators used the *Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide* to inform quality improvement practices, were in their infancy.
- The manager generously facilitated daily opportunities for educators to plan and review the learning programme. As leader, the manager promotes high standards and articulates a clear vision and direction for the work of the setting.
- Educators were supported informally and formally. Appraisals were facilitated termly where educators were provided with an opportunity to discuss areas that were working well as well as identifying areas that required further development.
- The manager and educators demonstrated a commitment to their role and in providing quality learning experiences for children. At the time of the inspection, one educator was upskilling and completing her Level 6 in Early Childhood Care and Education. During the inspection, it was reported that the team had plans to engage in training with regards the revised *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum* Framework.
- Several channels of communication were used to share information with parents. These included a weekly text message with photos and a note explaining the various experiences the children were involved in.
- Clear settling-in procedures were in place to support children starting in the setting. There were settling-in visits each June and a gradual, flexible settling-in period was also offered.

- The educators supported the children's transition to primary school. An annual parent-educator meeting was facilitated for parents whose children were moving to primary school the following year. The educators had discussions with the children, and the local principal, vice principal and two students visited the setting each year. The manager reported a good working relationship with the local primary school where she and the principal worked collaboratively to ensure a smooth transition for all children attending that school.

Actions advised

- The manager and educators are advised to establish a systematic approach to self-evaluation. Through this process, the team can then identify areas that are working well while also identifying areas in need of further development throughout the setting.
- The manager is advised to self-refer through the Early Years Hive platform to engage with the Better Start Quality Development Service. In doing so, an early years specialist can assist and guide the educators in implementing the above actions advised.

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

APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

We accept our report and working at every aspect to improve on each issue.

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

We now have observations being done on each child and Learning Book's in place to identify each child's progress.

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