An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)

Final Report

Setting name	Connolly Preschool
Setting address	Connolly National School Connolly Ennis County Clare Y95Y066
TUSLA registration number	TU2015CE031
DCEDIY number	17CE0231
Date of inspection	13-11-2024
Date of issue of report	10-10-2025

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

Date of inspection	13-11-2024

Activities conducted during the Inspection

- Pre-inspection meeting with the setting manager/lead 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 manager/lead educator

Context of setting

Connolly Preschool is a community pre-school that was established in 2001. The setting is operated by a voluntary board of directors and a committee that is comprised of past and present parent representatives. Connolly Preschool is located within Connolly National School and provides a sessional pre-school to children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the morning of the inspection, eight children and two educators 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 was very good.
- A very welcoming and affirming atmosphere was evident in the setting. The educators warmly greeted the children. A very inviting arrivals area in the hallway provided seating and individual hooks and cubbies for the children's belongings. This area was used by the children throughout the morning when preparing to go outside.
- The routine was very flexible and child-led. The children made many choices about their play and learning and the educators followed the children's lead.
- The educators were very respectful in their interactions and they knew the children well. The educators promoted the children's independence and emotional wellbeing by encouraging them to do things for themselves and discussing emotions.
- The children's sense of identity and belonging was effectively supported. While there were respectfully displayed individual posters that depicted the children's family photographs, there was limited representation of the children's home languages. At times the educators used key words from the children's home languages to support the children with the routines.
- During the year, the educators had organised visitors from the local community and they also linked in with the school to attend their community events. These included visits from the local fire brigade, Gardaí, and a paramedic.

Action advised

- The educators are advised to enhance how the children's home languages are used and represented in the setting. The addition of dual signs, bi-lingual books and multi-cultural resources that are meaningful and represent the lived experiences and individual contexts of the children will support this.

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 curriculum was effectively informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum framework.* The educators organised the curriculum using medium-term and short-term

plans and topical themes were drawn from the children's interests. The plans included new language and concepts to be explored as part of the upcoming themes and activities.

- The educators documented the children's learning and progression using a group portfolio, which contained photographs of the children engaged in many different types of play and learning experiences. Individual progression was captured through individual narrative observations and individual learning portfolios. These documents contained information about each child's interests and play preferences, photographs and samples of their art work.
- The educators were supportive and encouraging during their interactions. During child-led play, the educators supported, enhanced and joined the children's play by following their lead. Group circle time experiences involved the educator leading the children through games and questions to explore numbers and colours. There was limited opportunities for the children to engage in group discussion and reflection during circle time.
- Play was a key feature of the provision across the daily routine. The learning environments provided for many different types of play and the educators were responsive when noticing the children's play interests. Some interest areas were engaged with more than others. Independent, free access to mark-making materials and literacy resources was not available to the children.
- A sensory room was located on the school grounds and was accessible to the children in small groups during the session. The educators utilised this space to provide a time for relaxation and small group time activities. This area included bean bags, soft lighting and sensory balls and materials.
- The educators sourced materials during play that enhanced the children's exploration of literacy and numeracy in a meaningful way. On the morning of the inspection, the educators provided paper, pencils and wrote numbers as 'prices' to enhance the children's role play in the shop area.
- The setting had established connections with external agencies to support the inclusion of all children. Additional supports, resources and education plans were in place to support children with additional learning needs.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to increase their use of open-ended interaction strategies with the children during circle time experiences. Open-ended questions, comments and collaborative conversations and reflections, can strengthen how the educators support the children's thinking and learning through their interactions.
- The educators are advised to regularly review the interest areas and learning environments to ensure they are responsive to the interests and investigations of the children. Completing regular reviews based on the children's progressing interests can ensure that environments consistently support and extend play opportunities throughout the year.

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

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements was good.
- The children were settled and interested in their play and learning experiences.
- Friendships were developing and the children enjoyed playing in pairs and small groups. The children had an interest in role play and initiated play scenarios together in the kitchen and shop area. On the morning of the inspection, the children became 'shopkeepers' and 'customers' buying food and filling baskets.
- The children's communication skills ranged from physical gestures to expressive language. A few children enjoyed quiet, parallel play using sand trays. They demonstrated focus and concentration as their interest was sustained using the sand trays and sand materials.
- The children enjoyed using the mark making materials in their play to depict writing lists and prices. There was limited extension of these mark-making opportunities for child-led free expression mark-making.
- The children were inquisitive and interested in their learning. They were eager to participate in group discussions and activities and demonstrated good levels of motivation and initiative when engaging with available play materials and resources. They independently sourced sand timers to support turn-taking during play.
- Songs and music were used for tidying up during the session. The children became active and joyful and really enjoyed this brief music time.

- The children enjoyed the outdoor play area and engaged in group running and games. The children joined the games initiated by the educators outside.

Actions advised

- The children would benefit from a reduction in the use of writing templates and worksheets and the increased use of open-ended writing and meaningful mark-making opportunities. The addition of a dedicated mark-making area and ensuring mark-making props are available throughout the interest areas can support this.
- To build on the use of music, songs and rhymes, the educators are advised to consistently add these types of experiences to the daily routines and transitions during the day. This can ensure that music, song and rhymes are experienced on many occasions during any given day.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was good.
- An effective shared approach to managing the setting was in place. The setting is operated and managed by the lead educator. The lead educator/manager takes responsibility for planning and is supported by the second educator.
- Planning and team communication happened informally. The educators' formal team reflections were not consistently planned for and documented. The educators engaged in a planning day at the beginning of each academic year to discuss the terms ahead.
- The educators reflected informally together on a daily basis. They discussed the children's responses to learning experiences. A formal review process using *Síolta* was not yet established.
- The educators liaised with the local county childcare committee to avail of training supports and had previously completed the Healthy Ireland Smart Start programme. The educators had recently completed training on supporting transitions with Better Start.
- The educators supported communication and partnership with parents through email and online messages. The parents were invited to sign their child's individual observations during the year and the individual learning portfolios were also sent home for parents to view. They shared curriculum updates with parents using an online messaging application.
- The setting had made good links with the primary school. The setting shared resources and the outdoor area with the school and were invited to visit the school and participate in some school events during the year. Transitions to school were effectively supported and good communication occurred between the educators and the teachers. The *Mo Scéal* reporting template was completed by the educators and shared with parents and the school for each child.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to establish formal opportunities for reflection as a team. The addition and use of action planning will support the development, action and reflection on agreed areas for development during the year.
- The educators are advised to engage with *Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* to support formal reviews from a whole setting perspective during the year.

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

Department of Education Insights – Quality in Early Years Education webinars

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