An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)

Final Report

Setting name	Amanda's Cots 'N' Tots
Setting address	Annaugh Clonmany County Donegal F93YP44
TUSLA registration number	TU2015DL004
DCEDIY number	09DL0094
Date of inspection	01-05-2025
Date of issue of report	08-09-2025

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

Dates of inspection	01-05-2025

Activities conducted during the Inspection

- Pre-inspection meeting with the setting 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 two Early Childhood Care and Education Programme sessions
- Interaction with children
- Interaction with early years educators
- Feedback meeting with the setting owner and manager

Context of setting

Amanda's Cots 'N' Tots is a privately-owned setting located in Clonmany, County Donegal. The early learning and care setting offers full and part-time day care as well as two morning sessions for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the day of the inspection, the owner, the manager, two lead early years educators, three early years educators and a total of twenty-seven children were 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 good.
- The atmosphere in the setting was warm and welcoming. Some of the parents engaged in timely conversations with the designated educator, who greeted them at the door of each pre-school room at arrival and collection.
- The educators displayed a daily routine in each learning room. In one room they used photographs of the children to depict the sequence of daily activities. The routines provided good opportunities for the children to experience a balance of indoor and outdoor play.
- At snack time, the educators provided good opportunities for the children to develop self-help skills as they introduced helper roles. They conversed with the children in a personable manner, which supported a sociable experience.
- The educators provided the children with an effective visual and auditory cue to notify them about the transition to snack. They used 'Rainbow' the puppet and a bell to support the children's understanding of this transition in one learning room. The length of the transition to snack and subsequently to outdoor play created periods where the children were not purposeful or engaged in learning.
- Each educator had responsibility for recording observations for a designated group of children. The educators were warm and affectionate in their interactions with the children in each room. At the time of the inspection, there was no key person policy in place.
- The educators supported the children's sense of belonging by displaying their group crafts and collages. The birthday and family displays used the children's photographs and some photographs of community members who had visited the setting were displayed. There were few opportunities for the parents to come into the setting and to share their hobbies, interests and skills with the children.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to develop strategies that support the children to purposefully engage during the transition to and from the snack-time experience. This will minimise the waiting times and create a calmer experience as the children transition to subsequent activities.

- It is advised that the manager develop a key person policy for the setting. Engaging in research and discussion with the educators and parents around the effective implementation of this approach is advised.
- The educators are advised to encourage parents to participate in the daily life of the setting and to extend parental involvement to 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 recorded plans on a short-term basis. They used a topic approach, such as 'space' and 'superheroes,' when planning the activities. At times there was an overfocus on product-based art and activities promoting colour, number and letter recognition. The educators noted some of the children's play preferences and interests in the plans. At times, the educators completed brief evaluations of the weekly activities.
- The educators recorded the children's learning using the learning-story approach at various times during the year. Additionally, they uploaded some picture stories on an e-storybook application that was used in the setting. The parents had access to these learning records once the educators uploaded them.
- The educators were playful in their approaches and facilitated a range of play experiences for the children in the indoor and outdoor learning environments. The educators knew the children well and a few educators responded to and extended the children's interests spontaneously during play.
- The indoor environment provided opportunities for the children to engage in table-top play, role play, sensory play and a book area. Some of the role play areas were enhanced by offering effective visuals such as sample hairstyles beside the hairdressing resources and a menu with prices of food in the bakery area.
- The educators provided the children with the opportunity to play outdoors during the inspection. They had access to bubbles, trikes, scooters, a slide, an outdoor house and a sand tray. Some of the children and educators created an obstacle course together. Access to a range of well-planned areas with authentic, open-ended and natural materials was limited across the indoor and outdoor learning environments.
- The educators promoted the children's language and literacy skills during the circle time activity. They sang songs and read a story to the children. They provided mark-making materials such as chalk, crayons, paint and easels for the children. The children in one learning room were observed learning Lámh communication signs and Irish words during a circle time experience.
- The manager was the named inclusion coordinator for the setting, having completed the Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years training. Some of the educators had completed the Hanen communication programme. The setting was availing of support from the Better Start Access and Inclusion Model specialist. The educators had started to develop Access and Inclusion plans for children with additional needs.

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. Developing a curriculum statement to ensure consistent, play-based practices across the setting is advised.
- It is advised that the educators record a variety of regular, meaningful, strength-based assessments to gather information about children's holistic and significant learning experiences and achievements.
- The educators are advised to develop the indoor and outdoor learning environments to provide for a broader array of inviting areas of play with open-ended, natural and real-life materials for the children to explore.

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

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements was good.
- The children enjoyed activities such as a rocket collage activity, building blocks, playdough, wheeled vehicles and the obstacle course outdoors.
- The majority of children were developing the ability to play co-operatively with their peers and were secure and at ease in the setting.

- The educators affirmed the children for their efforts and achievements during the construction and craft activities. The children's individual folders that contained their arts, crafts and cutting templates went home each term for the parents to view. There was an overuse of templates and product-based art in the folders which limited the scope of the children's individual creative expression. The children's comments were not frequently recorded on their paintings or in the recorded observations.
- Some children liked to share information about their family background and personal experiences. One child talked about his uncle who worked near the setting. Another child talked about exercise and her parent's hobby of going to the gym. Some children recognised themselves as competent learners and celebrated their success when they completed an activity.
- A few of the children demonstrated their developing knowledge and understanding of the world in activities such as their collage of rockets and subsequent models of rockets they made from Duplo blocks. There were few opportunities provided for the children to fully develop their individual and shared interests through the use of digital technology and factual books.

Actions advised

- It is advised that the educators record the children's comments about their process art. Using their ideas, comments and questions to plan meaningful experiences and activities will support the extension of their interests and their sense of involvement in their learning. Reflecting their achievements visually in the room, in their individual folders and in observations will support their ability to reflect on themselves as successful learners.
- The educators are advised to support the children to become creative in their expressions. Providing frequent art opportunities that are process based and are child directed will support this area of their learning.
- It is advised that the educators further nurture the children's understanding of the world. Using factual books, active learning experiences and videos will support the extension of their individual and shared interests and will promote curiosity, exploration and investigation.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was very good.
- The educators were clear about their roles and responsibilities and an ethos of teamwork was evident.
- The manager had recently established processes for internal review using some self-evaluation tools from the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide*. The manager had requested mentoring support from Better Start Quality Development specialist to support improvement in the setting.
- The manager conducted supervision meetings with each educator every six weeks. Staff meetings were conducted each term. At the time of the inspection, the staff meetings were not used to embed consistent review and reflection on quality improvements and practice.
- The educators were engaged in higher education in Early Childhood Education and Care at the time of the inspection. The manager used the supervision process to identify areas of training that the educators required.
- The educators communicated with parents at arrival and collection and through the use of the e-storybook application around 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 manager and educators organised an annual open day in the setting for the parents and children to support the settling-in process. The manger emailed the parents the setting policies and procedures and provided a brief overview of the setting on an information sheet.
- The educators shared information about each child as they transitioned from one learning room to another within the setting. The majority of the children attended the setting on a full-time basis, and therefore were familiar with the educators and each room in the setting.
- The educators completed the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment *Mo Scéal* transition report with parental consent and shared it with the teacher of junior infants. Social stories and photographs of the local primary schools were used to support the children's understanding of the transition to school. One teacher of junior infants had organised a visit to the setting to meet the children prior to their transition to primary school.

Actions advised

- The manager is advised to use action planning with the educators during staff meetings to embed and develop processes for self-evaluation and quality improvement. Providing opportunities for the educators to engage in training around planning and assessment will support the improvement of pedagogical practices.
- To further promote two-way communication, the manager is advised to develop opportunities for the key person to meet with the children's parents with regard to their learning and development. Developing a more comprehensive and visual parent handbook to support the settling-in process is also advised.

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	Good
Quality of management and leadership for learning	Very 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

APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

We are grateful for the feedback from our inspection. We were aware there were areas we needed to work on and this is why we had enrolled with the Better Start Access and Inclusion Model. Luckily our inspection came before we set our goals with our Better Start Access and Inclusion Model specialist because now we are setting our goals around the advised actions from our inspection. We are excited to commence working on these goals which we hope will make our setting a better place for staff, children and their families.

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

At the next staff meeting we are going to discuss strategies to use to engage the children during the transition to and from snack time. Also at the staff meeting staff will be reminded to record children's comments about their art and how more open ended materials are needed and less templates. We will discuss how technology can be used for sharing learning information and how staff can go to the library and borrow any books needed for an area of learning. We are currently researching 'Key Person' policies in order to come up with one for our setting. From September we are going to welcome parents back into our setting instead of dropping the children at the door. The Better Start specialist is going to provide staff with training on the 'Emergent Curriculum'. We are currently looking for some training on learning stories also to ensure they are more personal and don't always have to have an educational purpose. The Better Start specialist is also going to help us develop our indoor and outdoor environments and help us with introducing more open-ended and natural and real life materials. From September staff meetings will use action planning with staff to embed and develop processes for self-evaluation and quality improvement. Training will be provided around planning and assessment for staff as advised. Meetings will be planned with parents and keyworkers in November and then next year we hope to extend this to two meetings with another in August before the children commence their new room. Finally we are currently working on improving our 'Parent Handbook' and hope to have it ready for the new term in September.

Published September 2025/ Foilsithe Meán Fómhair 2025