Early Years Education-focused Inspections
in
Early Years Settings Participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme

Briefing Paper

26 May 2015
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context
The Department of Education and Skills (DES) works to improve the quality of learning for children and young people in a range of educational settings, including primary schools, post-primary schools and centres for education. Our aim is to evaluate key aspects of the work in educational settings and to promote improvement.

The Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills (DES), at the request of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), is developing a model of inspection that focuses on the quality of educational provision in early years settings participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme.

The ECCE scheme provides a free pre-school year for children in the year before they start school. This scheme was introduced in 2010 by DCYA for children aged more than 3 years 2 months and less than 4 years 7 months on 01 September in the relevant pre-school year. This signifies an annual governmental investment of €170 million. Both the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills recognise the critical importance of high quality early education for optimising children’s learning and development.

The Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills plans to pilot Early Years Education-focused Inspections (EYEIs) in Autumn 2015. It is intended that these education-focused inspections will complement a range of other measures that have been taken to support the ongoing improvement of quality in early education. The education-focused inspections will explore the extent to which early years practitioners participating in the ECCE scheme are engaging with existing national frameworks: Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, and Síolta: the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education. The education-focused inspections will ascertain the nature, range and appropriateness of the early educational experiences for children who are participating in the ECCE scheme.

This briefing paper provides information on the proposed Early Years Education-focused Inspections to be undertaken by the Early Years Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills.

1.2 Rationale and purpose
Early Years Education-focused Inspections are being introduced at this time for a number of reasons:

- To highlight the importance of high-quality early education in nurturing the foundations for lifelong learning and in helping children develop to their full potential now and into the future
- To support the ongoing development of quality within the early years settings participating in the ECCE scheme through the provision of support and advice to early years practitioners in relation to practices that impact on children’s learning experiences and achievements
- To provide an assurance of the quality of the early education experienced by children participating in the ECCE scheme
- To complement other measures undertaken nationally to support ongoing improvement in the quality of early education provision; in particular the implementation of the national frameworks through engagement with the Aistear/ Síolta Practice Guide
To provide information, which will be available to the public, and in particular to parents of pre-school children, on the quality of early education in early years settings participating in the ECCE scheme.

It is intended that the Early Years Education-focused Inspections will:

- Ascertain the nature, range and appropriateness of children's learning experiences and achievements
- Identify and affirm good practice in relation to educational provision in early years settings participating in the ECCE scheme
- Provide advice and support to early years practitioners about how children's learning experiences and achievements can be developed
- Support self-evaluation and review processes within the settings
- Identify settings that may benefit from additional support on aspects of practice
- Provide written inspection reports, which will be publicly available, on the quality of early education provided by early years settings participating in the ECCE scheme
- Complement information provided by inspections conducted by other agencies within the early years settings participating in the ECCE scheme
- Contribute to the gathering of information at a national level on the quality of pre-school children's learning experiences and achievements.

2. FEATURES OF EDUCATION-FOCUSED INSPECTIONS IN EARLY YEARS SETTINGS PARTICIPATING IN THE ECCE SCHEME

2.1 Focus and Principles

The Early Years Education-focused Inspections aim to support the ongoing improvement of quality in early educational provision and will be underpinned by a number of principles including:

- Early childhood is a significant and distinct time which must be nurtured, respected, valued and supported in its own right
- High quality educational experiences in early childhood contribute significantly to life-long learning success
- Children’s well-being and holistic educational development should be supported in early childhood in accordance with their needs
- The role of the practitioner within early education settings is central
- Children should be active agents in their learning and development, and enabled to achieve their potential as competent, confident learners, through high quality interactions with their environment and early childhood practitioners
- Children's strengths, needs, opinions, interests and well-being are integral to the early education provided for them
- Play is central to the learning and development of young children
- Each child has his/own set of experiences and a unique life story. The child’s identity as an individual and as a member of a family and wider community is recognised
The role of parents as children’s primary educators is recognised and supported.

Education-focused inspections take cognisance of context factors related to the ECCE setting, including socio-economic circumstances.

The ongoing development of quality through co-professional dialogue between practitioners in early years settings and DES Early Years inspectors is promoted.

Education-focused inspections are conducted in accordance with the Code of Practice for the Inspectorate (DES, 2015).

2.2 Inspection Framework

The proposed quality framework for education-focused inspections has been informed by:

- The pilot inspections carried out by the DES Inspectorate and HSE Inspectorate (2011)
- DES pilot inspections in Early Start settings (2013/2014)
- National and international research and policy relating to early childhood education and its inspection
- Review of other agencies’ inspection processes and requirements within the early years settings.

The quality framework incorporates the key elements of best practice in early education, and categorises provision in accordance with the following four broad areas:

- Quality of 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

Key outcomes (20 in total) are identified for each of the four broad areas which describe aspects of best practice (Appendix 1). To ensure optimum transparency for early years practitioners about the focus of the inspections, each outcome has been further described through the use of a number of possible signposts of practice (Appendix 2). It is important to emphasise that the lists of signposts of practice are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive. It is acknowledged that there are different approaches among early years service providers and that providers are at different stages of development. It is not expected that all signposts will be evident in a given setting.

The quality of the context to support children’s learning and development includes the following 3 outcomes:

- The atmosphere and organisation of the setting nurtures children’s learning and development
- Relationships are responsive, respectful and reciprocal
- Children’s sense of identity and belonging is nurtured.

The quality of processes to support children’s learning and development encompasses 8 key outcomes:

- Provision is informed by Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework
• Information about the child’s development informs the next steps in learning
• High quality interactions with children are facilitated
• The environment and resources support children’s learning and development
• Play is central to children’s learning and development
• Emergent language, literacy and numeracy skills are fostered
• Provision for children’s learning and development is closely aligned to their interests and developing capabilities
• Children learn within an inclusive environment.

The quality of **children’s learning experiences and achievements** focuses on 5 key outcomes within the quality framework:

• Children demonstrate engagement and enjoyment in their learning and a positive sense of well-being
• Children experience achievement and are developing through their learning experiences
• Children are developing a sense of identity and belonging and personal and social skills to support their learning and development
• Children communicate their experiences, thoughts, ideas and feelings with others in a variety of ways
• Children make sense of their world by interacting with others and their environment through playing, investigating and questioning.

The quality of **management and leadership for learning** within the early years setting participating in the ECCE scheme will be evaluated using the following 4 key outcomes:

• Planning, review and inspection are informed by *Síolta; the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*
• Management within the setting provide for a high quality learning and development experience for children
• Clear two-way channels of communication are fostered between the early years setting, parents, families and children
• Transitions into, from and within the setting are managed effectively to support children’s learning and development.

Inspectors will engage in professional dialogue with practitioners about these outcomes and signposts for practice during the inspection visit. Inspectors’ judgements about the quality of provision in each of the four areas will be informed by their observation of activities organised and facilitated by the practitioners during the day of the inspection visit.

### 2.3 Inspection Focus
It is important to emphasise that the main focus of the inspection will be on the quality of the dynamic processes that facilitate children’s learning in the early years setting. Inspections will not require the creation of new records or documents. Inspectors will review the available planning documentation used by practitioners to support the normal everyday practices within the setting. This information will help inspectors to ascertain the breadth, balance and developmental nature of the emerging curriculum provided for children. Inspectors will also review records relating to children’s learning experiences and achievements in order to
develop an understanding of their educational progression. Opportunities will be provided for early years practitioners within the pre-school settings to discuss the content and nature of documents relating to the children's learning and development.

2.4 Quality Continuum
A five-point scale will be used to evaluate the quality of provision within each of the four broad areas with a view to supporting ongoing improvement in the quality of provision within the early years setting.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of children.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>Provision that is very good is highly effective in meeting the needs of children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Provision that is good is effective in meeting the needs of children but with some aspects to be developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Provision that is fair requires practice to be improved to meet the needs of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Provision that is poor is inadequate and requires significant improvement to meet the needs of children.</td>
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All evaluative judgements made by inspectors about the quality level assigned to each of the four areas within the early years setting inspected will be based on the evidence gathered during the inspection. Inspectors will provide clear oral and written feedback to practitioners in the setting on the inspection.

2.5 Child protection
The primary regulatory function in respect of inspecting the compliance of an early years setting participating in the ECCE scheme with Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (DCYA, 2011) rests with TUSLA. However, if deficiencies in respect of a setting’s compliance with Children First: National Guidance come to the attention of a DES inspector in the course of an education-focused inspection, the inspector will, in the spirit of Children First: National Guidance, alert the management of the early years setting to the deficiencies noted and will report the matter to TUSLA.

Where a child protection concern is brought to the attention of the inspector(s) during an education-focused inspection in an early years setting, the DES inspector(s) will follow DES procedures for reporting on child protection matters.

3. HOW WILL THE EARLY YEARS EDUCATION-FOCUSED INSPECTION MODEL OPERATE?

3.1 Before the Inspection
(a) How will early years settings be selected for education-focused inspections?
The DES Inspectorate will liaise with other agencies involved in inspection activity in early years settings to ensure that there is no duplication in inspections scheduled for a given day.

A range of criteria will be used to select a number of early years settings participating in the ECCE scheme, including history of inspection activity within that setting. Account will also be taken of factors such as those listed below in selecting early years settings for education-focused inspections:

- Geographical location
- Urban/rural context
- Size of early years setting and number of children in attendance
- Nature of management (privately owned/community)
- Pedagogy/philosophy of the setting
- Primary language of the setting

(b) How much notice will be given?
Normally, early years settings participating in the ECCE scheme will not receive prior notice of an education-focused inspection. This is to facilitate the inspection of educational provision in the setting under the normal conditions of a typical day in the setting. In the exceptional event that the education-focused inspection cannot be completed on the day of the inspection, it will be completed within 7 working days from the original date of inspection.

(c) How will the service provider know who is going to conduct the education-focused inspection?
The early years inspection team will be recruited based on their qualifications and their experience of the early education sector. It will also include a number of existing DES inspectors. Early years inspectors conducting education-focused inspections will present official identification on arrival in the early years setting.

The number of inspectors who visit the early years setting will be influenced by the number of designated learning rooms participating in the ECCE scheme within that setting. Typically, one inspector will visit where there are two or fewer designated learning rooms. Two or more inspectors will visit early years settings that have three or more learning rooms. Occasionally, it may arise that two inspectors will visit the same learning room within an early years setting at the same time (work shadowing, pilot inspection) but generally there will only be one inspector operating within a particular learning room at any given time.

3.2 The Inspection

(a) What will happen on the day of the education-focused inspection?
Typically, the inspector(s) will arrive in an early years setting prior to the commencement of learning activities. On arrival, the inspector(s) will present official identification to the manager/lead practitioner of the setting. A brief initial meeting will be held with the manager/lead practitioner and the inspector(s) in order to:

- Outline the inspection process
- Agree the schedule of visits to the various learning rooms/areas
- Discuss any practical issues that may affect the inspection
- Make arrangements for discussion and oral feedback of inspection findings
• Request available planning documents and records of children’s learning and achievements for review during the inspection
• Discuss the setting’s self-evaluation practices and improvement priorities

The inspector(s) will have due regard for the responsibilities and demands on the time of the manager and/or lead practitioner within the setting.

Observation of learning activities
The main activity of the education-focused inspection will be the observation and inspection of the processes and practices that concern children’s learning in a range of learning rooms within the early years setting. In smaller settings it may be possible for the inspector(s) to visit all learning rooms. In other cases, however, the inspector(s) will visit a sample of learning rooms. The scheduling of these visits will be at the discretion of the inspector(s) who will indicate to the manager which learning rooms will be visited during that inspection day.

A visit to an early years setting will generally last for the full duration of the pre-school day. Visits to individual learning rooms within the setting will range in duration depending on the nature of activities. Such visits will typically include:
• Observation of learning activities
• Review of learning environments
• Dialogue with practitioners
• Interaction with the children
• Review/ discussion of available documentation.

In the event that more than one inspector is involved in the education-focused inspection, a short meeting will be convened for inspectors to share findings and agree an overall quality level in respect of each of the four areas outlined in the quality framework.

Feedback meetings
Subsequent to a visit to a learning room, the inspector will provide the early years practitioner(s) whose work was inspected with feedback on that work. In some situations this feedback may be provided individually if the inspector deems this to be appropriate. Feedback may be provided directly after the observation visit, or at a time agreed by the inspector and the early years practitioner(s).

At the conclusion of the inspection, the inspector will communicate the draft overall findings to the manager of the early years setting and, where feasible, to any additional pre-school leaders. The inspector will:
• Acknowledge and affirm effective practice
• Discuss the quality of the early education provision in each of the four broad areas using the quality levels from the five-point quality continuum
• Enable the manager and other practitioners present to discuss and respond to the findings
• Identify, as necessary, areas for development and make relevant and practical recommendations for improvement
• Outline the process leading to the publication of the report.

The draft findings presented at the feedback meeting will be finalised and a short report prepared for the early years setting.
3.3 After the inspection
A short draft inspection report (approximately 800 words in length) will be prepared following the completion of the inspection. The report will present the main findings and recommendations under each of the four broad areas as outlined in section 2 above. There will be no singular overall rating. A sample report template is presented in Appendix 3.

The report will be processed through the normal quality assurance procedures of the Inspectorate and issued to the early years setting for factual verification and response, as prescribed in *Publication of School Inspection Reports: Guidelines* (DES, 2015). Ordinarily, the final report and the response from the early years setting, will be published on the website of the Department of Education and Skills. Reports will also be hosted on the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Pobal websites.

3.4 Review of an Early Years Education-focused inspection (EYEI)
A practitioner or manager of an early years setting affected by an EYEI may seek a review of the inspection using the procedures outlined in *Procedures for Review of Inspections on Schools and Teachers under Section 13 (9) of the Education Act (1998)* (Revised 2015). ([www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie))

4. IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 The Pilot Phase
The education-focused inspection model will be trialled in Autumn 2015 in a number of early years settings participating in the ECCE scheme. Reports on education-focused inspections undertaken during the pilot phase will not be published but will be issued to the early years settings inspected having gone through the Inspectorate’s normal quality assurance processes. It is hoped that practitioners in the early years settings that participate in the pilot will discuss the inspection process with other stakeholders from the early years sector. This sharing of information about the practical implementation of the proposed education-focused inspections will contribute to the consultation process and the review of the inspection model.

5. HOW WILL THE EARLY YEARS SECTOR BE CONSULTED?

5.1 The Consultation Process
A briefing and consultation session will be held on Tuesday 26 May 2015 in the Department of Education and Skills, Dublin.

Participants in the pilot inspection will be consulted by the DES Inspectorate about their experience of the education-focused inspections. Early years practitioners and representatives from the early education sector will also be consulted following the pilot phase and will be invited to submit their views. The information that will be circulated within the early years sector, during the pilot phase, to facilitate engagement in the formal consultation process will include:

- Copies of the briefing paper on Early Years Education-focused Inspection (May 2015)
- Feedback forms (hard copy and online) (Autumn 2015)
• Arrangements for bi-lateral meetings (Autumn 2015)
• Timelines for submissions and consultation meetings (Autumn 2015).

The submissions made by the stakeholders in early education in relation to the education-focused inspections will be collated and analysed. Proposed changes will be considered and the updated inspection model will be submitted to the Minister for Education and Skills for approval in Autumn 2015.

The DES Inspectorate is committed to working in partnership with the early years sector and will liaise regularly with practitioners, policy makers and stakeholders. Regular opportunities will be provided for stakeholders within the early years sector to provide feedback and make suggestions which will inform the Inspectorate’s review and development of inspection processes.

Conclusion

Should you require further clarification about this proposed Early Years Education-focused Inspection model or about the consultation process please submit your query to eyei@education.gov.ie.
APPENDIX 1: Overview of Quality Framework for Education-focused Inspections in Early Years Settings participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area 1 - Quality of context to support children’s learning and development</strong></td>
<td>1. The atmosphere and organisation of the setting nurtures children’s learning and development</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Relationships are responsive, respectful and reciprocal</td>
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<td>3. Children’s sense of identity and belonging is nurtured</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Area 2 – Quality of processes to support children’s learning and development</strong></td>
<td>4. Provision is informed by <em>Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Information about the children’s development informs next steps in learning</td>
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<td>6. High quality interactions with children are facilitated</td>
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<td>7. The environment and resources support children’s learning and development</td>
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<td>8. Play is central to children’s learning and development</td>
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<td></td>
<td>9. Emergent language, literacy and numeracy skills are fostered</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10. Provision for children’s learning and development is closely aligned to their interests and developing capabilities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11. Children learn within an inclusive environment</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Area 3 – Quality of children’s learning experiences and achievements</strong></td>
<td>12. Children demonstrate engagement and enjoyment in their learning and a positive sense of well-being</td>
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<td></td>
<td>13. Children experience achievement and are developing through their learning experiences</td>
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<td>14. Children are developing a sense of identity and belonging and personal and social skills to support their learning and development</td>
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<td>15. Children communicate their experiences, thoughts, ideas and feelings with others in a variety of ways</td>
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<td>16. Children make sense of their world by interacting with others and the environment through playing, investigating and questioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area 4 - Quality of management and leadership for learning</strong></td>
<td>17. Planning, review and inspection are informed by <em>Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>18. Management within the setting provide for a high quality learning and development experience for children</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19. Clear two-way channels of communication are fostered between the early years setting, parents, families and children</td>
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<td></td>
<td>20. Transitions into, from and within the setting are managed effectively to support children’s learning and development</td>
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APPENDIX 2:
Quality Framework for Education-Focused Inspections in Early Years Settings participating in the ECCE scheme
## Area 1 - Quality of context to support children’s learning and development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Signposts for practice: Consider the extent to which…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. The atmosphere and organisation of the setting nurtures children’s learning and development | • A caring ethos and a warm, affirming atmosphere are evident  
• Routines and procedures consistently promote children’s physical, social and emotional security, together with their learning and development  
• It is evident that children are active agents in choosing and organising their learning and development activities  
• Snack/meal time is seen as a social occasion and an opportunity to promote well-being and a healthy lifestyle  
• Children are supported to manage their own hygiene and personal care needs  
• Times of transition within the setting support positive learning experiences for children |
| 2. Relationships are responsive, respectful and reciprocal | • Practitioners show sensitivity, warmth and positive regard for children and their families  
• Practitioners foster caring and respectful child-child relationships  
• Secure relationships are fostered between children and key practitioners in the setting  
• Practitioners model and provide guidance and encouragement towards positive behaviour  
• Recognition, praise and encouragement are a regular feature of the responses to children |
| 3. Children’s sense of identity and belonging is nurtured | • Respect for and recognition of the uniqueness of each child is evident  
• Opportunities are provided for children to develop an appreciation of themselves as individuals and as members of groups  
• Opportunities are provided which bring together children, families and practitioners within the setting  
• Diversity is recognised, valued and affirmed within an inclusive learning environment  
• The setting has made connections and is integrated with the local community |

### Overall Quality Level: **Quality of context to support children’s learning and development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
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1 These outcomes and indicators have been informed by *Aistear* and *Síolta*. The lists are neither exhaustive nor prescriptive.
**Area 2 – Quality of processes to support children’s learning and development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Signposts for practice: Consider the extent to which…</th>
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</table>
| 4. Provision is informed by Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework | • A broad-based curriculum, informed by *Aistear*, has been documented and is being used to support children’s learning and development  
• Practitioners in the setting have been involved in the development of an emergent, enquiry-based curriculum and demonstrate knowledge, understanding and confidence about putting these plans into practice  
• Planning takes account of children’s varying interests, cultural backgrounds, strengths, needs and previous learning experiences  
• There is a planned approach to developing children’s dispositions, values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding  
• Planning supports the provision of a connected, holistic learning experience for children  
• Planning for curriculum implementation is organised on long-term, medium-term and short-term bases  
• The implementation of the curriculum is monitored and reviewed on a regular basis |
| 5. Information about the children’s development informs next steps in learning | • A variety of assessment approaches is used to gather information about children’s learning experiences and achievements  
• Assessment for learning approaches are used to inform the next steps in children’s learning experiences and ensure continuity in their learning  
• Information about children’s learning is regularly documented to build a rich picture of children’s learning and development  
• Children are regularly provided with appropriate formative feedback to extend their learning and development  
• Parents are consulted and informed about their child’s learning and development |
| 6. High quality interactions with children are facilitated              | • The child is viewed as a competent and confident learner  
• The child is recognised as an active agent in his/her learning  
• There is an appropriate balance between adult-initiated and child-initiated learning and development activities  
• The practitioner knows the child well and responds to his/her interests and learning needs appropriately  
• The practitioner engages and motivates the child in his/her learning and development in a respectful and caring way  
• The practitioner uses a range of appropriate interaction strategies and methodologies to facilitate a broad range of learning experiences  
• The practitioner promotes peer interactions in pairs and small groups to nurture supportive relationships |
| 7. The environment and resources support children’s learning and development | • Indoor and outdoor environments are well maintained, safe and inviting  
• Indoor and outdoor environments are purposefully structured to develop children’s curiosity, creativity, imagination and desire for exploration  
• Indoor and outdoor environments and resources are used effectively to stimulate, support, consolidate and extend children’s learning  
• Children have regular access to outdoor learning environments  
• Resources are accessible, developmentally appropriate, and provide for multi-sensory learning experiences  
• The setting has a variety of literacy and numeracy/mathematical resources which are used regularly and purposefully  
• Children’s achievements are creatively displayed and accessible to children and parents  
• Children make choices around their engagement with environments, resources and activities  
• The environments are used to develop children’s physical fitness and gross and fine motor skills  
• The environment is structured to ensure children learn in a variety of contexts throughout the day |
8. Play is central to children’s learning and development
- Play is the central medium through which children learn and develop within the setting
- There are opportunities for children to plan for, talk about and think about their play experiences
- Opportunities are provided for a variety of types of play including creative play, language play, physical play, imaginative play, socio-dramatic play and construction play
- Play opportunities are freely available, accessible, appropriate and well-resourced
- Play is used as a medium for children to interact with, explore and make sense of the world
- Children have opportunities to engage in play activities alone, with peers and/or with practitioners
- The practitioner effectively facilitates play, leads play and directs play in order to effectively support children’s learning and development
- Play enables purposeful learning and development for all children in accordance with their needs and interests

9. Emergent language, literacy and numeracy skills are fostered
- Practitioners model appropriate language, including mathematical language, and encourage an expanded use of vocabulary and language during interactions
- Practitioners ensure there is a suitable balance between speaking and listening during interactions
- Children are encouraged and supported to express their views, emotions and thinking in a range of ways
- Children’s home language(s) is/are valued and affirmed
- Children regularly enjoy and share a variety of rhymes, jingles, poems and songs
- Children have access to high-quality books and are provided with regular opportunities to listen to and explore stories
- Opportunities are provided for children to engage in mark-making
- Mathematical thinking and learning is promoted through the use of open-ended resources and games, linked to the everyday lives of children

10. Provision for children’s learning and development is closely aligned to their interests and developing capabilities
- Planning for children’s learning and development builds on the interests, previous experiences and achievements of children
- Practitioners set high but realistic expectations for all children in the setting
- Opportunities are provided for children to achieve fulfilment, success and mastery during learning activities
- Children are enabled and supported to make connections in their learning and to transfer their knowledge and skills to new learning situations
- Children are encouraged and supported to respond creatively as they engage in learning
- Learning activities provide progressively more complex, varied and challenging experiences for children in accordance with their individual needs and abilities

11. Children learn within an inclusive environment
- An inclusive approach is adopted to ensure the engagement of all learners within the setting
- Practitioners recognise and accommodate diversity in the style, pace and focus of children’s learning and development
- Specific attention is paid to the learning of children with additional needs, children who have English as an additional language, minority groups, and those affected by educational disadvantage
- The learning and development of children is fostered in partnership with parents
- The setting has made links with external agencies, where appropriate and possible, with a view to optimising support for children with additional needs

These outcomes and indicators have been informed by Aistear and Síolta. The lists are neither exhaustive nor prescriptive.
Overall Quality Level: **Quality of processes to support children’s learning and development**

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### Area 3 – Quality of children’s learning experiences and achievements

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| **12. Children demonstrate engagement and enjoyment in their learning and a positive sense of well-being** | - Children demonstrate enjoyment in their learning  
- Children are motivated, interested and engaged in their learning activities  
- Children display initiative, self-reliance, self-confidence and demonstrate positive learning dispositions such as resilience, resourcefulness and persistence  
- Children make decisions about their learning and during their learning experiences  
- Children are aware of and can name their feelings experienced during learning activities  
- Children demonstrate creativity and a sense of wonder and natural curiosity  
- Children are developing the ability to play cooperatively, in pairs or small groups |
| **13. Children experience achievement and are developing through their learning experiences** | - Children experience success during learning activities  
- Children regularly discuss or share aspects of their learning achievements with others  
- Children demonstrate an awareness of their changing and developing abilities  
- Information documented about children’s learning reflects their achievements in a range of connected learning experiences appropriate to an early education context  
- Information documented about children’s learning reflects their development with due regard for their individual interests, needs and approaches  
- Children show increasing confidence and co-ordination over their gross and fine motor skills  
- Children demonstrate a growing capacity to make healthy choices about nutrition, exercise and personal routines  
- Children demonstrate a developing capacity to reflect, use judgements and make decisions |
| **14. Children are developing a sense of identity and belonging and personal and social skills to support their learning and development** | - Children show an awareness and appreciation of their own uniqueness and have a sense of who they are  
- Children are able to describe their interests, opinions, feelings, family background and personal experiences  
- Children are developing a positive understanding of their own identity as competent learners  
- Children are developing a positive understanding of their identity as members of families and groups  
- Children have an awareness of their local community and the roles of different people within that community  
- Children show an understanding of and regard for the identity, rights and views of others  
- Children understand the rules and boundaries of acceptable behaviour and demonstrate an evolving capacity for self-regulation and conflict resolution  
- Children are developing personal and social skills which enable them to respond appropriately to different situations e.g. turn-taking, co-operating, negotiating, taking responsibility, building relationships |
| **15. Children communicate their experiences, thoughts, ideas and feelings with others in a variety of ways** | - Children use and interpret non-verbal communication strategies such as making eye contact and listening,  
- Children use language to give and receive information, interpret experiences, ask questions, make requests, refuse, negotiate, solve problems, imagine and recreate roles and to clarify their thinking, ideas and feelings |
Children interact with other children and adults by listening, discussing, questioning and taking turns in conversations

Children appreciate their home-language and understand how different languages can be used with different people and in different situations

Children express their feelings, thoughts, ideas and creativity through story-telling, making art, mark making, moving to music, role playing and problem solving

Children explore sound, pattern, rhythm and repetition in language

Children represent their ideas and feelings through various media and play activities

Children demonstrate an awareness and emergent understanding of the meaning and uses of symbols, pictures, print and numbers as a means of communication

Children have a growing understanding of the meaning and use of mathematical language

Children make sense of their world by interacting with others and their environment through playing, investigating and questioning

Children are inquisitive and confident in exploring and thinking about their learning experiences

Children are aware of the natural environment and its features, materials, animals and plants

Children engage, explore and experiment in their environment and use their developing physical skills to manipulate objects and materials

Children use books and ICT for fun, to gain information and to broaden their understanding of the world

Children collaborate with others to share interests and ideas and to solve problems

Children make connections and associations between new learning and what they already know

Children display the capacity to respond to a variety of ‘I wonder why…’ questions

These outcomes and indicators have been informed by Aistear and Síolta. The lists are neither exhaustive nor prescriptive.

**Overall Quality Level: Quality of children’s learning experiences and achievements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>✔</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Very good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Area 4 - Quality of management and leadership for learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Signposts for practice: Consider the extent to which…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **17. Planning, review and inspection are informed by Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education** | • Management and staff regularly reflect on and review their practice, policies and procedures in order to improve learning experiences and outcomes for children  
• *Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* informs planning, review and improvement practices  
• An ethos of professionalism, teamwork, collaboration and partnership is evident  
• The views of staff, parents, management and children are sought during self-review processes  
• Practitioners avail of mentoring and other external advisory supports, where available  
• Outcomes of self-review are documented, shared and acted upon to improve children’s learning experiences and achievements |
| **18. Management within the setting provide for a high quality learning and development experience for children** | • Appropriate systems are in place for the smooth organisation of educational experiences and activities in the setting  
• There is clarity around the roles and responsibilities of practitioners with regard to educational activities  
• Leaders provide a good role model for the staff, promote high standards and foster a clear vision and direction for the work of the setting  
• Opportunity is provided to each practitioner in the setting to take a leadership role in promoting quality learning  
• Effective strategies are in place for professional reflection and for the mentoring, support and continuous professional development of all staff in the setting |
| **19. Clear two-way channels of communication are fostered between the early years setting, parents, families and children** | • Parents and families are proactively consulted as the primary educators of their child and involved as partners in their child’s learning and development  
• Parents and families are made aware of the policies, procedures and curriculum in operation within the setting  
• The setting shares information on children’s learning and achievements with parents and families in a spirit of openness, mutual respect and transparency  
• There are formal and informal opportunities to exchange information with parents and families and other professionals in the best interests of the child  
• The voice of the child is respected and included during decision making processes that affect them  
• Efforts are made to communicate with parents and families whose first language is not English |
| **20. Transitions into, from and within the setting are managed effectively to support children’s learning and development** | • Information is gathered from parents, families and other settings on children’s prior experiences and used to ensure continuity of experiences and progression in learning for children  
• Information is shared between the early years setting and the primary school to ensure continuity of experiences and progression in children’s learning  
• Policies and procedures have been developed to promote the sensitive management of transitions within and between settings |

These outcomes and indicators have been informed by *Aistear* and *Síolta*. The lists are neither exhaustive nor prescriptive.
Overall Quality Level: **Quality of management and leadership for learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 3: Draft Report Template

Early Years Education-focused Inspections Inspection Report

Name of Setting:  
Identifier number:  

Address of Setting:  
Date of visit:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTEXT OF SETTING</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Description of setting and relevant context factors.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA 1: QUALITY OF CONTEXT WHICH SUPPORTS CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Actions advised</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA 2: QUALITY OF PROCESSES WHICH SUPPORT CHILDREN’S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Actions advised:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA 3: QUALITY OF CHILDREN’S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Actions advised:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA 4: QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Action advised:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS
Language used in Early Years Education-focused Inspection reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Level</th>
<th>Provision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>Provision that is very good is highly effective in meeting the needs of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Provision that is good is effective in meeting the needs of children but with some aspects to be developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Provision that is fair requires practice to be improved to meet the needs of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Provision that is poor is inadequate and requires significant improvement to meet the needs of children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of Overall Inspection Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Quality Level</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of context to support children’s learning and development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of processes to support children’s learning and development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of children’s learning experiences and achievements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of management and leadership for learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>