



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# A Guide to Early Years Education Inspection

Inspectorate  
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# Acknowledgements

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# 1

## Introduction



## 1.1 Inspections and this guide

The Inspectorate of the Department of Education (DE) works to improve the quality of learning for children and young people in Irish schools, centres for education and early learning and care (ELC) settings providing State funded early learning and care for children aged from birth until they enrol in primary school and other education settings. The inspections are designed to evaluate key aspects of education provision and to promote improvement in the education setting under review. The DE Inspectorate is also responsible for the provision of advice to the education system, to the Minister and to policy makers.

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI) is carried out in accordance with section 13(3)(b) of the Education Act 1998<sup>1</sup> and supports evaluation of early learning pedagogy in a diverse range of early learning and care settings. In line with a Memorandum of Understanding between the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), the Minister for Education and the Inspectorate of the Department of Education, EYEI is carried out in early learning and care settings, funded by DCEDIY to deliver services for children aged birth to six years including the universal free early childhood care and education (ECCE) programme.

This guide outlines how the DE Inspectorate conducts early years education inspections and is effective from 2022. It replaces the previous *Guide to Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)* (2018). The most significant change to the previous Guide to EYEI is the extension of the DE Inspectorate remit to evaluate the quality of educational experiences in ELC settings funded by DCEDIY for children aged from birth to six years. This extension builds on a commitment in First 5: A whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families<sup>2</sup> The Quality Framework that informs this EYEI model builds on previous EYEI quality frameworks (2016, 2018) and is underpinned by four core messages:

- The child at the centre of practice
- The child as an active learner
- Building strong connections to support children's learning
- Laying the foundations for children's learning

It was developed in light of the DE Inspectorate's experience of inspecting pre-schools since April 2016 and following consultation with stakeholders and partners involved in the development and delivery of high-quality early education in Ireland. The EYEI birth to six model operates in line with the Code of Practice for the Department of Education Inspectorate 2022<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The Education Act 1998

<sup>2</sup> 2018 First 5: A whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028

<sup>3</sup> Department of Education: Code of Practice for the Department of Education Inspectorate 2022

## Terminology

This guide details early years education inspection in the diverse range of early learning and care settings funded by the State in Ireland. To accommodate the diversity of staffing and governance arrangements across these settings, the general terms managers/lead educators and early years educators will be used when referring to the professional adults engaged in the provision and practice of early learning and care in these settings.

This guide is relevant to provision and practice for all babies, toddlers and young children attending early learning and care settings. Whilst EYEI evaluates the quality of provision and practice across all the diverse settings and contexts that babies, toddlers and young children in the early childhood range birth to six attend, this Guide will adopt the same terminology as that in 'First 5', namely 'babies and young children' 'all children' and 'children' in the language of the Quality Framework. This is primarily to support the fluency and readability of the document.



# 2

What is EYEI  
designed to do?



Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI) evaluates the nature, range and appropriateness of the early educational experiences of babies and young children in state-funded early learning and care settings. The EYEI model of inspection is based on a quality framework informed by the principles of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*<sup>4</sup>, and *Síolta: the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*<sup>5</sup> as well as national and international research related to early childhood education and inspection.

Among the principles underpinning the quality framework are the following:

- Early childhood is a significant and distinct time which must be nurtured, respected, valued and supported in its own right
- High-quality early learning and care experiences in early childhood contribute significantly to life-long learning success
- Care and education are inextricably linked in the lives of babies and young children and require the implementation of a relational pedagogy that takes a holistic approach to the provision of high-quality early learning experiences
- All children’s wellbeing and holistic educational development should be supported in early childhood in accordance with their needs
- The role of the educator in early education settings is central
- Babies and young children should be active agents in their learning and development and enabled to develop and achieve their potential as competent, confident learners, through high-quality interactions with their environment and with early years educators
- Children’s strengths, needs, opinions, interests and wellbeing are integral to the early learning and care provided for them
- Play is central to the learning and development of babies and young children
- All children have their 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.

EYEI takes cognisance of context factors related to the early education setting including size, philosophy, staffing, governance and socio-economic circumstances.

EYEI is premised upon a universal design approach to the provision and practice of early learning and care. This means that all children present in the setting should be accommodated to benefit from all activities, environments, programmes and pedagogy in a manner that is respectful and attuned to their individual interests, needs, strengths, cultural background and age and stage of learning and development.

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<sup>4</sup> National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2009)

*Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. NCCA, Dublin

<sup>5</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2010)

*Síolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*.



The EYEI model is designed to:

- Highlight the importance of high-quality early learning and care in nurturing the foundations for lifelong learning and in helping babies and young children develop to their full potential now and into the future
- Identify and affirm effective practice in support of children's early learning, development and wellbeing
- Support the ongoing development of quality in early learning and care settings through the provision of support and advice to early years educators about how children's learning experiences and achievements can be enriched and enhanced
- Complement other national measures to support continuing improvement in early learning and care provision and practice, for example, mentoring and training resources to support early learning and care settings provided by *Better Start* and the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide<sup>6</sup>
- Support internal review processes in early learning and care settings
- Quality assure all state-funded, centre-based early learning and care provision experienced by children aged from birth to six years
- Provide information to the public, including parents, on the quality of early education in state-funded early learning and care provision through the publication of Early Years Education Inspection Reports.



<sup>6</sup> 2009 National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) The Aistear Síolta Practice Guide

## 2.1 External inspection of early learning and care settings

External inspection adds improvement and change in early educational experiences in settings. Inspections provide an external perspective on the work undertaken by the managers, lead educators, early years educators and other staff in the setting and complement, challenge and validate internal evaluation processes. Inspection reports provide objective, evidence-based judgements about the quality of early education provision and affirm the aspects of practice that are working well. The outcomes of inspection also inform the judgements of staff about the strengths and priorities for improvement in both provision and pedagogy in the setting. The actions advised by inspectors in the written inspection reports provide important direction for the professional staff in the early learning and care setting to assist with the ongoing development and implementation of plans for quality improvement.

All inspection models developed by the DE Inspectorate focus on the quality of pedagogy, the opportunities for learning and the educational experiences and achievements of children and young people. Attention is paid to the broad range of learner experiences in the early learning and care setting based on an understanding that care and education are inextricably linked and that wellbeing is fundamental to optimal learning. EYEI may also focus on the quality of support for babies and young children, the quality of action planning for improvement and the quality of pedagogical leadership and management, including how the setting interacts with parents and families.

EYEI is used to provide evaluative information, advice and support regarding the quality of early education with reference to the content of the following four areas of practice:

- The quality of the context to support children’s learning and development
- The quality of the processes to support children’s learning and development
- The quality of children’s experiences and achievements, and
- The quality of management and leadership for learning

These four areas of practice are further elaborated in the *Quality Framework for Early Years Education* as detailed on page 26 of this Guide.





Early Years Education Inspection is a collaborative process involving the inspection team and staff in the education setting, including, for example the early years educator(s), owner(s)/ management and lead educators and/or members of the board of management. In the context of early learning and care (ELC) settings funded by the DCEDIY also complements the monitoring and regulatory processes of other agencies for example, the TUSLA Early Years (PreSchool) Inspectorate <sup>7</sup>. The evidence base of an EYEI, in a particular setting may include, where available, relevant evaluative information on education provision in the setting gathered through other inspection activity. The EYEI model takes account of the progress a setting has made in respect of the actions advised in any previous early years education inspection report.

Inspection supports professional engagement between staff in early learning and care settings and the inspector. Most of the inspector's time during inspection is given to direct observation of pedagogy and children's experiences in the various learning contexts/learning environments provided by the setting. The purpose of the inspection is to assess the quality of provision, affirm the work of professional staff, engage with children and support quality improvement. The inspector's feedback, informed by evaluation activities during inspection, should enhance professional reflection and internal evaluation and review processes and ultimately improve experiences and outcomes for all children in the setting.

Inspection supports the leadership role of pedagogical leaders and management of the early learning and care setting by providing opportunities for professional dialogue with inspectors on matters of relevance to the continuing improvement in the quality of learner experiences in the setting.

<sup>7</sup> TUSLA Early Years (Pre-School) Inspectorate



Typically, EYEI results in the publication of an inspection report. This report and the oral feedback provided at the conclusion of the inspection can support staff in early learning and care settings to identify strengths in pedagogy and provision and facilitate professional reflection on aspects requiring further development.

The DE Inspectorate acknowledges that young children and their parents are key stakeholders in the community of the early education setting. To support this position, all inspection models make provision for representation of the voice and experience of learners in evaluation activities. Provision for parents to have an opportunity to provide their perspectives on the quality of provision for their children's education is also facilitated by the DE Inspectorate through a range of inspection and non-inspection activities.

## Early Years Education Inspection models

The Inspectorate currently has two distinct inspection models to support evaluation of early education. These are the EYEI and Follow-through Inspection models. The (FT) model enables an inspector to evaluate the extent to which settings have implemented the actions advised in previous early years education inspection reports.

The application of each inspection model takes into account the particular context of the early learning and care setting. Factors such as size, location, philosophy or curriculum, socio-economic factors affecting the population of learners and their community, children's special educational needs and the support they require, may impact on the provision and pedagogy of the setting. Inspectors recognise that early learning and care settings work within a very specific context and take these factors into consideration during evaluations.

## 2.2 Key principles that inform inspection

The DE Inspectorate is focused on ensuring that the learners in a wide range of education settings receive the best possible education in the light of their potential and their learning needs. Inspection aims to promote high standards in pedagogy and in the learning outcomes and experiences of learners and strive to enable those learning to improve the quality of the education and care they provide.

The work of the DE Inspectorate is underpinned by four key principles:

- A focus on learners
- Development and improvement
- Respectful engagement, and
- Responsibility and accountability.

The four key principles, described in detail in the [Code of Practice for the Department of Education Inspectorate](#)<sup>8</sup>, provide the standards that inform and guide all aspects of inspection work. These principles govern the full range of inspectors' evaluation and advisory work in all settings, including early learning and care settings, schools, centres for education and a range of other settings. Inspectors also take due account of data protection legislation in conducting early years education inspection work.

The DE Inspectorate is committed to carrying out inspection in ways that provide real opportunities to affirm good practice and to provide practical advice to early years educators, lead educators and management including, where relevant boards of management, with the ultimate aim of improving learning experiences and outcomes for all children.

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<sup>8</sup> 2022 Department of Education :Code of Practice for the Department of Education Inspectorate

This means that:

1. We are open and transparent about the way we collect and collate the evidence on which our evaluative judgements are based

- We adhere to the content of our published guides as they relate to inspection activity
- We apply evaluation criteria consistently, drawing on the *Early Years Education Inspection Quality Framework (2022)* (See page 26 and Appendix 1)

2. Our evaluative judgements are based on the collection of objective, dependable, high-quality data, having taken the context of the education setting into consideration

- As part of our evidence gathering, we engage in dialogue with children, early years educators, lead educators and management and we meet with other relevant staff and boards of management, where possible and appropriate
- We use the evidence we gather to support our findings and our actions advised in a manner that is fair to all concerned
- We rely on a range of evidence from a number of different sources
- We conduct post-inspection meetings to clarify, inform and confirm findings
- We provide opportunities for the staff in the early learning and care setting to engage in professional dialogue with us during our inspection activity
- We provide an opportunity for the setting to respond to the relevant main findings of the inspection through publication of a setting response, where provided

3. We respect the right of individuals to privacy, as far as possible and consistent with our duty to report on quality and standards

- We are sensitive towards the individual persons with whom we engage and we are committed to courtesy, respect and fairness in all interactions with individuals and groups
- Every effort is made to preserve the positive relationships that exist between those involved in managing and leading the early learning and care setting, staff, parents and learners
- In certain circumstances, we may receive other information in a manner in which the person providing that information has a reasonable expectation that the information is given in confidence. While we will respect confidences, we cannot guarantee the absolute confidentiality of the information provided or the anonymity of the individual person or persons providing the information. However, having due regard to statutory provisions, we will seek to protect the anonymity of the person, if we believe that he or she had the understanding that it was being given in a confidential manner and that to release the information to others would prejudice the receipt of such information in the future

#### 4. We report objectively and fairly on the quality of early education provision

- We set out clearly and unambiguously the main findings and actions advised arising from the inspection so as to enhance the motivation and overall capacity of the education community to achieve its goals and to bring about improvement in outcomes for learners
- We promote fair and balanced reporting of findings, particularly where conflicting evidence is presented
- We recognise and acknowledge effective work, progress and achievement
- We provide advice in a supportive and constructive manner and we present actions which are designed to support early learning and care settings to engage with our Quality Framework. In this way, we enable lead educators and early years educators to set and achieve their own goals for high-quality provision and practice
- We provide accessible information for parents and the public about the quality of the early learning and care setting's work and we also provide an assurance of quality for the public



# 3

## How inspection is carried out





Each of these stages is outlined in the sections below.

### 3.1 Before the inspection visit

#### *Scheduling inspections*

In advance of scheduling an EYEI in an ELC setting, the DE Inspectorate liaises with the TUSLA Early Years Inspectorate in order to avoid, as far as is practicable, overlapping inspections or the scheduling of different types of inspection within an unduly short timeframe.

#### *Notice*

In most instances, an early learning and care setting will receive prior notice of an EYEI. Typically, a minimum of two working days' notice will be given. An inspector conducting the inspection (the reporting inspector) provides notice of the EYEI to the designated contact person<sup>9</sup> of the setting. This is usually by telephone and/or email.

When providing the official notification of the inspection, the reporting inspector outlines the format and structure of the inspection, discusses arrangements for any meetings to be held with the management team and pedagogical leaders and/or early years educator(s) before, during or after the inspection and clarifies any specific issues, including for example, information on the daily routines in the setting. The reporting inspector has overall responsibility for the EYEI including the allocation of team roles, the arrangement of meetings and the compilation of the final inspection report.

The DE Inspectorate reserves the right to conduct early years education inspections without prior notice in a proportion of cases or where an inspection without notification is deemed necessary by the Inspectorate.

#### *Documents*

External inspection focuses primarily on the work of the early learning and care setting and the interactions and processes which take place in the course of the normal day in the setting. There is a limited emphasis on documentation. This means that inspectors may request to see and examine documents, which the setting can reasonably be expected to have available to support the normal everyday operation and delivery of the programme of learning and care. These may include the parent handbook or other information for parents, a curriculum statement, programme planning documents, internal review and quality action plans, records of babies and young children's learning and achievements and outlines of the daily routine for each room.

Depending on the size and scale of provision in the setting, the inspector will request the staff and management in the setting to complete a Setting Contact Form and a Setting Information Form (see Appendix 3) in advance of commencement of the inspection. The information provided in this form will assist in the planning and organisation of inspection activity in the setting.

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<sup>9</sup> The designated contact person will be identified when the inspectors makes first contact with the setting. This should then be confirmed by the setting on the Setting Contact Form.

## Meetings

An integral element of the EYEI process is the engagement between the inspector and the staff and management/leadership of the setting. Typically a pre-inspection meeting is held face-to-face but may also be accommodated remotely by telephone or using online meeting facilities with management and pedagogical leader(s) of the setting before the inspection commences. The reporting inspector, in consultation with management and pedagogical leader(s), also arranges to hold meetings with representatives of the board of management or management committee, where relevant, and with the staff in the setting. Generally, these meetings are part of the evaluation and evidence gathering processes. A post-inspection meeting is also arranged where the findings of the inspection are shared and discussed. This meeting may also be held in person or remotely.

### 3.2 During the inspection visit

The inspection visit is conducted by one or more inspectors. The inspection model (whether an EYEI or a FT inspection) and the size of the setting determine the length of time the inspection takes and the activities undertaken in the course of the evaluation. Typically, between one and three days are set aside for core in-setting inspection activities, depending on the number of learning environments in the setting. Inspection activities include observation of practice, meetings with the management team, lead educator(s), early years educators and staff, the review of documentation and the provision of feedback.

On the basis of information provided by the setting, the reporting inspector plans the inspection activities, in consultation with management and early years educators to minimise disruption to the normal operation of the setting.

#### *Pre-inspection meeting*

Typically, the pre-inspection and post-inspection meetings take place on site. However, in some instances, it may be possible to conduct these meetings remotely via telephone or online platform.

On arrival, the inspector(s) will present official identification to management and early years educators in the setting. The inspector(s) will hold a short meeting in order to:

- Outline the inspection process
- Agree the schedule of visits to the various learning environments and the times for the inspectors to hold meetings and collate inspection findings
- Discuss any practical issues that may affect the inspection
- Finalise arrangements for the post-inspection meeting with the management and early years educators after the inspection
- Request available planning documents, daily routine and records of children's learning achievements for review during the inspection
- Gather evidence in relation to management and leadership for learning in the setting
- Discuss internal review practices and improvement priorities of the setting

While the inspection team makes every effort to work within the agreed timeframe for the EYEI, unforeseen events may occasionally extend or alter this timeframe. Where possible, any changes will be discussed with the management and early years educators in advance.

### *Visits to learning environments*

The main activity of the inspection is the observation of the processes and practices relating to babies and young children's learning in one or more learning environments, both indoors and outdoors in the setting. The scheduling of inspection visits is at the discretion of the reporting inspector who will indicate to the management and early years educator(s) which learning environment(s) will be visited during the inspection.

Inspectors are sensitive to the potential impact of the presence of another adult on babies and young children, most notably when observing care routines. At times, the inspector may withdraw from the learning environment and return at a later stage to conclude his/her observations.

An inspection visit generally takes place during the normal operational hours of the early learning and care setting. Visits to individual learning environments in the setting can vary in duration depending on the nature of the activities taking place. The EYEI model provides the opportunity to gather a range of evidence relating to leadership for learning and the quality of learning outcomes for babies and young children. This facilitates the triangulation of evidence in order to provide rigorous and robust findings and draw conclusions that contribute towards improvement.

The visits typically include:

- Review of learning environments (both indoors and outdoors)
- Observation of practice in learning environments
- Interaction with children, management, leaders, educators and other staff
- Review and discussion of available documentation.

Pedagogy and practice in support of children's early learning in any learning environment in the setting may be observed in the course of the evaluation. This may include the work of temporary staff and support staff who are working in the setting at the time of the inspection visit. In larger settings, this can involve inspection visits to a sample of learning environments. It may also include the work of external personnel who are employed by the setting to provide additional tuition or support to children as a regular feature of the programme of learning. The inspector, using the EYEI Quality Framework, considers the preparation for the programme of learning being offered in the setting, the effectiveness of the pedagogical approaches utilised, the interactions and atmosphere and how babies and young children's learning, wellbeing and development are supported throughout their time in the setting.

The inspector evaluates the level to which babies and young children's knowledge, skills and dispositions are supported and developed and the extent to which they are engaged appropriately in their learning. Planning and assessment practices and the progress made by children are also reviewed. The inspector(s) may also interact with children and review samples of their work.

Subsequent to a visit to a learning environment, the inspector will provide the early years educator(s) and management with feedback. Feedback may be provided directly after the observation visit, or at a time agreed by the inspector and the early years educator(s)/management. Observed good practice is acknowledged and affirmed and, where relevant, advice is given in relation to how provision can be improved or developed further.

### *On-site meetings*

During the course of an EYEI, it may be necessary to hold meetings to gather additional evidence to inform the preparation of the draft report for the setting. Scheduling of such meetings will be discussed, where possible, in advance of the inspection. However, it may be necessary to arrange a meeting during the course of the inspection. In the event that more than one inspector is involved in the EYEI, a meeting will be convened between the inspectors to enable them to discuss their findings and to arrive at an agreed judgement about each of the four areas outlined in the Quality Framework.

### *Documents*

The main focus of an EYEI is on the quality of the interactions and processes that facilitate babies and young children's learning experiences in the setting. Notice of an EYEI does not require the creation of new records or documents. Inspectors review the available planning documentation, including the daily routine used by early years educators to support the normal everyday practices in the setting. This information helps inspectors to evaluate the breadth, balance and developmental nature of the curriculum and the learning experiences that are provided for the babies and young children. These learning experiences will include all children's experiences in the setting including care routines as, particularly for very young children, these are important contexts for interactions, learning and development. Inspectors also review the records of children's learning experiences and achievements that are available in the setting, in order to develop an understanding of the children's learning progress. Opportunities are provided for the early years educator(s) to discuss relevant documentation with the inspector(s).

### *Evaluating professional practice*

While EYEI involve review of the professional practice of early years educators and the quality of early learning provision in the setting inspected, the inspection process is not a professional competence inspection. However, where an inspector has serious concerns about the quality of provision in a learning environment, those concerns will be shared with the management and leaders and the relevant early years educator(s) as part of the feedback provided. Where concerns relate to management and/or leadership in the setting, they are shared by the inspector(s) with the person/body identified on the registration documentation as the owner or responsible body. Where an inspector has serious concerns about the application of the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016<sup>10</sup> within a setting, the matter will be referred to the TUSLA Early Years Inspectorate, as the statutory regulator for the sector, and in line with the TUSLA Policy on Feedback and Concerns<sup>11</sup>.

### *Child Protection*

In conducting early years education inspections, DE Inspectors will also adhere to the Department of Education's Child Safeguarding Statement the detail of which is available to view online.<sup>12</sup>

If deficiencies in respect of an early education setting's compliance with Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017<sup>13</sup> come to the attention of an inspector in the course of an early years education inspection, the inspector will, in the spirit of that guidance, alert the management of the early learning and care setting to the deficiencies noted and will report the matter to TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency.

Where a child protection concern is brought to the attention of the inspector(s) during an education inspection in an early learning and care setting, the inspector(s) will follow Departmental procedures for reporting on child protection matters. This procedure is set out in the Procedures for Responding to Child Protection Concerns brought to the Attention of Staff Employed by the Department of Education and Skills (Updated May 2021).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016

<sup>11</sup> TUSLA Policy on Feedback and Concerns

<sup>12</sup> 2021 Department of Education: Guide to Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections

<sup>13</sup> 2017 Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children

<sup>14</sup> 2017 Department of Education and Skills: Procedures for Responding to Child Protection Concerns brought to the Attention of Staff Employed by the Department of Education and Skills

### 3.3 Following the inspection visit

#### *Post-inspection feedback meeting*

At the conclusion of the inspection, the inspector(s) will communicate the draft findings of the inspection to the management and lead educator(s) of the setting and, where possible, to the early years educator(s) in the learning environments inspected and to members of the management board or committee. Provision of feedback is an important part of the inspection process. It allows for communication of the main draft findings of the inspection and provides further opportunities for clarification of any information and for discussion about how the setting can develop through implementing the actions advised in the inspection feedback.

During this meeting, the inspector(s) seek to:

- Acknowledge and affirm effective practice
- Provide an evaluation of education provision with reference to the quality continuum (Section 6 - Table 1)<sup>15</sup>
- Identify areas for development and improvement and advise, as relevant, on the actions advised to bring about improvement
- Provide an opportunity for the management and lead educators and other early years educator(s) present, to discuss and respond to the findings
- Outline the process leading to the publication of the inspection report.

#### *The inspection report*

A draft inspection report is finalised following the completion of the feedback meeting. The report presents the main findings and actions arising from the evaluation. It is processed through the normal quality assurance procedures of the Inspectorate and is issued to the setting for factual verification and later for setting response, as prescribed in Guidelines to the Publication of School Inspection Reports 2015.

When the EYEI report is issued for Factual Verification (FV), the management and lead educator(s), early years educators and chairperson of the management board, where relevant, have the opportunity to draw the attention of the DE Inspectorate to any statements in the draft report with which they believe to be errors of fact. Subsequently, the reporting inspector makes any necessary amendments to the report and it is issued to the early learning and care setting for Setting Response (SR). The management/staff of the setting have an opportunity to submit a written response to the report, outlining plans to address the actions advised in the report. The finalised report and the setting's response are published on the website. Link to EYEI reports.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> 2015 Department of Education: Guidelines to the Publication of School Inspection Reports

<sup>16</sup> Publication of Early Years Education Inspection Reports

*Publication of the inspection report*

The finalised report and the response of the setting are published on Department of Education pages of the Government of Ireland website [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie). To access an EYEI report or a (FT) report on any early learning and care setting insert the following link into your web browser.

(See Appendix 4 for a step-by-step guide to the processing of EYEI Reports for publication.)



# 4

## Acting on the inspection report





The management, lead educators and early years educators of the early learning and care setting should, as part of their agenda for continuing improvement in the setting, carefully consider the findings and actions advised in the EYEI report (as a staff team) and should plan for the implementation of those actions. The EYEI report along with other types of information gathered by the staff in the setting can also be used to inform internal review and evaluation processes in the setting and planning for improvement and development.

Responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the actions advised and improvements in an EYEI report rests mainly with the leadership and management of the setting. In some cases, the early learning and care setting may wish to access the assistance available from mentoring/support services and other sources of advice when planning and implementing improvements. The degree to which progress has been made on the implementation of the actions advised in an EYEI report may be evaluated at a later date in Follow-through inspections by the Department of Education Inspectorate (See Appendix 2 for further details).



# 5

## The Early Years Education Inspection Quality Framework



Early years education inspection is based on a quality framework that is informed by the principles of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and *Síolta: the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*, as well as national and international research related to early education and inspection. The Quality Framework incorporates the key elements of best practice in early learning and care and categorises provision under four broad areas:



In Table 1 below, twenty key outcomes are identified, under the four broad areas, which describe aspects of best practice in early learning and care.

Area	Outcome
<b>Area 1 - Quality of context to support children's learning and development</b>	1. The atmosphere and organisation of the setting nurture babies and young children's learning and development and support the inclusion of all children
	2. Relationships are warm, responsive, respectful and reciprocal
	3. Children's sense of identity and belonging is nurtured
<b>Area 2 - Quality of processes to support children's learning and development</b>	4. Provision is informed by <i>Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework</i>
	5. Information about the children's development informs next steps in learning
	6. Provision for children's individual learning and development is closely aligned to their interests and developing capabilities
	7. High-quality interactions with children are facilitated
	8. The environment and resources support children's learning and development
	9. Play is central to babies and young children's learning and development
	10. Emergent language, literacy and numeracy skills are fostered
	11. Children learn in an inclusive environment
<b>Area 3 - Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements</b>	12. Babies and young children demonstrate engagement and enjoyment in their learning and a positive sense of wellbeing
	13. Children experience achievement and are developing through their learning experiences
	14. Children are developing a sense of identity and belonging and personal and social skills to support their learning and development
	15. Children communicate their experiences, thoughts, ideas and feelings with others in a variety of ways
	16. Children make sense of their world by interacting with others and the environment through playing, investigating and questioning
<b>Area 4 - Quality of management and leadership for learning</b>	17. Planning, review and evaluation are informed by <i>Síolta: the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education</i>
	18. Management in the setting provides for a high-quality learning and development experience for all children
	19. Clear two-way channels of communication are fostered between the early learning and care setting, parents, families, babies and young children
	20. Transitions into, from and within the setting are managed effectively to support children's learning and development



To ensure optimum transparency for early years educators about the focus of the inspection, each outcome has been further described through the use of a number of possible signposts for practice (Appendix 1). The signposts for practice are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive. It is acknowledged that there are different approaches among early years educators and setting providers and that staff are at different stages in the development of their practice. It is not expected that all signposts will be evident in a given setting.

Inspectors engage in professional dialogue with early years educators about a selection of outcomes and signposts for practice during the inspection visit. Inspectors' judgements about the quality of provision in each of the four areas are informed by their observation of learning environments and experiences, the engagement and involvement of babies and young children the pedagogical practice of the early years educator(s) and the leadership and management processes on the day of the inspection.

# 6

## The Quality Continuum



In analysing and reporting on their findings in respect of each of the four broad areas of the Quality Framework, inspectors use a quality continuum with five quality bands as illustrated at Table 2 below.

**Table 2: The quality continuum**

Level	Description
Excellent	Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of children
Very good	Provision that is very good is highly effective in meeting the needs of children
Good	Provision that is good is effective in meeting the needs of children but with some aspects to be developed
Fair	Provision that is fair requires practice to be improved to meet the needs of children
Poor	Provision that is poor is inadequate and requires significant improvement to meet the needs of children



# 7

## Review of inspection





An early years educator or management and pedagogical leaders of an early learning and care setting affected by an inspection may seek a review of the inspection in accordance with the procedures outlined in Procedures for Review of Inspections on Schools and Teachers under Section 13(9) of the Education Act (1998) (March 2021)<sup>17</sup>.



<sup>17</sup> 2015 Department of Education: Procedure for Review of Inspections carried out by the Department of Education Inspectorate under Section 13(9) of the Education Act 1998

# 8

Publication and  
revision of this guide



This guide has been prepared following consultation with lead educators, managers, early years educators, academics, parents, organisations that provide support to settings, and other stakeholders with an interest in early learning and care, in accordance with Section 13(8) of the Education Act, 1998.<sup>18</sup>

The Inspectorate is committed to improving the ways in which it carries out its evaluation and advisory work in settings and the provisions of this guide will be reviewed periodically.



<sup>18</sup> Education Act 1998

# 9

## Appendices



## Appendix 1: Early Years Education Inspection Quality Framework - Signposts for Practice <sup>19</sup>

### Area 1 - Quality of context to support children’s learning and development

Outcome	Signposts for Practice: Consider the extent to which...
<p>1. The atmosphere and organisation of the setting nurtures babies and young children’s learning and development and supports the inclusion of all children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A caring ethos and a warm, nurturing, affirming atmosphere are evident</li> <li>• Practices are in place that support children to develop strong emotional bonds and special relationships and attachments with key educators</li> <li>• Educators are knowledgeable about children’s personalities, temperaments, needs and individual preferences</li> <li>• Practices in the setting are based around respectful engagement with the child and his/her family</li> <li>• All experiences, including care routines are used to support learning and implement a relational pedagogy</li> <li>• Well-paced routines and procedures are consistently used to promote the development of core learning dispositions and skills</li> <li>• Children are active agents in choosing and organising their learning and development activities</li> <li>• Snack/meal time is seen as a social occasion and an opportunity to promote independence, relationships, wellbeing and a healthy lifestyle. Babies and young children are supported individually to engage fully during these times</li> <li>• Educators plan environments for children that are calm, relaxed and encourage curiosity, creativity and playful exploration and learning</li> <li>• The early learning curriculum encourages the use of care practices as an opportunity to promote and enhance babies and young children’s ability to manage their self-care needs</li> <li>• Babies and young children are supported to become confident and independent in managing their own self-help and self-care needs in a meaningful and respectful way</li> <li>• Time and space is provided for all children, irrespective of their age or stage of development to freely explore the indoor and outdoor environment, in the company of attentive and aware educators</li> <li>• Times of transition within the setting support positive learning experiences for children, are managed effectively and promote continuity in learning throughout the day</li> <li>• Children and families are consulted and supported in the transitions between early learning environments, during their time in the setting. Transitions are carefully planned for, with the needs of the individual child in mind</li> </ul>

<sup>19</sup> Early Years Education Inspection Quality Framework

## Area 2 – Quality of processes to support children’s learning and development

Outcome	Signposts for Practice: Consider the extent to which...
<p>2. Relationships are responsive, respectful and reciprocal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educators show affection, sensitivity, warmth and positive regard for children and their families</li> <li>• Warmth and affection are demonstrated physically and emotionally through relationships that are respectful and positive</li> <li>• Management, lead educators and early years educators create and maintain conditions necessary for nurturing relationships with children, to include consistency of the key person in line with best practice</li> <li>• The key person approach supports the development of consistency and security in babies and young children’s relationships in the setting</li> <li>• Early years educators foster caring and respectful child-child relationships</li> <li>• The key person acts as an important link between families and the setting</li> <li>• Parents are aware and have meaningful and regular opportunities to build strong positive relationships with their child’s key person</li> <li>• The educator has insight into the child’s family, culture and interests</li> <li>• Parents and families are actively included in planning for their child’s early learning experiences</li> <li>• Parents and families participate in the daily life of the setting</li> <li>• Early years educators model and provide guidance and encouragement towards positive behaviour</li> <li>• Early years educators support babies and young children to regulate their emotions and feelings. Recognition, affirmative feedback and encouragement are a regular features of the responses to children</li> </ul>
<p>3. Children’s sense of identity and belonging is nurtured</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect for and recognition of the uniqueness of each child is evident Practice adopts an anti-bias approach, is child-centred, respectful and culturally responsive</li> <li>• Opportunities are provided for all children to develop an appreciation of themselves as individuals and as members of their family and community</li> <li>• Children have opportunities to make positive social connections with other children and with early years educators throughout the day</li> <li>• Opportunities are provided which bring together babies, young children, families and early years educators in the setting</li> <li>• Diversity is recognised, valued and affirmed within an inclusive learning environment</li> <li>• The setting has made connections with the local community and is integrated with the local community</li> <li>• Children have opportunities to get to know people and places within their community</li> </ul>

Outcome	Signposts for Practice: Consider the extent to which...
<p>4. Provision is informed by <i>Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A broad-based curriculum, informed by <i>Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework</i> has been documented and is being used to support babies and young children’s learning and development</li> <li>• Early years educators in the setting have been involved in the development of an emergent, enquiry-based curriculum and relational pedagogy that demonstrates knowledge, understanding and confidence about putting these plans into practice</li> <li>• Planning takes account of babies and young children’s varying interests, cultural backgrounds, strengths, abilities, needs and previous learning experiences. There is a planned approach to developing children’s schemas, dispositions, values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding</li> <li>• Decisions around planning for children’s learning is underpinned and informed by relevant research on learning and development</li> <li>• Early years educators develop individual care and learning plans for babies and young children in collaboration with their families</li> <li>• Plans are flexible enough to allow for response to babies and young children’s emergent interests</li> <li>• Planning supports the provision of a connected, holistic learning experience for children using assessment for learning methods to promote the progression of their next steps in learning and development</li> <li>• Planning for curriculum implementation is organised on long-term, medium-term and short-term bases</li> <li>• The implementation of the curriculum is monitored and reviewed on a regular basis</li> </ul>
<p>5. Information about the children’s development informs next steps in learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A variety of meaningful, strengths-based assessment approaches is used to gather information about babies and young children’s learning experiences and achievements and ensure continuity and progression in their individual learning</li> <li>• Early years educators develop various approaches to make babies, and young children’s voices and interests visible</li> <li>• Early years educators document significant learning experiences to share with the children’s families</li> <li>• Children are regularly provided with appropriate support and formative feedback to extend their learning and development</li> <li>• Parents are consulted regularly and informed about their child’s learning and development</li> </ul>

Outcome	Signposts for Practice: Consider the extent to which...
<p>6. Provision for children's individual learning and development is closely aligned to their interests and developing capabilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning for babies and young children's learning and development builds on the cues, interests, previous experiences and achievements of children</li> <li>• Early years educators set high but realistic expectations for all children in the setting</li> <li>• Babies and young children are challenged and learn strategies for active exploration, thinking and reasoning</li> <li>• Opportunities are provided for babies and young children to achieve fulfilment, success and mastery during learning activities</li> <li>• Children are enabled and supported to make connections in their learning and to transfer their knowledge and skills to new learning situations</li> <li>• Children are encouraged and supported to respond creatively as they engage in learning</li> <li>• Children discover different ways to express their creativity and individuality</li> <li>• Learning activities provide progressively more complex, varied and challenging experiences for children in accordance with their individual needs and abilities</li> </ul>
<p>7. High-quality interactions with children are facilitated</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Babies and young children are viewed as competent and confident learners</li> <li>• Babies and young children are recognised as active agents in their learning Children are supported and encouraged to learn with and alongside others</li> <li>• There is an appropriate balance between adult-initiated and child-initiated learning and development activities</li> <li>• The early years educator knows the child well, is attuned to and responds to their verbal and non-verbal cues, interests and individual learning needs sensitively and appropriately</li> <li>• Early years educators regularly use the opportunities of care routines such as bottle feeding and nappy changing to engage in shared attention activities (joint attention) with children. Early years educators maintain a balance between listening and talking</li> <li>• Early years educators actively extend children's communication skills, thinking and language learning during play (sustained shared thinking)</li> <li>• Early years educators engage and motivate the child in their learning and development in a respectful and caring way</li> <li>• Early years educators use a range of appropriate interaction strategies and methodologies to facilitate a broad range of learning experiences</li> <li>• Early years educators promote peer interactions in pairs and small groups to nurture supportive relationships</li> </ul>
<p>8. The environments and resources support individual children's wellbeing, learning and development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indoor and outdoor environments are well maintained, appropriate and inviting</li> <li>• Indoor and outdoor environments are purposefully structured and organised to develop children's curiosity, creativity, imagination and desire for exploration in support of psychological and physical wellbeing</li> <li>• Environments are used to promote movement for babies and young children at all stages of development</li> <li>• Indoor and outdoor environments and resources are used effectively to stimulate, support, consolidate and extend children's learning</li> <li>• The outdoor learning environment is valued and promoted as offering a rich context for babies and young children's learning experiences</li> </ul>



Outcome	Signposts for Practice: Consider the extent to which...
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Babies and young children have frequent access to outdoor learning environments. Resources are accessible, developmentally appropriate, and provide for multi-sensory learning experiences</li> <li>• The setting has a variety of appropriate literacy and numeracy/ mathematical resources both indoors and outdoors, which are used regularly and purposefully</li> <li>• Children’s ideas and achievements are creatively displayed and accessible to children and parents</li> <li>• Children make choices around their engagement with environments, resources and activities</li> <li>• The environment encourages babies and young children to build the capacity for self-regulation and resilience through the provision of opportunities for appropriate risk taking</li> <li>• The environment is structured to ensure children learn in a variety of contexts throughout the day</li> </ul>
<p>9. Play is central to babies and young children’s learning and development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play is the central medium through which babies and young children learn and develop within the setting</li> <li>• Babies and young children have access to a range of interesting experiences that stimulate their learning and development, for example, treasure baskets, free movement and heuristic play</li> <li>• In play, early years educators are present, attuned and responsive to babies and young children</li> <li>• Time for extended, open-ended play is promoted within the setting</li> <li>• There are regular opportunities for children to plan for, talk about and think about their play experiences</li> <li>• Opportunities are provided for a range of play experiences, including creative play, language play, physical play, imaginative play, risky play, sociodramatic play and construction play</li> <li>• Play opportunities are freely available, accessible, appropriate and well-resourced to sustain purposeful learning and active exploration. The importance of spontaneous play and movement is recognised.</li> <li>• Play is used as a medium for babies and young children to interact with, explore and make sense of the world</li> <li>• Babies and young children have opportunities to engage in play activities alone, with peers and/or with educators</li> <li>• The early years educator effectively facilitates play, and joins in as a play partner, where appropriate, in order to support children’s learning and development</li> <li>• Play enables purposeful learning, creative expression and development for all children in accordance with their needs and interests</li> </ul>
<p>10. Emergent language, literacy and numeracy skills are fostered</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early years educators model appropriate language, including mathematical language, and encourage an expanded use of vocabulary through the use of open-ended questioning and language enrichment during interactions</li> </ul>

Outcome	Signposts for Practice: Consider the extent to which...
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early years educators support babies and young children to engage in two-way, reciprocal communication throughout the day</li> <li>• Early years educators recognise the importance of language in supporting emotional development</li> <li>• Early years educators ensure there is a suitable balance between speaking and listening during interactions</li> <li>• Children are encouraged and supported to express their views, emotions and thinking, in a range of ways</li> <li>• Children’s home language(s) is/are valued and affirmed and are visible within a print-rich environment</li> <li>• Children regularly enjoy and share a variety of rhymes, jingles, poems and songs</li> <li>• Children have access to high-quality books, linked to their interests and play areas</li> <li>• Children are provided with regular opportunities to listen to and explore stories in the company of an affectionate and attuned early years educator</li> <li>• Opportunities are provided for children to engage in mark-making</li> <li>• Mathematical thinking and learning is promoted through the use of open-ended resources and games, linked to the everyday lives of children</li> <li>• Children have opportunities to engage with activities, both indoors and outdoors that build early positive dispositions towards science, technology engineering, the arts and mathematics (STEAM) through hands-on, active experiences</li> </ul>
<p>11. Children learn in an inclusive environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are equitable opportunities to engage all children in learning irrespective of gender, ability, age, ethnicity or background</li> <li>• An inclusive approach is adopted to ensure the engagement of all children within the setting</li> <li>• Children experience the stories, songs, rhymes and symbols of their own and other cultures in a meaningful way</li> <li>• Educators recognise and accommodate diversity in the style, pace and focus of children’s learning and development and their individual temperament</li> <li>• 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 and/or trauma</li> <li>• The learning and development of children is fostered in partnership with parents</li> <li>• The setting has made links with external agencies, where appropriate and possible, with a view to optimising support for children with additional needs</li> </ul>

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

Outcome	Signposts for Practice: Consider the extent to which...
<p>12. Babies and young children demonstrate engagement and enjoyment in their learning and a positive sense of wellbeing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Babies and young children demonstrate enjoyment and fun in their learning</li> <li>• Children are developing the ability to play cooperatively, in pairs or small groups</li> <li>• Children are motivated, interested and engaged in their learning experiences</li> <li>• It is evident that children’s voices, including verbal and non-verbal cues are heard, respected and acted upon</li> <li>• Children demonstrate contentment and are secure and at ease within the setting</li> <li>• Babies and young children are effectively supported by early years educators to build self-help skills, make choices and develop positive learning dispositions such as resilience, resourcefulness and persistence</li> <li>• Babies and young children frequently have choices and make decisions about their play and learning during all aspects of their daily routine</li> <li>• Early years educators co-regulate and support babies and young children to learn how to regulate and name their emotions in ways appropriate to their stage of development</li> <li>• Children are affirmed, comforted and supported to manage their feelings and emotions in a way that enhances their wellbeing</li> <li>• Children demonstrate creativity and a sense of wonder and natural curiosity</li> <li>• Children demonstrate a developing capacity to reflect, use judgements and make decisions</li> </ul>
<p>13. Children experience achievement and are developing through their learning experiences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Babies and young children are supported by early years educators to experience mastery and success during learning activities</li> <li>• Children regularly discuss or share aspects of their learning with others and are supported to recognise their own capabilities and achievements</li> <li>• Early years educators mediate babies and young children’s awareness of their changing and developing abilities making connections to the past, present and the future</li> <li>• Information documented about children’s learning reflects their achievements in a range of connected learning experiences appropriate to an early education context</li> <li>• Information documented about children’s learning reflects their development with due regard for their individual interests, needs, approaches and cultural backgrounds</li> <li>• Babies and young children are supported by early years educators to increase their confidence and coordination in relation to their gross and fine motor skills</li> </ul>

Outcome	Signposts for Practice: Consider the extent to which...
<p>14. Children are developing a sense of identity and belonging and personal and social skills to support their learning and development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children are supported to demonstrate a growing capacity to make healthy choices about nutrition, exercise and personal routines</li> <li>• Children show an awareness and appreciation of their own uniqueness and have a sense of who they are</li> <li>• Children are able to communicate their interests, opinions, feelings, family background and personal experiences</li> <li>• Children are developing a positive understanding of their own identity as competent learners</li> <li>• Early years educators provide opportunities for children to develop a positive understanding of their identity as members of families and groups</li> <li>• Babies and young children are supported by early years educators to make connections with others including peers and in particular, siblings</li> <li>• Children have an awareness of their local community and the roles of different people within that community</li> <li>• Children show an understanding of and regard for the identity, rights and views of others</li> <li>• Children are developing an evolving capacity for self-regulation and conflict resolution</li> <li>• Children are developing personal and social skills which enable them to respond appropriately to different situations. This may include turn-taking, cooperating, negotiating, taking responsibility, and building relationships</li> </ul>
<p>15. Children communicate their experiences, thoughts, ideas and feelings with others in a variety of ways</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early years educators are responsive to the broad range of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies and behaviours used by babies and young children; for example crying, cooing, babbling, eye contact, gestures, body language and listening</li> <li>• 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</li> <li>• Children interact with other children and adults by listening, discussing, questioning and taking turns in conversations</li> <li>• Children appreciate their home language and understand how different languages can be used with different people and in different situations</li> <li>• Children express their feelings, thoughts, ideas and creativity through storytelling, messy play, sensory play, making art, mark making, moving to music, role playing and problem solving</li> <li>• Children regularly explore sound, pattern, rhythm and repetition and language through conversation, songs, rhymes and jingles throughout the day</li> <li>• Children represent their ideas and feelings through various media and play activities</li> <li>• Children’s voices are visible within the setting; e.g. documentation of their comments on their artwork or in their learning records</li> </ul>

Outcome	Signposts for Practice: Consider the extent to which...
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children demonstrate an awareness and emergent understanding of the meaning and uses of symbols, pictures, print and numbers as a means of communication</li> <li>• Children have a growing understanding of the meaning and use of mathematical language</li> <li>• Children whose home language is not that predominantly used within the setting have opportunities to communicate and express themselves</li> </ul>
<p>16. Children make sense of their world by interacting with others and their environment, through playing, investigating and questioning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Babies and young children are inquisitive and confident in exploring and thinking about their learning experiences</li> <li>• Children are aware of the natural environment and its features, materials, animals and plants</li> <li>• Babies and young children have plentiful opportunities' to engage in sensory rich experiences, both indoors and outdoors</li> <li>• Children engage, explore and experiment in their environment and use their developing physical skills to manipulate objects and diverse materials</li> <li>• Children use a range of ICT/media for learning, to gain information and to broaden their understanding of the world</li> <li>• Children collaborate with others to share interests and ideas and to solve problems</li> <li>• Children make connections and associations between new learning and what they already know and have opportunities to reinforce this learning</li> <li>• Children display the capacity to respond to a variety of 'I wonder why...' questions</li> <li>• Children have opportunities to understand and meaningfully explore education for sustainable development</li> </ul>

**Area 4 - Quality of management and leadership for learning**

Outcome	Signposts for Practice: Consider the extent to which...
<p>17. Planning, review and evaluation are informed by <i>Síolta: the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management and pedagogical leaders provide oversight and have responsibility for the programme of learning and care, in line with best practice and research</li> <li>• Management, pedagogical leaders, early years educators and other staff regularly reflect on and review their practice, policies and procedures in order to improve learning experiences and outcomes for children</li> <li>• Internal review, self-evaluation and reflection are regularly promoted through the use of <i>Síolta: the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education</i> and the <i>Aistear Síolta Practice Guide</i></li> <li>• Reflective practices are adopted to support professional learning in the setting and to inform planning, review and improvement practices</li> <li>• The <i>Aistear Síolta Practice Guide</i> is used systematically in the context of individual and/or whole setting evaluation</li> <li>• An ethos of professionalism, teamwork, collaboration and partnership is evident</li> <li>• The views of staff, parents, management and children are regularly sought during internal review processes and are used to inform plans for quality improvement</li> <li>• Individual and/or whole setting avails of mentoring and other external advisory supports to support their internal review and quality improvement processes</li> <li>• It is evident that all staff in the setting are aware of relevant research, policy and practice developments that impact on the quality of their work with young children</li> <li>• Outcomes of internal review are documented, shared with all stakeholders and acted upon to improve children’s learning experiences and achievements</li> </ul>
<p>18. Management within the setting provides for a high-quality learning and development experience for children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management and pedagogical leaders are responsible for ensuring appropriate systems are in place for the smooth organisation of educational experiences and activities in the setting ensuring conditions necessary for nurturing and consistent relationships are in place</li> <li>• The stated philosophy and vision of the setting is evident in the practice of all staff</li> <li>• There is clarity around the roles and responsibilities of early years educators with regard to educational activities</li> <li>• The leader/management and pedagogical leaders in the setting optimise the effective use of the varied skill sets of all staff</li> <li>• Staff demonstrate thoughtfulness, self-awareness and reflection in all aspects of their practice</li> <li>• Leaders provide a good role model for the staff, promote high standards and articulate a clear vision and direction for the work of the setting</li> <li>• Opportunities are provided for regular support and supervision of all staff</li> <li>• Opportunity is provided to each educator in the setting to take a leadership role in promoting good quality learning</li> <li>• It is evident that practice is informed by evidence-based theory and that staff are knowledgeable about children’s learning and development</li> </ul>

Outcome	Signposts for Practice: Consider the extent to which...
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early years educators are knowledgeable about the roles and functions of external professionals and support services and how to access and engage with these services</li> <li>• Effective strategies are in place to support and promote reflective practice and for the mentoring, support and continuous professional development of all staff in the setting</li> </ul>
<p>19. Clear two-way channels of communication are fostered between the early-years setting, parents, families, babies and young children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents and families are proactively consulted as the primary educators of their babies and young children and involved as partners in their babies and young children’s learning and development</li> <li>• Parents and families are made aware of the policies, procedures and curriculum in operation within the setting and are included as key stakeholders in internal review processes</li> <li>• The setting regularly shares verbal and documented information on children’s learning and achievements with parents and families in a spirit of openness, mutual respect and transparency</li> <li>• There are formal and informal opportunities for the two-way exchange of information with parents and families and other professionals in the best interests of the babies and young children</li> <li>• The voice of child and his/her family, is respected and included during decision making processes that affect the child and his/her family</li> <li>• Early years educators have put strategies in place to communicate with all parents and families for whom English/Irish is an additional language</li> </ul>
<p>20. Transitions into, from and within the setting are managed effectively to support children’s learning and development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policies, procedures and practice have been developed to promote the sensitive and supportive management of transitions for babies and young children</li> <li>• Information is gathered from parents, families, and from external services and professionals on children’s prior experiences when transitioning into the setting</li> <li>• This knowledge is used to ensure continuity of experiences and progression in learning for babies and young children</li> <li>• Babies and young children are supported to experience smooth transitions across rooms and environments. Information is shared between staff in the education setting to ensure continuity of experiences and progression in children’s learning</li> <li>• The setting has established a professional mutual relationship with pre-school/primary school to which the child is transitioning from/to in order to share information that supports and promotes; curriculum continuity, recognition of children’s experiences and achievements and progression in children’s learning</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2: Follow-through Inspection Model

### Introduction

The purpose of a Follow-through inspection is to evaluate the progress an ELC setting has made in implementing the actions advised from an earlier inspection where a written report has been published or issued to a setting. This is facilitated through a consultative, co-professional engagement between the inspector and relevant setting management, leaders, educators and staff. Inspectors also advise the setting on strategies and actions to enable them to fully address the actions advised. Any ELC setting that has had an inspection leading to a published report may be scheduled for a Follow-through inspection.

Follow-through inspections provide an opportunity for the ELC setting to show the progress it has made in improving practice in areas where actions were advised in a previous inspection reports. Inspectors discuss the improvements with management and leaders, individual educators and with groups of educators and others where appropriate.

At the conclusion of a Follow-through inspection, inspectors discuss their overall findings with the management, leaders, educators and other staff, and where relevant, with a representative of a board of management/management committee. They acknowledge the progress made and provide advice on further actions required to ensure the full implementation of each action advised in the original inspection report. The findings from a Follow-through inspection add to the early learning and care setting's own information as they engage in internal review and quality improvement initiatives.

### Inspection focus

Follow-through inspections focus on the level of progress made by the education setting in implementing specific actions advised outlined in a previous inspection report, rather than the overall educational provision that the setting makes. The following continuum indicates the language used when reporting on progress made:

No progress	Partial progress	Good progress	Very good progress
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Where the original EYEI was published, the finalised report and the response of the setting are also published on the Department's website ([www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie)).<sup>20</sup>

### Publication of the inspection report

The finalised report and the response of the setting are published on Department of Education pages of the Government of Ireland website [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie). To access a Follow-through (FT) report on any early learning and care setting please see Appendix 4

<sup>20</sup> Early Years Education Inspection Reports



Overview of inspection activities: Follow-through Inspection

Before the inspection visit	Inspectorate activity	Typically, the inspector follows the same processes as during an EYEI, including the options for face-to-face or remote pre-inspection and post-inspection meetings. Similar to an EYEI, the inspector contacts the management and pedagogical leaders a minimum of two working days in advance of the inspection (As with EYEI the DE Inspectorate also reserves the right to carry out unannounced inspections). The inspector will seek relevant information which will guide the inspection process. Depending on the size of the setting, Setting Contact Form and a Setting Information Form may be provided to the management and pedagogical leaders via email and a deadline date for return will be agreed.
		Arrangements are made for any meeting which may be required and for any documentation which the inspector may wish to view.
	Setting activity	The management and pedagogical leaders prepare any documents and arrange meetings that may be required
		The management and pedagogical leaders returns the Setting Information Form to the reporting inspector within the agreed timeframe
During the inspection visit	Inspectorate activity	<p>Among the activities that may take place in the course of a Follow-through inspection are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting with management and pedagogical leaders and/or representative of the board/management committee</li> <li>• Meeting with relevant educators/members of staff</li> <li>• Observation of pedagogy and learning and other relevant activities</li> <li>• Interaction with children</li> <li>• Review of setting documentation, records and evidence of babies and young children’s learning experiences and achievements</li> <li>• Review of resources and facilities</li> <li>• Post-inspection feedback meeting with management and pedagogical leaders</li> </ul>
	Setting activity	Draft report is issued to the management and pedagogical leaders/other designated person for factual verification (five working days) and for setting response (ten working days)
After the inspection visit	Inspectorate activity	Publication of the follow-through inspection report <sup>21</sup> on the Department of Education pages on Gov.ie

<sup>21</sup> Early Years Education Inspection Reports

## Appendix 3: Setting Contact Information Form

### Eolas teagmhála an tsuímh / Setting Contact Form

Please complete this form electronically and return it to the reporting inspector by email

*Comhlánaigh an fhoirm seo go leictreonach le do thoil agus seol ar ais chuig an gcigire tuairisce í ar ríomhphost*

Ainm an tSuímh/Setting Name	
Uimhir TUSLA/TUSLA registration	
RLGO an tSuímh/DCEDIY number	
R-Phost/Email address	
Uimhir theileafóin/Telephone number	
Contact details verified at inspection	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Owner/Manager Úinéir/Bainisteoir		R-phost/ Email	
Other contact person/ Duine teagmhála eile		R-phost/ Email	

**Tábhachtach:** Bainfear úsáid as na seoltaí ríomhphoist a thugtar anseo chun an tuairisce a eisiúint ar feadh na gcéimeanna fíoraithe fíorasacha, freagairt na suímh agus an fhoilsithe.

Cinntigh le do thoil:

- go bhfuil a fhios ag úinéir an tseolta go bhfuil an seoladh ríomhphoist á úsáid chun na críche seo

**Important:** The email addresses provided here will be used to issue the report throughout the factual verification, setting response and publication stages.

Please ensure:

- that the owner of the address is aware that the email address is being used for this purpose

**Cuir tic anseo le deimhniú go bhfuil na sonraí thuas cruinn.**

**Tick here to confirm that the details provided above are correct.**

Déanfar próiseáil ar na sonraí a bhaileofar le linn na meastóireachta seo i gcomhréir le Polasaí um Chosaint Sonraí na Roinne atá in-íoslódáilte ag <https://www.gov.ie/ga/foilsuichan/4fdf6-an-roinn-oideachais-fogra-priobhaideachta/>

Tá sonraí breise ar conas a phróiseálann an Roinn Oideachais sonraí pearsanta ar fáil ar <https://www.gov.ie/ga/eolas-eagraiochta/cosaint-sonrai/#tredhearcacht>

Scríosfar na sonraí teagmhála go léir trí bliana tar éis dáta foilsithe na tuarascála cigireachta.

All contact details gathered as part of the evaluation will be processed in accordance with the Department of Education Data Protection Policy which can be accessed at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d78f2-department-of-education-privacy-notice/>

For further details on how the Department of Education processes personal data, please visit: <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/data-protection/#transparency>

All contact details will be deleted three years after the date of publication of the inspection report.

## Appendix 4: Setting Information Form

### Department of Education - Inspectorate

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**An Roinn Oideachais**  
Department of Education

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### Early Years Education Setting Information Form (SIF)

Through its inspection and advisory work, the Inspectorate of the Department of Education (DE) supports improvement and development of education provision in schools and early learning and care (ELC) settings. In conducting inspections, inspectors take account of the context within which settings operate. To assist us in understanding the context in which your setting operates, you are requested to complete this Setting Information Form.

The responses you provide will be very valuable for the evaluation of early year's education provision in your setting and will help inform the professional dialogue with the inspector(s) during the inspection. Please return the completed form to the reporting inspector. Please retain a copy of this form for discussion with the inspector(s) during the inspection.

### PRIVACY NOTICE for Early Years Setting Information Form (SIF) Returns

The early education setting provider is the original data controller for timetable data and staff qualifications information included in the SIF, see Appendix A. The Early Years Education Inspectorate of the Department of Education requests that the provider supply details of their timetable and details of staff qualifications to the SIF.

- The Department of Education is the data controller for the SIF information once received. Within the Department, the Inspectorate acts as the assigned data controller for the SIF information. The Early Years division of the Inspectorate can be contacted by email to [roisin\\_foy@education.gov.ie](mailto:roisin_foy@education.gov.ie) or by telephone to 018892407.
- The contact details of the Data Protection Officer for the Department of Education are e-mail [dpo@education.gov.ie](mailto:dpo@education.gov.ie) or by post to Department of Education, Data Protection Unit, Athlone, Co. Westmeath
- The purpose of the SIF is to facilitate the planning of Early Years Education Inspections in setting. The RI uses the information provided in the SIF in the planning and timetabling of the inspection and only discloses the relevant data for a provider, see [Appendix A](#), to the specific Inspector/s who are inspecting that provider. The content of the SIF is NOT disclosed to any other organisation.
- The SIF is retained as per [Appendix A](#). Its retention beyond the stated period will be subject to review thereafter.
- Please follow the <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/20f6e1-protectingpersonal-data-in-the-department-of-education-and-skills/> for information on

your right to access your data. You may also exercise your right to correct your data, seek to restrict how it may be processed or object to how it may be processed. Your data will not be used for automated decision-making or profiling, please see: <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/data-protection/>

- The person whose personal data is processed has the right to complain to the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner where they are concerned that this may be in breach of data protection legislation. Please see <http://www.dataprotection.ie>
- The legal basis for collecting the data is Article 6(1)(e) of the GDPR underpinned by Section 13 of the Education Act.

**Part 1: General information on your setting**

Please complete.

<b>Setting name</b>	
<b>TUSLA number</b>	
<b>DCEDIY number</b>	

<b>Management structure</b> (please tick as appropriate)	<input type="checkbox"/> Private setting	<input type="checkbox"/> Community setting	<input type="checkbox"/> Part of chain
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify		
<b>Owner/Manager</b>		Email	
<b>Chairperson/ Director of Management body</b>		Email	
<b>Parent representative</b> (where applicable)		Email	
<b>Other relevant personnel i.e. Operational manager, Deputy manager, Curriculum co-ordinator</b>		Email	
<b>Main language of setting</b> (please tick)	<input type="checkbox"/> English medium	<input type="checkbox"/> Irish medium	<input type="checkbox"/> Dual language (English and Irish)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify		

<b>Setting opening hours</b>	
<b>Number of learning rooms</b>	
<b>Total number of early years educators</b>	

Please attach a copy of the daily routine for each of the rooms listed

Groups/ rooms	Times AM/PM	Early Years Educators names Please specify lead educator	Educator Qualifications/ Level e.g. Level 5 ECEC, Level 8 BA Early Childhood Education	No. children enrolled	Age range
1					
2					
3					
4					

Groups/ rooms	Times AM/PM	Early Years Educators names Please specify lead educator	Educator Qualifications/ Level e.g. Level 5 ECEC, Level 8 BA Early Childhood Education	No. children enrolled	Age range
5					
6					
7					
8					

*(Please add extra rows if required)*

**Part 2: Education provision in the setting**

**Important context factors relevant to your setting**

(For example, how long established, curriculum approach or pedagogy, vision or mission of the setting)

*(Box expands as required)*

**Are there children attending the setting who have received a support allocation from HSE or through the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)? If so, how many? *(Please do not insert names of children)***

**Are there children attending the setting for whom English is an additional language? If so, how many? What are the main languages? *(Please do not insert names of children)***

**Please tell us about any aspects of your setting that you wish to highlight as a strength or a current area of improvement**

*(Box expands as required)*

**Any further relevant information that you wish to bring to the attention of the Inspectorate that you feel may be relevant to the inspection**

*(For example, if you have a link to online information about the setting such as a website, please insert the link here)*

*(Box expands as required)*

*Thank you for completing this form.*

*Do you consent to the information in this form being used for the purposes outlined in **Appendix A**?*

*Has the information provided in respect of each named person been brought to the attention of him/her in advance of submitting this form to the Early Years Education Inspectorate of the Department of Education?*

**Name of person who completed this form**

**Role in setting**

**Date**

*Completed forms should be returned to the reporting inspector:*



Appendix A – List of data items included in the Early Education Setting Information Form Return (SIF Return) submitted by providers of early education setting to the Department of Education on request.

Data Item	Purpose	Is it shared by Early Years Inspectorate section with Inspector/s?	Retention period	Comment
<b>Ref No. of provider</b>	To uniquely identify the registered provider of early year setting	Yes	Retained for 18 months and subject to review thereafter	<i>May be retained longer if an inspection is still ongoing</i>
<b>Name of provider</b>	To identify provider	Yes	As above	As above
<b>Name of owner/manager</b>	To identify owner/ manager	Yes	As above	As above
<b>Name of chairperson/ director of management body</b>	To identify chairperson/ director of management body	Yes	As above	As above
<b>Name of parent representative</b>	To identify parent representative	Yes	As above	As above
<b>List of staff members by name including name of owner where involved in delivering early education setting</b>	To identify staff member/ owner associated with a setting and/or setting room or learning area	Yes	As above	As above
<b>Educational qualifications of staff member/ owner who deliver early education</b>	To identify professional context for delivery of Programme	Yes	As above	<i>As above</i>
<b>Setting session (repeated by no. of sessions )</b>	To identify time allocated to sessions	Yes	As above	As above
<b>Staff member assigned to session/room (repeated)</b>	To assist in planning inspections	Yes	As above	As above

## Appendix 5 Step-by-step guide to the publication of inspection reports

### Step 1 - Preparation of the Inspection Report

The inspection report is prepared following completion of the evaluation work in an early education setting. Normally, the evaluation work concludes with oral feedback on the findings and actions advised arising from the inspection. This feedback may be provided to educators and other staff in the setting, and/or to the management and pedagogical leaders, and/or to representatives of a management board/committee.

The Inspectorate then completes the draft inspection report. The draft report is subjected to the Inspectorate's normal quality assurance mechanisms.

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### Step 2 - Draft inspection report issued for Factual Verification (FV)

The Inspectorate Secretariat sends a copy of the draft report, accompanied by a Factual Verification (FV) form ([see page 61](#)) to the email address of the designated contact person, as agreed with the early learning and care setting during the inspection.

The designated contact person is invited to draw the attention of the Inspectorate to any errors of fact in the inspection report, using the Factual Verification Form. The form is returned to the Inspectorate Secretariat by the designated contact person within five working days of the date of issue of the report.

The factual verification form, when returned to the Inspectorate Secretariat by the designated contact person, is referred to the reporting inspector and the appropriate assistant chief inspector. If any errors of fact are drawn to the attention of the Inspectorate, the report may be amended, as necessary, normally within five working days.

If no response is received in respect of factual verification within five working days of the issue of the report, it is assumed that the setting is satisfied that the report is accurate. The report is then prepared for issue to the setting for setting response (SR).

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### Step 3 - Finalised inspection report issued to the early learning and care setting

The Inspectorate Secretariat sends a copy of the finalised report, via email, to the designated contact person. On receiving the inspection report, it is advised that a copy of the report is shared with all staff and management in the setting who participated in and/or were otherwise involved in the inspection: It is also advised that the report should be shared with parents.

## Step 4 - Setting Response (SR)

The purpose of the setting response is

- to allow the management/staff of the setting to respond to, and make observations on, the contents of the inspection report
- to allow management/staff of the setting to set out the actions that the setting has taken or plans to take to address each of the actions advised in the report in the context of their plans for internal evaluation, planning, and improvement in the quality of their provision and practice.

Where the setting chooses to provide a setting response to the Inspectorate, the response is completed by using the pro-forma Inspection Report Setting Response Form (see page 62).

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### *Setting Response: Options available*

Any of the following actions may be taken when the finalised report is issued to the designated contact person for setting response:

#### OPTION A

The early learning and care setting may accept the report without comment and record this intention by returning the proforma inspection report response form to the Inspectorate within ten working days of the date of issue of the inspection report.

#### OPTION B

The early learning and care setting may respond formally to the findings and actions advised of the report by using the proforma inspection report response form. This must be done within ten working days of the date of issue of the inspection report. Normally, if the management board or committee exercises this option, the setting response is included as an appendix to the published report.

#### OPTION C

The early learning and care setting may request a formal review of the inspection under the *Procedure for Review of Inspections on Schools and Teachers under Section 13 (9) of the Education Act, 1998*.

As a suggested guide, the total length of the setting response is approximately 500 words. Restrictions governing the content of the inspection report will also apply to the setting response. For example, the identity of individuals such as educators, children, members of the board of management and inspectors may not be revealed in the setting response. The setting response is an opportunity for the setting to comment on the contents of the report and to highlight the follow-up actions which it proposes to take (or has already taken) following the inspection. Comments on the inspection process may not be included in the setting response. (If the management or staff of the setting has concerns about the way in which the inspection was conducted, the Procedure for Review, should be used to bring their concern to the attention of the Inspectorate). It is also advised that the report with setting response is shared with parents.

Other than in exceptional circumstances, the setting response will be published in its entirety, with the exception of the signature of the management and/or pedagogical leader(s), at the same time and in the same format as the inspection report. If, for any exceptional reason, the DE Inspectorate decides not to publish the setting response, the Inspectorate will inform the setting of this decision and the reason or reasons for it.

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### Step 5 - Publication

If the setting has exercised option A or option B as described above, the Inspectorate will publish the inspection report. Usually, publication takes place within ten working days of the receipt of the completed Inspection Report Setting Response Form from the setting.

If the setting has sought a review of the inspection or the inspection report (or both), the Inspectorate adheres to the Procedure for Review of Inspections on Schools and Teachers under Section 13 (9) of the Education Act, 1998. The inspection report will not be published until the review has been need completed and, if appropriate, any recommendations arising from the review have been addressed. On the completion of this process the publication of the final inspection report proceeds in accordance with option A or B above.

The Inspectorate publishes the inspection report and the setting response (if relevant) on [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie). Where the initial inspection report was not subject to publication the FT Report is issued to the setting but is not published.

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### *No response received*

If a response is not received from the designated contact person(s) of the setting, and if option C has not been availed of within the time limit (ten working days from the date of issue of the report to the setting), a null response is assumed and the report is published by the Inspectorate within a further five working days.

### Inspection Report Factual Verification Form (FV)

Setting name	
Setting address	
Setting TUSLA Registration Number/ DCEDIY ID number/ (please provide all relevant to your setting)	
Setting email address	
Type of inspection	Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI) or Follow-through Inspection
Date of issue of Inspection Report	
For office use	

### Factual inaccuracies in the report

Please use the space below to draw the attention of the Inspectorate to any factual inaccuracy that you believe is included in the draft inspection report issued to your setting. Alternatively, please supply details on an attached sheet.

Page	Inaccuracies

This form must be signed and returned to [eyereports@education.gov.ie](mailto:eyereports@education.gov.ie) within five working days of the date of issue of the draft report to the early education setting (i.e. insert date here).

<b>Signature</b>	
<b>Print name:</b>	
<b>Signature:</b>	
<b>Role in the early learning and care setting:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	

### Return address:

Completed forms can be scanned and sent to: [eyereports@education.gov.ie](mailto:eyereports@education.gov.ie)

Or posted to:

EYEI Reports, Department of Education, Marlborough St., Dublin 1 D01 RC96

### Inspection Report Setting Response Form (SR)

Setting Name:	
Setting address:	
Setting TUSLA Registration Number/ DCEDIY ID number/ (please provide all relevant to your setting):	
Type of Inspection:	Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI) or Follow-through Inspection
Date of issue of report for SR:	
For Office Use	

**Please choose option A, or B, or C**

OPTION A	I/We accept the report as the final inspection report and do not wish to respond formally to the report
OPTION B	I/We accept the report as the final inspection report and wish to respond formally to the report. I/We agree that the response submitted will be included as an appendix to the report. The response is submitted below
OPTION C	I/We do not accept the report as the final inspection report and request a review of the inspection in accordance with the published procedures of the Department of Education for the review of Inspections. I/We will submit/have submitted a written request for c: review to the Office of the Chief Inspector

**Setting response: Part A**

Please comment on the content of the inspection report (approximately 100-150 words) and note that comments on the inspection process may not be included in the setting response -see Step 4, Appendix 4

[100-150 words approx.]

**Setting Response: Part B**

Please indicate the actions that the early education setting has taken or plans to take to address each of the actions advised in the report (approximately 350 - 400 words)

[350-400 words approx.]

This form must be signed and returned to [eyereports@education.gov.ie](mailto:eyereports@education.gov.ie) within ten working days of the date of issue of the final report to the early education setting (i.e. insert date here).

Signature	
Print name:	
Signature:	
Role in the early learning and care setting:	
Date:	

**Return address:**

Completed forms can be scanned and sent to: [eyereports@education.gov.ie](mailto:eyereports@education.gov.ie)

Or posted to:

EYEI Reports, Department of Education, Marlborough St, Dublin 1 D01 RC96

