



13th April 2021

Circular: 0020/2021

To: Management Committees, Owners/Managers, Preschool Leaders,
Practitioners and Other Staff of Early Learning and Care Settings

ARRANGEMENTS FOR INSPECTION OF EARLY LEARNING AND CARE (ELC) SETTINGS APRIL-JUNE 2021

Please bring this circular letter to the attention of all relevant staff and to all members of management committees (where appropriate)

SUMMARY

This circular provides information about the Department of Education Inspectorate's inspection, research and evaluation engagements with ELC settings between April and June 2021.

It provides an update to Department Circular 0042/2020 which issued to the ELC sector in June 2020.

Introduction

The Inspectorate is very conscious of the very significant challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic which are faced by owners, managers, preschool leaders, practitioners and other staff in ELC settings, as well as the children, parents and communities served by ELC settings. Owners, managers, leaders, practitioners and other staff in ELC settings have made outstanding efforts to reopen and sustain face-to-face provision. Their work in engaging with parents and children at home during closure periods is also acknowledged and appreciated.

Conscious of the challenges and context faced by ELC settings, the Inspectorate adjusted the normal arrangements for inspection, evaluation, research and support work for the 2020/21 academic year. These adjustments were set out in Department of Education Circular 0042/2020

<https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/87d25-arrangements-for-inspection-of-earlylearning-and-care-elc-settings-for-the-20202021-academic-year/> The primary purpose of this Circular letter is to provide you with additional information about the Department of Education Inspectorate's inspection, research and evaluation engagements with settings until June 2021.



1. Inspection and evaluation work April - June 2021

Enabling all children, particularly the most vulnerable, to remain connected with their ELC settings and to continue to progress in their learning continues to be a priority of both Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the Department of Education. Inspectors are very conscious of the critical role played by owners, managers, leaders, practitioners and other staff in ELC settings and parents and the whole setting community in supporting this priority.

The Inspectorate's programme of work in the April -June 2021 period reflects a commitment to supporting ELC settings and ensuring the best possible outcomes for all learners. The programme of work for the remainder of the period to June 2021 will include the following:

Inspection Activity

The Department of Education Inspectorate will recommence evaluation activity from 12 April 2021 in a manner that is appropriate and respectful of the current context in ELC settings.

In the early stages of resumption of the inspection programme, the focus will be on Follow-Through inspections. These are typically carried out when a setting has a published Early Years Education Inspection report for at least one year to allow for progress against inspection recommendations to take place. In the planning of each of these inspections, consideration will be given to the current context in which the ECCE Programme is operating.

The Inspectorate is also planning for a carefully phased recommencement of the programme of normal inspection work in this period. In line with the Guide to Early Years Education Inspection available at:

<https://assets.gov.ie/25240/e9c7597b2a5644e0b605aa434dd8d08f.pdf> ,

advance notice will be provided to the ELC setting. During this initial contact, arrangements will be made to ensure compliance with public health guidance whilst allowing for the gathering of authentic data to support the evaluation. For example, pre-inspection and post-inspection meetings may be arranged remotely either by telephone or online; we will maximise observation of interactions with children in outdoor settings as far as possible; and carry out observations in a limited number of indoor environments. Additional information to support settings to engage with inspection activity will be provided and discussed when initial contact is made by the Inspector.



Provision of information, guidance and support

The Inspectorate will continue to draw from the findings of the analysis of education inspection in ELC settings to develop and publish further topics in the webinar series, *Insights: Quality in Education* (<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c71c0-insights/>). To date webinars have been developed to look at the following topics:

- Transitions, Early Literacy, Assessment for Learning, Developing Physical Skills, Self-Evaluation, Effective Outdoor Learning Environments, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

Webinars on the following topics are in preparation and will be published in the coming months:

- Promoting Resilience, Partnership with Parents, Working with Mixed-age Groups, Free Play, Promoting Creativity.

In addition to communicating findings of inspection and research, this work enables the collection and sharing of exemplars of effective practice in ELC settings nationally and promotes a common understanding of high quality early education provision and practice amongst all stakeholder groups including early years education professionals, setting leaders, managers, parent and learners.

If you would like to provide feedback/comment on the Insights webinars or receive notification when a new series is published please let us know at the following email address insights_info@education.gov.ie

2. Plans for the extension of Department of Education (DE) educationfocused inspections to 0-3 year olds

The DE Inspectorate currently has a quality assurance role in relation to the educational aspects of State-funded education provision for learners from age 2 years and 8 months to age 18 years. It is also tasked with extending this inspection role to include provision for children from 0 – 3 years as a commitment in *First 5, A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families*.

As a result of this extended remit, the Inspectorate will have an inspection role in relation to the educational quality of provision in centre-based settings and schools providing for learners from 0 - 18 years. This has the potential to build positive connections across ELC, primary and post-primary education settings and thereby improve the educational transition experiences of children and young people.



The Inspectorate is currently working on the development of the EYEI 0-6 Model in line with the commitment in *First 5* and this development work will continue in a sample of ELC settings in the period from 12 April 2021. Briefing and consultation with early years stakeholders will take place in parallel with a field trial of the extended quality framework for EYEI in co-operation with volunteer ELC settings. If you are interested in participating in this field trial please contact EYEInspectorate@education.gov.ie.

3. HSE School/ELC Setting Support Service

During the final months of 2020, the Inspectorate collaborated with colleagues in the Health Service Executive's School Support Teams to assist them as they provided specific and targeted support to schools and ELC settings. Since early November 2020, a number of inspectors have been assigned for a portion of their time to the HSE School Support Service. This support increased with the recent re-opening of schools and ELC settings delivering the ECCE Programme in ELC settings and the Inspectorate will continue to provide assistance to the HSE Support Teams as required and agreed.

4. Specific activities will be kept under review

The specific activities included in the Inspectorate's work will be kept under review and will evolve in line with public health advice and the prevailing health circumstances.

Harold Hislop Chief
Inspector
oci@education.gov.ie