



31 August 2021

Circular: 0044/2021

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

**ARRANGEMENTS FOR DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
INSPECTORATE ENGAGEMENT WITH EARLY LEARNING AND
CARE (ELC) SETTINGS
SEPTEMBER 2021 - JUNE 2022**

SUMMARY

This circular:

- Acknowledges the significant efforts made by ELC practitioners, leaders, owners, managers and other staff of ELC settings to ensure children's early education and learning could be sustained during 2020/21
- Provides information about the Department of Education Inspectorate's planned inspection engagements with ELC settings between September 2021 and June 2022
- Supersedes Department of Education Circulars 0042/2020 and 0020/2021.

1. Introduction

The Department of Education (DE) Inspectorate is very conscious of the very significant challenges that were faced by ELC setting practitioners, leaders, owners, managers and other staff in ELC settings during 2020/21 because of COVID-19.

The DE Inspectorate's engagement with ELC settings since March 2020 highlighted the outstanding efforts by many ELC settings, their staff, management and parents to keep settings operating safely and effectively and to support children's learning and wellbeing at home while settings were fully or partially closed. ELC settings demonstrated great creativity and innovation in providing continuity of learning experiences for children and in engaging with parents and families throughout the pandemic.

As the public health situation improves, the DE Inspectorate looks forward to continuing the phased implementation of its inspection programme that will



include a full range of inspection activity between September 2021 and June 2022. Information on inspection activity in primary and special schools (Circular 0032/2021) is published online [here](#); information on inspection activity in post primary schools and in other centres of education (Circular 0033/2021) is published online [here](#).

2. The Department of Education Inspectorate's planned inspection and development work September 2021 – June 2022

In April 2021 the DE Inspectorate began its phased implementation of an inspection programme following the reopening of ELC settings. At the outset, the emphasis was on conducting Follow-through (FT) inspections with a small number of Early Years Education Inspections (EYEIs) also taking place. Follow-through (FT) inspections 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.

2.1 Early Years Education Inspections (EYEIs) and Follow-through (FT) inspections

The DE Inspectorate's full inspection programme will recommence from September 2021 and will include a substantial number of EYEIs. In addition to our programme of EYEIs, we will also be conducting FT inspections.

Details of these inspections are set out in the *Guide to Early Years Education Inspection* available at:

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

2.2 Plans for the extension of DE Early Years Education Inspections (EYEIs) to include evaluation of education provision for 0-3 year olds

The DE Inspectorate currently has a quality assurance role in relation to 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 monitoring of education provision for children from 0 – 3 years, in line with 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 DE 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 DE Inspectorate is currently working on the development of the EYEI 0-6 model in line with that commitment. This development work will continue in a sample of ELC settings in the period September to December 2021. Briefing and consultation with early years stakeholders will take place in parallel with a field trial of the EYEI 0-6 model in co-operation with volunteer ELC settings. If you are interested in participating in this field trial please contact EYEInspectorate@education.gov.ie.

2.3 The voice of children and parents

The experience of the pandemic highlighted for us as an Inspectorate the importance of voice – of listening to the views of children and their parents about children’s learning experiences at all levels of the education system. In the ELC context, the DE Inspectorate will be trialling new ways of engaging with parents in the course of inspections such as through online surveys or focus group meetings between inspectors and parents during the September 2021- June 2022 period. In addition, the DE Inspectorate will be continuing to develop its ways of engaging with children before, during and after inspections.

3. Dissemination of education inspection findings and education resources

The DE Inspectorate will continue to draw from the findings of the analysis of education inspections in ELC settings to develop and publish further topics in its webinar series, *Insights: Quality in Education* (<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c71c0-insights/>).

To date, webinars on the following topics have been developed:

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

We have also published two webinars to support ELC practitioners to engage with EYEI processes.

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



- Partnership with Parents
- Working with Mixed-age Groups
- Free Play
- Promoting Creativity
- *Luath Thumoideachas* / Early immersion education.

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 among all stakeholder groups including early years education professionals, setting leaders, managers and parents.

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

4. Advance notice

Typically, advance notice will be provided to the ELC setting in relation to inspections carried out by the DE Inspectorate between September 2021 and June 2022. During this initial contact, arrangements will be made to ensure compliance with public health guidance during the inspection while 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. Additional information to support ELC settings to engage with inspection activity will be provided and discussed when initial contact is made by the inspector with the ELC setting.

Participation in the trial of the extended EYEI 0- 6 model and all other trial and developmental work carried out by the DE Inspectorate will be voluntary and advance notice of such engagements will be provided to the participating ELC settings.

5. Public health advice

All inspections and other DE Inspectorate engagements with ELC settings between September 2021 and June 2022 will be fully cognisant of, and in line with, the prevailing public health advice. All inspections will also continue to be carried out in a way that is appropriate to and respectful of the operational context of each individual ELC setting.

Harold Hislop
Chief Inspector
oci@education.gov.ie