

Message from Chief Inspector to Early Learning and Care Settings

[Academic Year 2021-22]

As the summer months draw to a close and children return to Early Learning and Care (ELC) settings and schools, I am getting in touch to let you know about the arrangements for Department of Education inspectors' work with ELC settings from September 2021.

I must, however, firstly acknowledge how much we have learned from the great work of ELC settings and school communities over the past year and indeed since the pandemic began. During that time, inspectors were really struck by the outstanding efforts of many school and setting leaders, teachers, practitioners, boards, support staff, owners and managers to keep ELC settings and schools operating safely and effectively for children and young people and to support them and their families at home when schools and settings had to close. We have witnessed the innovative and creative approaches of education practitioners across the education system as they strived to provide the best educational experiences for the young children in their care. We saw how many ELC settings developed new outdoor learning experiences that enthused and invigorated our youngest learners. And we came to appreciate in a new and very real way the role of schools and ELC settings in the lives of children and their parents.

Inspectors are acutely aware of the impact of COVID on all involved in education – most especially children and young people with special educational needs. And we know there were many others – both staff and children - who were affected by the pandemic.

As an Inspectorate, we also learned in a new and more immediate way the importance of voice - of listening to the experiences of all in our ELC and school communities – children, parents, practitioners, teachers, owners, managers – and of taking due account of those voices in our work with settings and schools. As we look ahead with optimism to the new academic year, I want to let you know that we are publishing a circular for ELC settings with details of our plans. We have also recently published details of our planned inspection work across the wider education system; you can access the relevant circulars at: https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0032_2021.pdf and https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0033_2021.pdf

Our inspection activity in ELC settings recommenced in April 2021 and essentially we plan to continue with this work in as normal a manner as possible during the academic year 2021-22. Our work will include:

- Early Years Education Inspections (EYEIs) and Follow-through (FT) inspections. Details of those inspections are set out in the Guide to Early Years Education Inspection available at: <https://assets.gov.ie/25240/e9c7597b2a5644e0b605aa434dd8d08f.pdf>
- Research and development to support the extension of Department of Education Early Years Education Inspections



to include evaluation of education provision for 0-3 year olds in line with a commitment in First 5, A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families

- Implementation of strategies to give greater voice to children and parents during inspections
- Dissemination of education inspection findings and education resources - in particular though the continued publication of the DE Inspectorate webinar series, Insights: Quality in Education (<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c71c0-insights/>).

We continue to be fully committed to working in partnership with our colleagues in the Tusla Early Years Inspectorate to ensure that our activities are coordinated and complementary in the best interests of children. We will also seek to take a strengths-based approach to our work, recognising and validating the professional work of staff in early learning and care settings.

For now, I want to thank you for your support during the last academic year and I look forward with hope to a safe, successful and happy 2021-2022 for all.

Harold Hislop
Chief Inspector



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education