

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT FOR FACTUAL VERIFICATION

Setting Name	Little Stars Montessori School
Setting Address	Castle Avenue Kilminchy Portlaoise County Laois
DCYA number	18LS0145

Date of Inspection: 04-04-2019

WHAT IS AN EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION?

The Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI) model is used to provide evaluative information, advice and support in relation to education provision in a pre-school setting participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. These inspections affirm good practice and advise actions, where appropriate, to aid the further development of education provision in the setting.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspector(s) evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. Quality of the context to support children's learning and development
2. Quality of processes to support children's learning and development
3. Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements
4. Quality of management and leadership for learning

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the setting's provision in each area.

Early-Years Education Inspection

Date of inspection	04-04-2019
Inspection activities undertaken	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with setting owner• Observation of interactions during the four morning ECCE sessions• Interaction with children• Review of relevant documents• Post-inspection feedback meeting with setting owner

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Little Stars Montessori School is located in Portlaoise, Co. Laois. In October 2018 the setting changed ownership; the core staff team remained the same in the setting. The setting has four pre-school rooms where the local children can avail of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The children are allocated to different groups according to their age and stage of development. All pre-school rooms in the setting were visited as part of the inspection process.

AREA 1

QUALITY OF CONTEXT TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- The quality of the context to support the children's learning and development is very good.
- A welcoming atmosphere is evident as parents and children are greeted warmly and with respect at arrival and departure times. Parents come into the setting and settle their children into various play areas.
- Practitioners have a good relationship with parents and children; there is open conversation and family stories are shared. The practitioners display various stories in the corridors demonstrating the children's daily activities and experiences.
- The children are active agents in the well-planned daily routine which offers them choice in their own learning. They use a self-registration system which visually displays who is in pre-school each day.
- Transitions between activities are instant with a few verbal prompts to prepare children for the next stage of the day. Children are not always ready to move onto the next activity.
- Snack time is a social occasion and the practitioners encourage healthy eating and independence during this time. The children demonstrate good self-help skills which are effectively supported by the practitioners.
- The children are developing an understanding of their emotions and feelings. The practitioners use yoga and breathing exercises to relax and support children. The practitioners currently solve social conflicts for the children; this approach needs to be reviewed.
- There are very good displays which support individual and group identity within the setting. Visual resources to support the children's awareness of cultural diversity and of their local community are embedded in all pre-school rooms in the setting. Recently some parents visited the setting for a tea party; this event was linked to the interests of the children in one pre-school room.

Actions advised

- It is advised that the practitioners use displays and props to prepare the children for transitions between activities. This will also enable the children to engage in more prolonged play periods which they can conclude in a more gradual and phased manner.
- It is advised that the practitioners increase the support given to children to solve social conflicts and to understand their emotions and feelings. The practitioners could support children through asking open-ended questions and giving more time for children to reflect and make independent decisions.

AREA 2

QUALITY OF PROCESSES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- The quality of the processes to support the children's learning and development is very good.
- The curriculum in place is an effective blend of the Montessori Method and play-based learning. The practitioners are currently introducing an emergent curriculum and they ensure the curriculum is consistently informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*.
- Play is the main medium for learning with time given to children to allow them to pursue their interests. The blend of curricula ensures children have different experiences and resources available to them throughout their day. All indoor environments are well laid out with defined interest areas. The environments offer a range of resources including some real-life equipment and Montessori equipment.
- The setting has a written curriculum statement which supports the implementation of medium-term and short-term plans. The practitioners review and document the planning on a continuous basis. Planning focuses predominantly on themes and occasions; some of the children's emergent interests are included.
- The children have individual journals which document activities and observations that take place during the year. The practitioners have recently started to complete a group journal which they intend to share with parents. They also complete some formal observations on the children detailing the activity completed and the links to learning goals. Observations could be carried out on a more regular basis and could be shared with parents more continuously. Interactions between practitioners and children are playful.
- The practitioners support the children to challenge themselves, to ask questions and to explore new information on topics of interest. The practitioners ask testing questions around various topics; more open-ended questions would be beneficial. Recently, one group of children engaged in construction work and explored various machines and buildings where construction work takes place. This was then displayed for children to reflect on and share with their parents.
- The setting provides an inclusive environment with a strong focus on supporting children with additional needs. Children with additional needs have a communication book, individual plans and goals and access to support through the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM).

Actions advised

- It is advised that the practitioners review short-term planning to ensure it captures the children's individual emergent interests. Short-term planning should name the child associated with the emergent interest and the specific steps that will be taken to support the interest.
- The practitioners are advised to observe the children on a more regular basis and to ensure the observations capture each child's individual interests and learning needs. The practitioners are advised to share these observations with parents on a more continuous basis.
- Building on the good interactions between practitioners and children, practitioners are advised to extend the use of open-ended questions to scaffold the children's learning to a greater extent and to enable them to make connections with their previous learning and knowledge. This will help to optimise the daily learning and development opportunities for the children.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is very good.
- The children are happy in their learning environment. Most children demonstrate confidence in choosing their own activities and leading their own learning.
- The setting has an outdoor environment which offers children a variety of experiences including sensory play, gross motor development, risky play and exploring nature. On the day of the inspection, the children enjoyed finding worms, measuring them and seeing how they move.
- The children enjoy socialising in a range of groups and on the day of the inspection all children met in the outdoor area. This offered children the opportunity to engage in peer learning and to socialise with children of different age groups.

- The book area is used throughout the day. Children freely choose to read books independently and practitioners sit with children to encourage reading and imaginative discussion.
- The children have access to some mark-making materials and a range of art materials. The practitioners use template-based resources for planned group art activities. These practices limit the children's creative experiences.
- The children enjoy singing and practitioners use songs and puppets to encourage listening and turn-taking. They also enjoy imaginative play and on the day of the inspection they spent extended periods of time playing in the home corner.
- Each child's learning journal contains a range of art work and photographs which document and celebrate their achievements and experiences. There is potential to extend the use of these journals.
- The practitioners plan the environment and activities to ensure children have hands-on learning experiences. They introduce and explore counting and mathematical concepts using concrete materials.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to extend the children's access to art and mark-making materials; a designated mark-making area which offers children a variety of resources and materials to explore would be beneficial. The practitioners need to reduce the use of templates as a basis for planned group activities and focus on activities which offer more opportunities for practical learning.
- The practitioners are encouraged to extend the use of the individual learning journals to include the child's own reflections and memories. These journals could be sent home with parents during the year and parents could provide feedback and add comments.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- There is a professional working ethos in the setting and all practitioners work together as a team. The owner delegates some tasks and responsibilities to practitioners.
- The practitioners are very open to change and over the past few months they have many beneficial improvements in the setting, under the new management structure.
- The owner is a good role model for the practitioners and leads the way in introducing new and innovative practice. She has a clear vision for the setting and the ECCE team support her in implementing these ideas. Over the past number of months she has supported practitioners to develop their environments and has introduced new strategies for documenting planning and assessment. The *Aistear, Solta Practice Guide* could be used to a greater extent to support this work. The owner values the importance of continued professional development and encourages and supports all practitioners to engage in training and conferences relevant to their work.
- There are regular staff meetings where the curriculum is planned, issues of concern are discussed and in-house training is completed. These meetings have been a key factor in supporting a smooth transition to new management and introducing new procedures in the setting.
- Communication with parents is facilitated through a newsletter and a parent handbook. The setting has an open-door policy and a settle-in policy. One practitioner greets parents on a daily basis and all practitioners share information with parents regarding their children and the daily events. The potential to increase parental involvement in the setting could be explored.
- The transition to primary school is planned for in June. The owner is developing links with some local principals, and a transitions to school booklet is being developed. Information is shared with parents regarding local schools and parents are encouraged to attend workshops on the transitions to school. An end-of-year report is provided for each child; this can be shared with the primary schools.

Actions advised

- It is advised that the practitioners use the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to support self-reflection and to assist the setting in documenting its key changes and developments.
- It is advised that the practitioners extend parental involvement in the setting, particularly in relation to curriculum implementation. Parental involvement in outings, setting developments and the transition to school will support the experiences of the children.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the setting to continue to implement the actions advised above is very good. The owner and practitioners have good communication procedures in place to support the implementation of the actions advised.

Summary of Overall Inspection

Area	Quality Level
Quality of context to support children's learning and development	Very good
Quality of processes to support children's learning and development	Very good
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	Very good
Quality of management and leadership for learning	Very good

Language used in Early-Years Education Inspection reports

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.