EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Name</th>
<th>Little Dale Academy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting Address</td>
<td>21 Dale Road</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mount Merrion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>County Dublin</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>09DR0077</td>
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Date of Inspection: 24-09-2019
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 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of inspection</th>
<th>24-09-2019</th>
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| Inspection activities undertaken | • Interaction with children  
• Review of relevant documents  
• Feedback to setting manager and lead practitioners |
• Meeting with setting manager  
• Meeting with practitioners  
• Observation of interactions during a number of sessions |

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Little Dale Academy is part of a long-established group of four privately-owned settings. This setting was established twelve years ago and is located in a large housing estate in south county Dublin. All children attend the setting on a full-time basis. It offers a Montessori approach to education with elements of play. On the day of the inspection, seven practitioners, including a practitioner employed under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) programme, and thirty-eight children were observed across three rooms. The manager and three practitioners attended the post-inspection feedback meeting. The early years setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised of the report, and the response of the setting will be found in the appendix of this report.

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.
• The majority of the children are present prior to the start of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. As new children join the group they are warmly welcomed by the practitioners and their friends.
• The children are offered very good opportunities to be active agents in their learning. In the morning, they self-register their attendance by adding their photographs to the bus display. Throughout the session, they choose and organise their own activities and replace them on the shelves when finished.
• A display of the daily routine is visible at child height and contributes to children’s understanding of the daily sequence of activities. The practitioners use effective strategies to signal transitions between activities. These include giving children adequate time to complete activities, the use of verbal reminders and the practitioners and children singing the tidy-up song.
• Secure and supportive relationships are fostered between the practitioners and the children. A key-person approach is used and the list of each key person and her group of children is on display. In this setting, the key-person approach is used for the gathering and recording of information on the children’s learning.
• The practitioners offer consistent meaningful praise and encouragement to all children. The practitioners provide guidance towards positive behaviour through the use of calm, positive tones and they support children to negotiate their minor disagreements by giving them the necessary words.
• The uniqueness of each child is reflected in the birthday displays and the children’s names and photographs on their coat hooks.
• The children are developing an awareness of cultural diversity through the discussions on cultural celebrations, such as Chinese New Year, the ‘Hello’ display in different languages, and the jigsaws and flags from different countries.
• Parents visit the setting for the Christmas play and the end-of-year picnic. Parents, including a doctor, a vet and a Garda, have come to share their work experiences.

Action advised

• The practitioners are advised to further reflect the diversity of cultures, abilities, languages and genders in the setting and community in the rooms. This could be achieved by using resources and books, depicting the home languages of the children, and through discussions on family celebrations.
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 learning programme and planning are clearly underpinned by Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. The themes of Aistear are displayed in each room and linked to children’s engagement in activities. The practitioners undertake long-term and medium planning that is divided into weekly topics. Practitioners take anecdotal notes of individual children’s comments and, on occasions, some noted interests are included in planning a group weekly topic.
- A range of approaches is used by practitioners to record children’s learning. These include a log of children’s progression in their use of the Montessori materials, developmental checklists and learner stories in children’s scrapbook. A childcare app is used for sharing information on children’s learning and photographs of their engagement in activities with parents. The next steps planned for children’s progression are evident in these assessment approaches.
- A variety of positive respectful interactions, such as open-ended questions and prompts, are used consistently by practitioners to engage children’s thinking and problem-solving skills. For example, during an activity on the five senses, a practitioner asked children: ‘What do you think it feels like?’, ‘Does anybody know anything that feels, rough, smooth?’ and ‘How does it smell?’
- The indoor environments are well laid out and equipped with a wide range of materials to support the specific Montessori areas, such as practical life, language, mathematics, culture and sensorial learning.
- A number of play resources are available to children, including a home corner area, small world play and construction play, before and after the ECCE session. The ECCE daily routine does not currently provide opportunities for children to engage in play during the session.
- Children access the outdoor area on a daily basis. A sand tray and opportunities to practice their physical skills using cars, a climbing frame and slides are available to the children.

Actions advised
- The practitioners are advised to extend their current approaches to planning by developing a clear cycle of progression for children who will be attending for both years. The inclusion of the emerging interests of the individual children into the short-term plans is also advised.
- Practitioners are advised to adapt the daily routine by adding time within the ECCE session for children to engage in a variety of play experiences. In so doing, the provision of more regular opportunities for children to engage in self-initiated, purposeful learning through play, supported by freely accessible resources, is advised.

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 display as happy and confident. They show enjoyment and engagement in their self-selected activities and in the adult-initiated activities. For example, children demonstrated great satisfaction when they discussed the items, such as cars, that they have brought from home that were matched to the sound of the week.
- Many children are experiencing success in the activities provided and show initiative and resourcefulness. This was evident as children successfully completed the pink tower and the knobbed cylinders independently.
- The children are provided with many opportunities to practise their independence and self-help skills. They can access their drinks when thirsty, place their rubbish in the appropriate recycling bin and put on their coats independently.
- Children take part in tidy-up routines and a child-helper chart lists tasks that children do throughout the session, such as acting as librarian, snack helpers and feeding the fish in the aquarium.
- Children are learning to talk about their emotions and a chart and cards showing different emotions are used effectively by practitioners to help children to express their feelings.
• Each child has an individual folder that contains samples of his/her art work and photographs of his/her engagement in activities. Examples of adult-planned art and craft activities and templates linked to themes are displayed in the rooms, with a small number of examples of children’s own creative and imaginative free process art.
• The children are developing an awareness of the natural environment. A farmer has brought lambs to visit the setting, the children go on nature walks to the local park and they plant flowers outside and herbs indoors.

Action advised
• The practitioners are advised to actively promote the children’s individual creativity by reducing the amount of template-based and adult-led art and craft activities. The addition of the children’s comments on their drawings will enhance children’s sense of well-being and identity and belonging.

AREA 4
QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING
• The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
• The practitioners in each room chat together informally at the end of each week. The whole staff come together each month for formal staff meetings; they discuss the learning programme and plan for the month ahead. Decisions taken at these meetings are documented.
• There is a very strong ethos of teamwork, partnership and collaboration among practitioners. Many examples of collaborative practice were observed, including practitioners making decisions regarding staying indoors or going outside and when to start snack time.
• The manager receives support and information from the local childcare committee and a private agency. She is committed to promoting continuing professional development and organises in-house training on different workshops for staff throughout the year, such as First Aid, Art and Aistear.
• The manager promotes high standards and fosters a clear vision for the provision of a quality learning experience for children. Her role includes offering informal job chats to practitioners to affirm good practice and support ongoing improvement.
• The practitioners use various approaches for the mutual sharing of information with parents. These include informal chats at arrival and collection times, the use of social media and a termly newsletter. To support practitioners’ knowledge of their child, parents complete an ‘All about Me’ form before their child starts in the setting. Open evenings for parents are held twice a year; parents visit the rooms and chat to practitioners about the learning activities.
• A number of effective procedures are in place to support the sensitive management of transitions within and into the pre-school. During the summer, a key person accompanies children moving into their new room and stays with them until they are settled. At the start of the school year adequate time and staggered hours are facilitated and parents are actively encouraged to stay with their child until he/she is comfortable in the new environment.
• The practitioners discuss with the children their upcoming move to primary school. The setting offers an after-school programme and the owner has developed informal links with the local schools. An end-of-year report outlines children’s progress and is shared with parents who may then decide to share it with the school.

Actions advised
• The practitioners are advised to avail of the professional self-evaluation tools in the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide to support them in their professional reflection and review of their practice.
• The practitioners are advised to further develop procedures to support the children’s transition to primary school. The use of the National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NCCA) transition document Mo Scéal would be beneficial in this approach.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE
The setting manager and practitioners attended and engaged professionally in the feedback discussion following the evaluation. The capacity of the setting to implement the actions advised above is very good.
## Summary of Overall Inspection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Quality Level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of context to support children’s learning and development</td>
<td>Very good</td>
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### Language used in Early-Years Education Inspection reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>Provision that is very good is highly effective in meeting the needs of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Provision that is good is effective in meeting the needs of children but with some aspects to be developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Provision that is fair requires practice to be improved to meet the needs of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Provision that is poor is inadequate and requires significant improvement to meet the needs of children.</td>
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APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT
SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report
- We were happy with both the Inspection and the outcome.
- The Report positively reflects the programmes and opportunities the children are offered whilst in our care.
- The report offers great advice on how to further extend opportunities for learning and reflecting.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

Actions already taken:
- New Template for planning
- Open-ended materials for arts and crafts
- Diverse reading materials added to library “reflection” notes

Plans to:
- Discuss the use of reflective practice
- Use self-evaluation tools
- Ensure Montessori programmes are not repeated for those staying a second year.
- Ensure continual growth and improvement within the service especially around children’s learning and development in particular learning experiences.