EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Name</th>
<th>First Steps Preschool</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting Address</td>
<td>Old Glencar Road</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Letterkenny</td>
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<td></td>
<td>County Donegal</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>09DL0098</td>
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Date of Inspection: 18-11-2019
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>18-11-2019</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Observation of interactions during two sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meeting with the setting manager</td>
<td>• Interaction with the children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meeting with the practitioners</td>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Observation of interactions during two sessions</td>
<td>• Feedback to setting manager and practitioner</td>
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**CONTEXT OF SETTING**

First Steps Pre-school is a private setting located in Letterkenny, County Donegal. It provides a morning and afternoon pre-school programme for children enrolled on the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the morning of inspection, thirteen children were present along with the owner / manager and two practitioners. Ten children and with two practitioners were present in the afternoon. When first established, the pre-school operated through English. An early-immersion experience is now provided, whereby the children learn the Irish language through play. The majority of the children transfer to Irish-medium primary education. The early years setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised of the report; the setting chose to accept the report without response.

**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 good.
- There is a notably caring and encouraging atmosphere in the setting. The children and their parents are greeted and welcomed warmly at arrival and collection time.
- Relationships between the practitioners and the children are consistently positive and affirming.
- The children enter the pre-school with ease and enjoy a short period of free play initially where they exercise choice over their play activities and their play partners.
- A daily routine affords time for free play, circle time, snack, musical and creative activities and outdoor play. The daily routine is displayed for parents, but not in pictorial form for the children.
- While each practitioner has group responsibility for documenting observations of the children’s learning and development, this does not extend to the organisation of small group activities or for communication with parents.
- Transitions from one activity to the next in the session are clearly announced to the children. The practitioners offer effective guidance to support positive behaviour.
- The practitioners support the children’s developing sense of identity and belonging. They get to know each child and his/her family, engaging in conversations about themselves and their lives. Practitioners create attractive photographic displays of the children and their families. Members of the local community such as the Gardaí, the nurse and a hairdresser visit the setting periodically. No visits have occurred in the current pre-school year as yet.

**Actions advised**

- It is advised that the practitioners review the daily routine, ensuring a longer period for uninterrupted child-led play, indoors and outdoors. Presenting the daily routine in a visual format as well as using songs and rhymes to support transitions will help the children’s understanding of the sequence of the session.
- It is advised that a key person approach, where each practitioner takes particular responsibility for a key group of children, organising their small group activities as well as communicating on an ongoing basis with their families, be fully implemented.
- To further nurture the children’s developing sense of identity and belonging, it is advised that increased opportunities are provided for parents and grandparents to visit the setting and to share their skills and life experiences with the children.
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 good.
- Planning for the curriculum is completed by the owner-manager on a long, medium and short-term basis. Planning is linked to Aistear; the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework but is predominantly based on practitioner-selected themes and centred on the indoor environment. While the practitioners understand the need for a more emergent approach to curriculum that follows the interests of all children, they have yet to document the practitioners understand the need for a more emergent approach to curriculum that follows the interests of all children, they have yet to document the children’s interests to inform planning for the learning activities.
- Learning stories are built around photographs of individual children engaged in specific activities with an associated narrative provided that describes the learning occurring. The quality of the learning stories vary in terms of how clearly the next steps in learning are laid out for the child and his/her parents. Scrapbooks are used to compile creative work throughout the pre-school year.
- There is a strong commitment to play-based learning. The indoor environment is structured into distinct interest areas ensuring that children access a range of play types including sensory play, creative play, socio-dramatic play, language play and construction play. Some of the learning areas contain real-word items, including natural and open-ended materials. Other areas, could be developed to foster a love of books, reading, emergent writing skills and creative dispositions.
- The interactions between the practitioners and the children are very good. The practitioners enter the world of make believe with the children and engage very well with them in playful scenarios. They respect the children’s choices and decisions around participation in activities.
- Circle time is used well to develop the children’s speaking and listening skills and to allow the practitioners explore the children’s experiences outside the pre-school. Practitioners model the Irish language very well and are very supportive and encouraging of the children’s attempts to use Irish. Songs and rhymes are used to very good effect to support language development.
- The practitioners foster an inclusive culture in the setting. They engage with the Better Start Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) to access support for children with additional needs, when required.

Actions advised
- It is advised that the practitioners develop enquiry-learning approaches by engaging the children in planning and deciding what they would like to learn and enquire more about, including their learning in the outdoor environment. The ‘Planning and Assessment’ pillar in the Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide will guide practitioners in recording the children’s interests in short-term curriculum planning.
- To create a rich picture of the children’s progression in learning over time, it is advised that learning stories that clearly outline the next steps in learning for the individual child are shared with the children and their parents on a regular basis. The learning stories could be placed in the individual scrapbooks to create a wider portfolio of each child’s learning and development.
- It is advised that the practitioners develop the indoor and outdoor learning environments further. Making the reading area more attractive and introducing a permanent creative space with a wider range of mark-making tools and materials, including recyclable materials and various types of paper would be beneficial. Use of the self-evaluation tool ‘Creating and using the learning environment’ in the Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide, will support this action.

AREA 3
QUALITY OF CHILDREN’S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children’s learning experiences and achievements is good.
- The children display very secure relationships with the practitioners and their peers. They are developing their capacities to play and learn in different social situations; intentionally alone, in pairs and in small groups. They show very positive understanding for the feelings, views and rights of their peers.
- The children demonstrate great enjoyment in free-play activities and confidently choose where to play, with whom to play and when to change activity during the free-play periods.
During the inspection, a number of children were very engaged in make-believe play in the doctor’s surgery where they bandaged each other and the practitioner, having great fun in do so. There were also many fun interactions observed in the home corner where the children enjoyed using real kitchen equipment. Sensory play with water and sand was also very popular with the children.

Many children demonstrated good levels of fine motor control, dexterity and planning as they constructed with blocks.

Circle time supports the children to develop communication skills; they listen to their peers and hold a teddy as a speaking object when it is their turn to share stories about their weekend activities. There was no observed story reading during the sessions observed and no child was seen to use the book area during the inspection.

The children are very eager to do things for themselves and to complete delegated tasks at snack time. They enjoy distributing lunch bags asking ‘Cé leis an mbosca tóin?’

The children learn much Irish language through songs and poems. The majority of the children love dancing and singing and they all enjoy getting outside for physical activities. A very short period of practitioner-led outdoor play was facilitated during the inspection.

Some children demonstrate an interest in painting at the painting easel. However, their creativity could be further supported through the provision of larger pieces of paper and a greater range of tools and materials, including open ended materials. A large group, practitioner-led drawing activity, which involved the children copying the practitioner as she demonstrated how to draw a dinosaur was overly prescriptive and lacked creative freedom and choice for the children.

The children enjoy pointing out their creative work that is displayed in the learning environment. It was noted that they like to talk about work that had been compiled in their individual scrapbooks.

**Actions advised**

- It is advised that practitioners provide time for the children to plan, do and review their learning activities to give them a stronger voice in the planning of future activities and to ensure that the themes explored are matched to the interests and the ages and stages of development of all the children.
- It is advised that the children be provided with regular opportunities to review their learning portfolios, including their learning stories with their key practitioners and their parents, to allow them to develop a growing awareness of their progress in learning.
- It is advised that story time, in small or in large groups, is a feature of the daily schedule to help foster a love of books and reading among the children. Additional time for child-led outdoor play in a range of interest areas and with a range of open-ended resources would also be beneficial.

**AREA 4**

**QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING**

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is good.
- There is a very positive ethos of team work evident and individual practitioners have a very good understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Both sessions were very well organised.
- The staff meets monthly and reviews planning. Minutes of these meetings are maintained. The practitioners are aware of the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide*.
- The staff has engaged with some CPD around Aistear and demonstrates an interest in further CPD to help with emergent planning and assessment for learning.
- Parents are invited to share information about things that are important in their children’s lives at the beginning of the year. They are given copies of the setting policies and procedures on enrolment. The current mission statement requires updating to reflect the early-immersion experience now provided for children. The curriculum policy could also indicate supports provided for parents regarding their child’s acquisition of the Irish language in the context of his/her playful learning experiences in the setting.
- Parents are informed about their child’s learning experiences through informal discussions, the use of a frequently updated notice board which displays the daily routines and planning and a group text messaging service. The children’s individual folders that document their learning experiences are sent home at the end of each term. An end-of-year review form is used to seek parents’ opinions on the children’s pre-school experiences.
- The owner/ manager has long established links with local primary schools and the children are prepared for the transition to primary school. Extending invitations to infant teachers to visit the
pre-school along with the sharing of relevant information to support continuity in learning for the children would further support the transition of the children to primary education.

**Actions advised**

- Practitioners are advised to seek mentoring support from the Better Start Quality Development Service around the areas of inquiry-based learning, emergent planning and developing learning stories to include clear next steps in learning.
- Practitioners are advised to use the self-evaluation tools in the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* to help with the documentation of review activities.
- To further support the children's transition to primary school, it is advised that the practitioners begin to explore using the 'Mo Scéal' learner profiles and the associated resources available at [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie) to support communication with junior infant teachers.
Summary of Overall Inspection

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</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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