An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna  
Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Name</th>
<th>Willow Montessori School</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting Address</td>
<td>33 Shanganagh Vale</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cabinteely</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dublin 18</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>09DR0065</td>
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Date of Inspection: 11-04-2019
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 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: 11-04-2019

Inspection activities undertaken

- Meeting with setting owner and practitioner
- Observation of interactions during the session
- Interaction with children
- Review of relevant documents
- Feedback to setting owner and practitioner

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Willow Montessori School is located in a residential area in the outskirts of Dublin city. It is a sessional, privately-owned setting that was established in 2008. It provides a morning pre-school session for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the day of inspection, seventeen children and two practitioners, one of whom is the owner, were present. 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 very good.
- A very caring and welcoming atmosphere is evident. Children and parents are greeted by practitioners in a friendly manner.
- Relationships are very positive. There is a history of family members attending the setting and the practitioners know the children and their families well. The open door policy encourages parents to engage in relaxed conversations with the practitioners.
- The daily routine is documented in picture format and time is allocated for the children to actively choose and engage in a range of activities.
- The children adapt easily to daily transitions. Verbal announcements and music are used to indicate that tidy-up has begun. During the inspection, some prolonged waiting times between activities resulted in an increase in noise levels in the room and a small number of children became disengaged.
- A key worker approach is in place. Each practitioner has responsibility for a group of children; the practitioners sit with their group of children during snack time and observe and document the children’s learning.
- Snack time is a relaxed, pleasant social occasion. The practitioners engage in many general discussions with children. In preparation for snack time the children happily take on helper roles; a small number of children found it a little difficult not to be chosen as the helper.
- The children demonstrated confidence in their ability to take care of their own hygiene and personal care needs. This included the use of the toilet facilities, taking on and off their coats and retrieving a chair for circle time.
- The uniqueness of each child is evident in the environment through displays, such as a family tree, photographs, the children’s art work and their hand prints.
- The children’s sense of identity and belonging is supported through a personalised song and the many discussions about the children and their families. Parents are invited to attend sports day, the yearly graduation and Christmas activities. Links with the community are well established through visits from members of An Garda and the postman, as well as trips to the library and walks in the locality.

Actions advised

- To minimise waiting periods between activities, practitioners are advised to revise the management of transitions. The use of books, stretch/movement activities or calming rhymes would be of benefit to children as they wait for the new activities to begin.
- To support the children’s awareness of the organisation of the helper routine and their predictability of daily activities, the practitioners are advised to devise and display a helper routine in collaboration 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.
- A curriculum based on the Montessori Method of education, with links to *Aistear; the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*, is implemented.
- Curriculum planning is organised on a long-term, medium-term and short-term bases. Planning is thematic and based on seasonal events and adult-chosen activities. A review of each activity is carried out and the outcomes documented are linked to the themes of *Aistear*.
- Information on the children’s learning is regularly documented in scrapbooks, in Montessori checklists and anecdotal observations. While there are some notes referring to activities that will extend the children’s interests, these are not yet used to inform planning for the next steps in their learning.
- Interactions between the practitioners and the children are positive and reciprocal. The practitioners provide effective support for peer interactions. They use soft tones to convey messages and motivate the children through positive praise and encouragement. During the inspection, the practitioners frequently moved among the children during free play activities which limited their opportunities for deep levels of engagement, sustained shared thinking or playful interactions with children.
- The practitioners view play as central to children’s learning. The children self-select activities of interest and freely move between the areas of interest.
- The indoor and outdoor learning environments are well maintained. The indoor environment is divided into interest areas. The children have frequent access to the outdoor area. During the inspection, this area was used for a large group fitness activity facilitated by an external agency.
- The variety of well-maintained Montessori and table-top resources are age-appropriate and freely accessible to all children. At the time of the inspection, there was a limited supply of real, open-ended, sensory, creative and mark-making materials freely available to the children.
- The practitioners support the children’s early language, literacy and numeracy skills through songs and rhymes, an appropriate use of language, word/letter displays and a good range of books and Montessori literacy and numeracy activities.
- The practitioners promote an inclusive learning environment for the children. Links with parents are fostered to support the children’s individual learning needs.

*Actions advised*

- The practitioners are advised to review their approach to short-term planning in order to align plans more closely with the children’s emergent interests. The ‘Planning and Assessment’ pillar of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* will assist in this regard.
- The practitioners are advised to be more consistent in their approach to the use of open-ended questioning when sitting with children during activities and to engaging in playful interactions during child-led activities.
- The practitioners are advised to use the environment audit tool from the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to review the environment and to place additional emphasis on providing more freely available, creative, and sensory and mark-making activities. It is also advised that open-ended, real and natural resources are provided in areas, such as the house and construction areas.
AREA 3
QUALITY OF CHILDREN’S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children’s learning experiences and achievements is good.
- The children present as happy and content and are at ease in their surroundings. They demonstrate persistence and decision-making abilities during their learning. For example a child informed the practitioner he was going to finish an activity before he tidied up for snack.
- The children demonstrate good communication skills and confidence in their interactions with their peers and adults. For example, many children introduced themselves to the new adult in the room and on many occasions freely shared information on their learning experiences through the use of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, such as pointing to photographs and samples of their work contained in a scrapbook to convey a message relating to their favourite activities. On the day of inspection, opportunities for the children to discuss or share learning as a small group were not observed.
- The children’s social skills are developing and friendships are emerging. While some children are happy to play alone, most have developed ability to play co-operatively in pairs and in small groups. Their ability to turn take, share and to help others is also emerging.
- For the most part, the children’s behaviour is positive. In the case of a small number of children, their ability to self-regulate needs to be further developed as they found it difficult to express their emotions verbally when responding to minor disagreements.
- The children’s fine and gross motor skills are developing well. A small number of children were happy to discuss their gross motor abilities as they informed the practitioner ‘I can throw’ and ‘I can twirl’.
- On the day of inspection, a large number of children showed great interest in the playdough activity. As they played with the dough they kneaded it, rolled it, cut it and skilfully made flowers and tiny balls from it. As they did this the dough became sticky and the practitioner added more flour; an opportunity to allow the children to explore and experiment with texture was missed.
- The children are developing a good sense of their own identity. They make many references to their families and birthdays and discuss their likes.

Actions advised
- The practitioners are advised to give the children given more opportunities to reflect on their learning in small groups. This will support their developing communication skills and help to consolidate their new and previous learning.
- To build on and support the children’s self-regulation skills, the practitioners are advised to regularly use behaviour management techniques, such as conflict resolution strategies, to encourage the children to discuss their feelings and emotions.
- It is advised that the children be given more autonomy in the use of sensory materials; this will allow them to explore and experiment as opportunities arise.

AREA 4
QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- Informal daily meetings and conversations are used as opportunities for practitioners to share information, plan for and reflect on the children’s learning and development.
- The owner and practitioner present as a professional team. They work well together and show support and respect for each other. There is clarity around individual roles and responsibilities and both have many opportunities to take a lead role in promoting the children’s learning.
- Links are established with the local childcare committee, St Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland, Barnardos and private consultants for advice and training. The practitioners also network with other early years settings through social media platforms. From time-to-time both the owner and practitioner participate in relevant early years training and have recently completed training in the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines.
- An open-door policy is in operation for parents. Information is shared with parents through daily conversations, letters, social media, text messages and information is displayed on the noticeboard. A comprehensive set of policies and procedures has been developed. These are also shared with parents through the parents’ handbook.
• To support the children to settle into the setting, children are invited to visit before they enrol and the practitioners obtain information in the ‘All about me form’ for each child. At the beginning of the year the children settle into the setting on a phased-in basis. Photographs of the children as they settle are also shared with parents.
• The practitioners prepare the children for the move to primary school through a variety of planned activities. With consent from parents, the practitioners currently share information with the primary school regarding children with additional needs.

Actions advised
• The practitioners are advised to conduct formal meetings with parents to further support the sharing of information on children’s learning and development.
• The practitioners are advised to develop a policy to support all children’s transitions to primary school. The use of the pillar on ‘Transitions’ from the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide will help support the implementation of this action.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE
During the post-evaluation feedback meeting, the owner and practitioner proactively and openly engaged in discussion. 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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of processes to support children’s learning and development</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of children’s learning experiences and achievements</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of management and leadership for learning</td>
<td>Very good</td>
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### Language used in Early Years Education Inspection reports

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