# EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

## REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Name</th>
<th>Small Wonders Crèche and Montessori</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting Address</td>
<td>16-18 Mountdown Road</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manor Estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dublin 12</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>09DS0072</td>
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**Date of Inspection: 07-06-2019**
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>29-01-2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Review of relevant documents, Feedback to setting owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Talk with the setting owner</td>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Observation of interactions during the sessions</td>
<td>• Feedback to setting owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interaction with children</td>
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CONTEXT OF SETTING

Small Wonders Crèche and Montessori, is a privately-owned setting that was established in 2002. The setting is located in a residential area of Dublin. On the day of inspection, the setting was in the process of relocating to another premises in the same locality. The setting provides full-day, after-school and a morning pre-school session for children from the local area, some of the children are enrolled in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. Twenty children, three practitioners, one of whom is the owner, were present on the morning of the inspection. The early years setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised of the report; a response was not received from the setting.

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 friendly, warm and caring atmosphere is clearly evident. On arrival, children are greeted in an upbeat and happy manner by practitioners.
- The positive and respectful relationships between the practitioners and the children are highly commended. The children have built very good attachments with the practitioners and they seek their help and support in an age-appropriate manner, as required.
- All practitioners provide appropriate praise and encouragement of the children’s involvement in activities. During circle time, visual images are used to discuss and support positive interactions between the children.
- The routine followed on the morning of the inspection, while different to the one documented, supported the children's active engagement in child-led activities. It provided ample time for the children to complete activities and tasks. The routine is not on display for the children.
- During the inspection, transitions between activities were signalled by a clean-up song. The children manage transitions very well and are aware that the song indicates that clean-up time has commenced. Some activities ended rather abruptly as no advance warning was given to the children's about the impending change of activity.
- On the day of the inspection, there was some promotion of snack time as a social experience for the children. The children chose where to sit and openly engaged in conversation with their peers. The practitioners moved around the room and assisted children to open lunch boxes before sitting and engaging with the children.
- A key-worker approach is implemented in the setting. The key worker’s role is to observe and document the children’s learning and to share this information with parents.
- The uniqueness of each child is represented in the environment in the family photographs and art and mark-making displays.
- To promote the children’s sense of identity and belonging, the practitioners create opportunities to bring the children and their families together in the setting. These include invites to family members to read stories, to participate in art activities with the children and to attend the end-of-year graduation and seasonal events.
- The children’s sense of belonging to the wider community is fostered through visits from people who work in the community. Along with community members, such as the postman and the lollipop lady, parents also share information on their professions with the children. For example, a nurse, teacher, Garda, dentist and a member of an equestrian centre came to visit.

Action advised

- To support the children’s predictability of daily events, the practitioners are advised to display the routine in picture format at the children’s eye level and to consistently follow the routine each day.
It is further advised that a longer period of notice is given to children when informing them that an activity is coming to an end.

- To further enrich the children’s snack-time experience, the practitioners are advised to promote this time as a more social experience for the children. In doing so, the practitioners are advised to create helper roles for the children and to sit with the children for the duration of snack time while also assisting children at the table who may require help.

**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 play-based curriculum, informed by the *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and including elements of the Montessori curriculum, was observed.
- The practitioners regularly partake in long, medium and short-term planning. Plans are thematic based and broad and focus on the promotion of children’s motor skills, Montessori activities and sessional events.
- Observations, checklists, along with a computer application, are used to document the children’s learning and development. In general, information documented is generic with little reference made to children’s interests. The information recorded is not used to inform planning for the next steps in children’s learning. Currently, learning journals are not compiled to support the children to reflect on their own learning experiences. The children’s art work is sent home regularly and photographs and information on the children’s involvement in activities are shared with parents through the computer application.
- The practitioners view children as capable and confident learners and their effective interactions to support play are noteworthy. There is an appropriate balance between adult-led and child led activities and strategies, such as the spontaneous following of children’s emergent interests, sitting at the children’s eye level and playfully engaging in activities, were observed during the inspection.
- The practitioners effectively scaffold and extend the children’s learning through their conversations and use of open-ended question and prompts to encourage children’s ideas.
- During the inspection, the children had access to both the indoor and outdoor environments. The environments support the children’s holistic development. On the day of inspection, the children freely engaged in a range of activities, such as pretend play, Montessori work, water play and risky play including climbing. There is potential to increase the number of discrete learning areas.
- The children’s early literacy and numeracy skills are effectively promoted through the practitioners’ modelling of language in everyday conversations, regular story time and the use of ongoing songs and action rhymes throughout the season. On the day of inspection information technology was also used with the children as part of the singing activities and the discussion on letters of the alphabet.
- The practitioners adopt an inclusive approach to promoting all children’s participation in activities. The setting links with external agencies, as appropriate, and has engaged with the Pre-school Demonstration Pilot Project initiative.

*Action advised.*

- The practitioners are advised to include children’s emergent interest in written observations and to use these interests and information on the children’s developing capabilities to guide short-term planning for the next steps in children’s learning. It is also advised that individual learning journals are created, in collaboration with the children, to support tracking of individual children’s learning in a child-friendly and accessible form. As part of this process, the practitioners are advised to consult the ‘Planning and Assessment’ pillar of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to develop their approach to observation, planning and documenting the children’s learning and development.
- As the practitioners set up the environment in their new premises, they are advised to use the ‘Environment’ pillar of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to guide the development of areas of interest.
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 demonstrate enjoyment in their learning. They present as motivated and display effective concentration skills.
- The children demonstrated positive behaviour throughout the session and age-appropriate, self-regulation, sharing and turn-taking skills.
- The children manage their self-help and personal hygiene needs successfully. They use the toilet and wash their hands independently.
- The children’s social and communication skills are emerging. They ask and answer questions in context. Good friendships are evident as children play together in small groups and pairs during self-chosen activities. For example, children worked together to dress the dolls and to bring the large blocks into the wooden ship.
- The children demonstrate a good awareness of themselves and others. On many occasions they successfully identified and shared their own successes. Children exclaimed ‘I can jump’, ‘I can tumble’, and ‘Look, I can blow a big bubble’. They also discussed their friends who were on holidays and made many references to family members.
- The children display highly developed imaginations and confidence in their cognitive, fine and gross motor abilities. For example, during their pretend play they travelled by boat to Africa, set up a card-matching game for a small group of children, filled water bottles with funnels and worked co-operatively together to move the sea-saw. Opportunities for the children to explore natural and creative materials, such as sand, paint and junk art, to develop their exploration and creative skills are limited.
- During pretend play activities, the children displayed very good knowledge of the world around them. This was demonstrated as they shared their knowledge on the difference between dinosaurs and crocodiles and discussed aeroplanes as a means of transport.
- The children’s emergent language, literacy and numeracy skills are developing well. They greatly enjoyed participating in story, songs and rhymes, they freely engaged in mark-making activities and used vocabulary relating to size and colour appropriately. The range of freely available mark-making equipment and books was limited and there was some use of worksheets to foster children’s literacy and numeracy skills.

Actions advised
- The practitioners are advised to provide the children with greater opportunities to explore and experiment through the provision of additional, freely available, multi-sensory and open-ended creative materials.
- To further promote the children’s emergent language, numeracy and literacy skills, the practitioners are advised to give children greater access to mark-making equipment and story books. They are also advised to discontinue the use of worksheets to promote children’s literacy and numeracy development.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- A professional atmosphere is clearly evident. The owner works alongside the practitioners and leads by example in her practice of positively interacting with the children. There is clarity around the roles and responsibilities of practitioners; on the day of inspection, there were some opportunities for all practitioners to lead learning.
- Team meetings take place each month. During these meetings there are opportunities for the practitioners to share information and to review policies and procedures. Informal daily support is provided to all practitioners by the owner. A record of all issues and concerns are documented.
- Monthly self-reviews of each room in the setting are carried out using the Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide.
- On the day of inspection, the learning programme was primarily informed by a play-based approach to provision. The owner reports that the setting is going through a period of change and that they are moving from a Montessori curriculum to a more play-based model incorporating elements of Montessori and underpinned by Aisteir; the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.
- The practitioners have established links with Early Childhood Ireland and the local county childcare committee for training, support and advice and they have also engaged the services of private early-years consultant. On occasion, the owner and practitioners network with other early years providers.
- The owner and practitioners regular take part in continuing professional development (CPD). They have participated in training on the Access and Inclusion model (AIM) and on diversity, equality and inclusion and practitioners have applied to participate in the Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years (LINC) programme.
- The practitioners use a range of strategies to effectively communicate with parents. These include; parents’ informal and formal meetings, the sharing of policy and procedures, phone calls and the use of a communications’ application and social media.
- An effective settling-in policy supports the children’s transition into the setting. Information on each child is sought from parents before the children begin and parents are encouraged to help settle children in on a phased basis.
- As the children prepare to move to primary school, discussions and activities take place with the children. Links with the local primary school have been established; these include a visit from the primary school home-school community liaison officer and, with parents’ consent, information is shared in the form of a postcard that children take with them to their school’s open day.

**Actions advised**

- The owner is advised to build on current good practice and to strengthen the roles and responsibilities of all practitioners in leading the children’s learning.
- It is advised that a review of the setting’s policy and procedures is undertaken to ensure that they reflect current practice and the implementation of a play-based curriculum linked to Montessori.
### 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>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of management and leadership for learning</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
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### Language used in Early-Years Education Inspection reports

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

*Published February 2020*