EARLY YEARS EDUCATION - FOCUSED INSPECTION

REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Name</th>
<th>Little Penguins Pre-school Montessori</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service Address</td>
<td>17 Beverly Grove</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scholarstown Road</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dublin 16</td>
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<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>09DS0161</td>
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Date of Inspection: 25-01-2018
WHAT IS AN EARLY YEARS EDUCATION-FOCUSED INSPECTION?

The Early Years Education-focused Inspection (EYEI) model is used to provide evaluative information, advice and support in relation to education provision in a pre-school service 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 service.

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 service’s provision in each area.
Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of inspection</th>
<th>25-01-2018</th>
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| Inspection activities undertaken | • Interaction with children  
• Review of relevant documents  
• Post-inspection feedback meeting with service managers |
• Meeting with service manager  
• Meeting with practitioner  
• Observation of activities and interactions during pre-school session |

**CONTEXT OF SERVICE**

Little Penguins Montessori is a long-established private service which currently provides a morning pre-school programme. It is located in a private-dwelling and the lead practitioner has been running the service since 2006 using a play-based curriculum with some elements of the Montessori approach. On the day of the inspection, the lead practitioner, practitioner and eleven children were present. The lead practitioner and the practitioner attended the post-inspection feedback meeting. The setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised in this 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.
- Families and children are greeted very warmly as they arrive in the morning. Time is taken to chat with them about the theme of the week and the planned daily activity.
- As children arrive, they hang up their coats and put their lunches in the fridge, demonstrating great familiarity with the morning routine. They move confidently round the room and are confident in choosing and organising their activities.
- The display of the flexible daily routine names the sequence of events and contains photographs of the children engaged in the daily activities. It is positioned on the wall at child’s height to support children’s independent access to it.
- Transitions between the various activities are signalled by the practitioners giving verbal reminders, counting down the minutes to the next activity and singing the tidy-up song.
- Secure and supportive relationships are fostered between the practitioners and the children. The use of positive affirmation and encouraging feedback was consistently used by the practitioners with the children. This supports and motivates them in their activities.
- On the day of the inspection, practitioners were attentive to the children’s needs. This included supporting children who arrived late by helping them to choose an activity they enjoy.
- Snack time is valued as a social occasion and the practitioners sit and chat to the children about their lives outside the pre-school.
- The practitioners consistently use calm, positive tones when chatting to the children. They recognise the children as competent and confident and provide them with guidance towards positive behaviour by giving them the words and time to negotiate any disagreements which arose with friends.
- The uniqueness of each child is reflected in the large birthday display, the photographs on their coat hooks and their personalised placemats. A small number of children come from diverse cultural backgrounds and this is reflected in the family books which the practitioners have started to develop along with the display of flags. Practitioners plan to add family books for all the children in the service.
- The parents visit the service for the Christmas carols, and the end-of-year graduation. Parents and family members have visited the pre-school come to take part in storytelling; others have come to share their work experience such as the nurse, the dietician and a dental nurse. These visits are
photographed and included in the ‘floor book’ and allow children ample opportunity to develop an understanding of the roles they play on the community.

- The children are learning about the local community and the people who work there. They have had visits from the lollipop man and the postman came to deliver letters from Santa.

**Action advised**

- To build on the supportive relationships already in place, the introduction of a key person approach is advised. This approach is one in which the key person builds secure supportive relationships with the children in their assigned key group and has the primary responsibility for sharing information in relation to the child with his /her parents.

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**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 practitioners undertake detailed long-term, medium-term and short-term planning. A resource file has been developed by the practitioners and identifies themes and activities linked to *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. On occasions, the children’s interests are noted in the short-term planning.
- The practitioners compile a selection of the children’s free art, and photographs of their engagement in activities into an individual learner scrapbook.
- A large ‘floor book’ contains photographs of the children’s engagement in the activities related to the selected themes with their comments added.
- The practitioners have recently changed the template they use to record the children’s learning based on feedback from the parents. The practitioners gather information on the children’s learning using a variety of approaches; these include anecdotal notes, a developmental checklist that looks at children’s physical, intellectual, emotional, social and language development. This is undertaken three times a year and a learner template is used every two months. At the time of the inspection, these approaches did not plan for the next steps in the children’s learning. Parents are invited into the service to view their child’s learning records and add their comments.
- The practitioners use a variety of positive interactions consistently with the children to promote and extend their learning such as open-ended questions and prompts.
- The indoor environment is well laid out with specific interest areas such as a home corner, small world play and a quiet cosy book corner. Each area has a very good selection of suitable well-labelled, accessible resources.
- Montessori materials such as cylinders, knobbed cylinders, the spindle box and variety of pouring and spooning activate are introduced during table-top activity time if children show an interest.
- Children access the small outdoor area when the weather is fine. If the weather is bad, practitioners push back the tables and chairs and engage the children in musical movement and physical games.
- Play is valued and encouraged in this service and on the day of the inspection, practitioners were observed playing alongside and with the children when invited by them.
- The practitioners recognise the children as competent learners and emphasise the value of everyday activities, songs, rhymes and games to support the development of the children’s emergent literacy and numeracy skills. Practitioners model mathematical language as they count children during the play trip to Australia and use their hands and body to talk about big, bigger, tall, and taller when using the Lego. On the day of the inspection, children recognised their name on their drawings and engaged in mark-making. The practitioners report that the children are introduced to the sandpaper letters and numbers if they show an interest. On occasions, pre-writing activities are provided for children who are in their second year of the pre-school programme.
- Children with additional needs are well-integrated into the group. Visual cues, such as, ‘Now and Then’ are used to support the children moving from one activity to the next. An approach *Superfriends* supports children with additional needs to develop social skills with their peers. Practitioners have developed professional relationships with the appropriate external agencies to support the children’s participation and development during the pre-school programme and they also ensure the mutual sharing of information with parents.
Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to broaden their current planning by ensuring plans are underpinned by *Aistear* and by incorporating the individual children’s emergent interests.
- It is advised that the practitioners adapt the approaches used for gathering information on the children’s learning. This can be achieved by habitually observing their learning and by clearly identifying the next steps for their progression. The documents on assessment in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* will assist practitioners in this regard.

**AREA 3**

**QUALITY OF CHILDREN’S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

- The quality of the children’s learning experiences and achievements is excellent.
- The children demonstrate great enjoyment and engagement in the play activities and explorations that they initiate and lead themselves as well as the adult-guided activities. They present as happy and confident with ample opportunities provided for self-initiated learning. For example, children show real pleasure and excitement in the adult-planned activity on Australia, in which children pretend to take an airplane and visit areas of interests such as Ayers rock. Children discuss what documents they need and what they needed to bring on the trip.
- Children’s voices and opinions and feelings are listened to and respected in the service. For example, they decide on what music they will listen to during relaxation time and select the songs they will sing and make decisions on drawings they want to bring home. During the planned pretend trip to Australia they were offered the choice of taking part or doing something different.
- Laughter and lots of chatting among children and practitioners is heard throughout the session.
- Children are provided with many opportunities to make choices and to organise their own learning. They demonstrate curiosity and resourcefulness and are achieving mastery and success. On the day of the inspection, children added playdough to water to see what would happen. The practitioner effectively supported and extended their understanding on this occasion and on many others to ensure that the children were sufficiently challenged and supported in accordance with their varying strengths and dispositions.
- It is evident that children are provided with regular opportunities to engage in socio-dramatic play. Children were observed playing out their experiences seen at home; putting on the builder’s hat and vest, earplugs, while dismantling the phone and fixing tables and shelves with the various real tools available such as magnifying glass and screwdriver.
- It is evident that the children have developed very good relationships with their peers. They play cooperatively in pairs such as making jigsaws together and using the Lego to make houses. Children have developed their classroom rules and they successfully negotiate sharing and turn-taking, using phrases such as ‘you can have it now’ and ‘now it’s her turn’.
- Children are developing very good self-help skills and independence. When they finish with a piece of equipment they replace it on the shelves and place chairs carefully back in position after activities. They take an active part in the tidy-up routines and a display with list of jobs and the classroom helpers is displayed on the wall. This helps children feel connected to their group and helps build independence and self-help skills.
- Children are learning about different languages and how they are used. Children confidently use Irish words for counting and for everyday phrases and specific words such as Namaste that are personal to some children in the pre-school.
- The children’s creativity is displayed with a description of their drawings in the children’s words added by the practitioners. Children engage in open-ended mark-making and process art throughout the session. During the art activity, children discussed their paintings, describing the dots and swirls like the aborigines. Their comments include statements which reflect their appreciation of individuality and creativity: ‘I’m making the same’ and ‘I’m making mine different’.
- The children demonstrate great enjoyment in singing songs and rhymes and in playing the I Spy game when tidying up.
- Children demonstrate an understanding of mathematical language and use it regularly as part of their everyday routines such as for counting the number of children sitting at the table, and describing their construction model.
• Children were observed using the photographs in their journal to compare and discuss their family homes and their location. This approach acts as a bridge between the children’s home life and the pre-school.
• On the day of the inspection, children used language with confidence to communicate their experiences and to clarify their feelings and thoughts. Children talked about their family members their special friends and are attentive to friend’s needs.

AREA 4
QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING
• The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
• The lead practitioner and the practitioner discuss the activities and events at the start of each day and hold formal meetings once a month to discuss planning and any issues arising.
• The lead practitioner and the practitioner have worked together for a number of years and there is a strong sense of a shared vision for children’s learning. They are committed to supporting children as active learners through positive interactions that motivate and support them as independent learners.
• There is evidence of strong teamwork collaboration and seamless leadership as noted during the discussions about moving on to the next activity. Practitioners plan at the staff meetings who will lead specific activities as observed during the large-group activities and storytelling.
• The lead practitioner accesses support and information from Early Childhood Ireland and the local Childcare Committee.
• The lead practitioner and the practitioner are committed to furthering their professional practice in order to support the children’s learning. The practitioner has recently attended a workshop on yoga and it is planned to offer this practice more in the future. The lead practitioner has attended workshops in Diversity and Equality training and on Marte Meo which emphasises a communication approach. The practitioners identified the benefit of these courses in developing their practice, such as the introduction of the family books.
• A range of commendable approaches is used for sharing information with parents. At the start of the year, parents are given an information booklet on the services policies and procedures. A newsletter is sent every month in advance outlining the themes, activities and songs to be covered. Children’s learner journals and art work are shared regularly and parents are invited for their comments. As parents arrive to the service, there are a number of photographic displays and information displayed on the windows and door. Practitioners share information on the children’s learning and achievements with parents at arrival and collection times. Parents are invited to share their photographs of their houses for inclusion in the family books and for different topics such as the recent one on Australia.
• Transitions into and from the service are managed very effectively to support the children’s learning and development. Parents are invited to visit the service before the children start and practitioners use the floor book to share their learning programme and the activities. The service facilitates a staggered settling-in process. Parents are encouraged to stay with their child during the settling-in process.
• Practitioners prepare the children for the move to primary school by discussing with them their upcoming move. Children are encouraged to talk about what they know of the school and what they think it might be like they are invited to draw their ideas of the uniforms and the school. Photographs of the school, and samples of the school uniforms are available to the children for discussion.

Action advised
• The practitioners are advised to avail of the templates and self-evaluation tools in the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide. These will support their professional self-reflection and review of practice during their staff meetings. The recording of the decisions taken during staff meetings is also advised to support the implementation and monitoring of improvement initiatives.
CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE
The lead practitioner and the practitioner attended the post-inspection feedback meeting. They engaged positively in the co-professional dialogue and expressed a commitment to implementing the actions advised. The capacity of the service to continue 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>Very good</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of children’s learning experiences and achievements</td>
<td>Excellent</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-focused 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>
</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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