An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION - FOCUSED INSPECTION

REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Name</th>
<th>Snowdrops Crèche</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service Address</td>
<td>22 C Terenure Road North, Terenure Dublin 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>09DY0230</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Date of Inspection: 21-02-2018
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>21-02-2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>Interpretation of findings</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meeting with service owner/manager</td>
<td>• Quality of context to support children’s learning and development is very good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meeting with practitioners</td>
<td>• A warm welcoming atmosphere is present and parents and children are warmly greeted at arrival and collection times. It is evident that practitioners know the parents well and time is taken to chat to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Observation of interactions and activities during pre-school session</td>
<td>• The daily routine is displayed using clocks to show the different times for activities. Routines in the room are flexible and are adapted to meet the children’s learning needs and interests. For example, on the day of the inspection, the weather was fine so children spent extra time outdoors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interaction with children</td>
<td>• Transitions between activities are signalled by the lead practitioner giving verbal reminders of the time remaining for each activity. On the day of the inspection, the majority of children moved easily between activities but a small number of children who were new to the pre-school room found it difficult to transition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• The children are offered very good opportunities to be active agents. They choose and organise their own activities such as selecting their play materials and deciding in which area they will play.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Post-inspection feedback meeting with the service owner/manager and practitioners</td>
<td>• Snack time is valued as a social occasion and the practitioners sit and chat to the children about their favourite fruit and their lives outside the pre-school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Secure and supportive relationships are fostered between the practitioners and the children. A key person approach is used in this service to support the development of a close, secure relationships between the practitioners and the children and to provide a link between the pre-school and the parents. The key person system is also used to support the gathering and recording of information on the children’s learning and development. The practitioners offer consistent praise and encouragement to children throughout the session using positive feedback and affirming gestures.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The practitioners provide children with guidance towards positive behaviour and support them to negotiate during conflict situations. They are sensitive to children’s needs. In particular, to those who are new to the pre-school room as the practitioners actively support them into the group by staying close to them and offering them the activities they enjoy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The uniqueness of each child is demonstrated through the photographs of the children on the large birthday display and through the display of their individual photographs. A small number of children attending the service come from diverse cultural backgrounds. At the time of the inspection, this was not reflected visually within the room.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**CONTEXT OF SERVICE**

Snowdrops Crèche is a privately-owned service located in a purpose-built building in Dublin 6. The service was established nineteen years ago and offers a full day care service. In the past, the service used a Montessori approach in its curriculum and Montessori materials continue to be available to the children within the play areas. The service is now focused on using a play-based learning programme underpinned by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. On the day of the inspection, the lead practitioner, assistant practitioner, a student on work experience and eleven pre-school children were present. The owner/manager, lead practitioner and assistant 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, and the response submitted on behalf of the setting can be found in the appendix of this report.

**AREA 1**

**QUALITY OF CONTEXT TO SUPPORT CHILDREN’S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

- The quality of context to support the children’s learning and development is very good.
- A warm welcoming atmosphere is present and parents and children are warmly greeted at arrival and collection times. It is evident that practitioners know the parents well and time is taken to chat to them.
- The daily routine is displayed using clocks to show the different times for activities. Routines in the room are flexible and are adapted to meet the children’s learning needs and interests. For example, on the day of the inspection, the weather was fine so children spent extra time outdoors.
- Transitions between activities are signalled by the lead practitioner giving verbal reminders of the time remaining for each activity. On the day of the inspection, the majority of children moved easily between activities but a small number of children who were new to the pre-school room found it difficult to transition.
- The children are offered very good opportunities to be active agents. They choose and organise their own activities such as selecting their play materials and deciding in which area they will play.
- Snack time is valued as a social occasion and the practitioners sit and chat to the children about their favourite fruit and their lives outside the pre-school.
- Secure and supportive relationships are fostered between the practitioners and the children. A key person approach is used in this service to support the development of a close, secure relationships between the practitioners and the children and to provide a link between the pre-school and the parents. The key person system is also used to support the gathering and recording of information on the children’s learning and development. The practitioners offer consistent praise and encouragement to children throughout the session using positive feedback and affirming gestures.
- The practitioners provide children with guidance towards positive behaviour and support them to negotiate during conflict situations. They are sensitive to children’s needs. In particular, to those who are new to the pre-school room as the practitioners actively support them into the group by staying close to them and offering them the activities they enjoy.
- The uniqueness of each child is demonstrated through the photographs of the children on the large birthday display and through the display of their individual photographs. A small number of children attending the service come from diverse cultural backgrounds. At the time of the inspection, this was not reflected visually within the room.
• Parents visit the service for the Christmas show and the end-of-year party. In the past, parents have come to share their work experience with the children to support their understanding of their local community and to build valuable links between the pre-school and home.
• The children are developing an awareness of the local area by taking walks to the library and to the local park for collecting leaves and the annual Teddy Bears' Picnic.

**Actions advised**

• The practitioners are advised to develop a visual daily routine with photographs of the children engaged in different activities displayed at child height. The addition of techniques to support the children’s move from activity to the next such as, the use of ‘Now’ and ‘Then’ cards will support children to follow the sequence of activities and to move confidently from one activity to the next.
• The reflection of the cultural diversity of the children and families within the service is advised. This can be achieved by displaying photographs of the children and their families, discussing family celebrations and making visible the children’s home language within the room.

**AREA 2**

**QUALITY OF PROCESSES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN’S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

• The quality of processes to support the children's learning and development is very good.
• A resource file that includes ideas and activities on the seasonal topics and different themes is used by the practitioners to inform their medium-term and short-term planning. Planning is underpinned by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and includes reference to the individual children’s emergent interests.
• A large ‘floor’ book, linked to the themes of *Aistear* is compiled of the children’s engagement in activities using photographs and this includes the children’s drawings.
• The practitioners gather and collate samples of the children’s art and craft and mark-making along with their open-ended, process art into individual folders for each child.
• The practitioners are introducing new approaches to gathering and recording information on the children’s learning such as an observation board and anecdotal notes and a learner template. These narrative and visual records are aligned to the four themes of *Aistear*. A developmental checklist is used to monitor the children’s development across a range of domains including the physical, intellectual, and language, social and emotional: this is based on the children’s ages and a learner record template, is used on a monthly basis. At the time of the inspection, these approaches did not clearly identify the next steps planned for the children’s learning.
• A range of positive respectful interactions is used by the practitioners to engage children’s thinking and problem-solving skills, using open-ended questions and prompts. For example, practitioners use phrases such as, ‘Tell me about’ and ‘What do we need?’
• At the time of inspection, play is the method of teaching and learning and very much valued in this service. Some Montessori materials are placed within the play areas and these include the brown rods, the pink tower, insets and sand paper letters and numbers within the mark-making area. These are used by the practitioners in a playful way with the children.
• The indoor environment is well-laid out in specific areas such as the large home corner, construction area and the comfortable cosy book corner. Each area has a poster with the number of children allowed to play in that area. A wide range of developmentally accessible resources that support children's play experiences is available. For example, the home corner has real pots and utensils and food packets and the book corner has a wide variety of books to suit children's interests.
• The outdoor area is accessed by the children on a daily basis. The area offers children many opportunities to practise their physical skills such as the ride along toys and the games played such as Blindman’s Buff. Children are provided with suitable multi-sensory experiences; a large sand tray is available and children take care of the bushes and flowers.
• Mark-making materials are provided within the writing area such as chalk board, crayons, and a white board. The practitioners provide the children with opportunities to access a variety of art experiences through painting, art and craft activities and the occasional use of colouring-in templates.
The children’s emergent literacy and numeracy are developed through the use of the Montessori materials such as sand papers letters and insets. Phonics are also used with the children who are moving to primary school, although not all children are ready for this type of formal learning activity. The practitioners also provide dot-to-dot, template-based activities and workbooks to embed the children’s knowledge and reinforce their practise of pre-writing skills. This approach reduces time offered for children to develop creativity and engage in playful learning activities, such as songs and rhymes that promote literacy and numeracy.

Practitioners model mathematical language in meaningful contexts to promote children’s understanding of early mathematical concepts and language: this includes routines such as counting the children as they go outside and asking children to check the poster to see how many children can play in that area.

During the storytelling activity, the children show great enjoyment and laughter is heard. The practitioner effectively engages the children by posing questions such as ‘why do you think that happened and to recall the story, ‘what happened next?’

**Actions advised**

- It is advised that the practitioners extend their current approaches to gathering information on the children’s learning by following the cycle of observing, recording and planning for learning. The inclusion of the children’s learning dispositions and the next steps for their progression is advised.
- Practitioners are advised to reduce the emphasis on the use of workbooks and template-based activities to teach children letters, shapes and numbers. The refocus on providing more open-ended experiences and opportunities for purposeful learning through everyday play experiences, songs and rhymes will promote children’s creativity and self-expression.

**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 confident and happy in the service. They show enjoyment and engagement in their self-selected activities and in the adult-initiated activities. For example, during the planting activity, the children chatted to the practitioners about the flowers that they had previously planted and discussed the colours of the petals.
- The children are learning to play cooperatively together and are learning the social rules of the service. On the day of the inspection, a small number of children who were new to the pre-school room struggled on occasion to share and to make decisions about activities. This resulted in the practitioners stepping away from the child or group they were within order to help these children to engage in activities. The practitioners supported the children to negotiate disagreements with their peers by giving them the words to express themselves.
- Many children are experiencing success within the activities provided and show initiative and resourcefulness. For example, when filling the water tray, the children used watering cans and jugs. They were observed getting a large pipette to check how many drops it would take to fill the cup.
- Children have many opportunities to make choices and to organise their own learning. They have developed the classroom rules, they make choices about the fruit they want at snack time and they negotiate additional time for tidying up in advance of their snack.
- The children take part in the tidy-up routines and a child–helper routine is in place. Jobs such as a line leader for going outside and downstairs for dinner are selected by the practitioner each day. There are some opportunities for children to practise their self-help skills with opportunities for these to be developed further.
- Children display confidence in talking to visitors and practitioners about their family outside the pre-school. A ‘Family Tree’ with photographs of the children and their families helps them to connect pre-school and family life outside the pre-school. This approach builds on the children’s sense of identity and belonging.
- A number of children who are present for a second year, show an awareness of their changing abilities and discuss their drawings and writing, describing what they can do now that they are four years old.
• Children were observed discussing numbers and discussing shapes and sizes. They talk about how many pieces of banana are left and discuss small and large containers.
• The children are developing an awareness of their own uniqueness and their ability. This is reflected in their photographs on their coat hooks and on the clipboard with their paintings and drawings on display outside the room.
• Some photographs of the local area are on display. Possibilities exist to build on these photographs to develop children’s awareness of the role local people in the area.
• The children are developing an understanding of the natural environment through their feeding of the goldfish in the room and the planting of flowers and their care outdoors.

Actions advised
• It is advised that the practitioners promote the children’s sense of identity and belonging and connection to the group by further developing the current child-helper list to include additional tasks to augment the line-leader roles for going outside. An option could include adding a visual list of specific jobs for children throughout the session such as helper during the tidy-up routine and snack helper. It is also advised that this routines be displayed visually at child height.

AREA 4
QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING
• The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
• The practitioners in the pre-school room come together at the end of each week to discuss the previous week and to plan for the week ahead and decisions taken are recorded. Whole-service meetings are held once a term.
• The practitioners work together as a team and there is clarity around the roles and responsibilities of practitioners with regard to educational opportunities. On the day of the inspection, a practitioner worked in a small group with children who were moving to primary school and the other practitioner engaged a small group of children in a storytelling activity.
• The owner/manager accesses support and information from Early Childhood Ireland and the local Childcare Committee. She links in with a local network of managers as a means of supporting her role as manager.
• The owner/manager is committed to providing a quality early-years’ experience to the children in the service. The service has recently completed engagement in the Better Start Quality Improvement programme. This has resulted in changes in the documents used for planning and gathering information on children’s learning, the layout of the rooms and the introduction of staff meetings.
• The staff is committed to their ongoing professional development and attend workshops to support them in delivering a quality learning experience to the children. The lead practitioner has recently started the Leadership for Inclusion in Early Years (LINC) programme.
• Within this service, the childcare supervisor offers appraisals to the staff every six weeks in order to support their professional development and practice.
• The practitioners use different approaches for sharing information with the parents. A parents’ handbook with information on the service’s policies and procedures is given to parents at the start of the year. Information is also available on the services website and the owner/manager sends information leaflets on different topics throughout the year. A parents’ notice board is at the entrance and contains information on the learning programme provided and topics of interest to parents. Updates on the children’s learning and achievements are shared informally with parents at arrival and collection times.
• The service facilitates a staggered settling-in process for children and parents are encouraged to stay until their child feels comfortable in their new environment. Children who are moving from the junior rooms in the service to the pre-school room visit the room for half an hour every day and this is gradually increased.
• The practitioners use books and discussions with the children to prepare them for their move to primary school. A document, ‘Transition Snapshot’ is prepared for parents on their children’s learning and parents are encouraged to share this with their child’s primary school. The service has developed informal links with the local schools due to their afterschool programme.
**Actions advised**

- The development of regular opportunities such as, formal meetings between practitioners/ key workers and parents for sharing information on the children’s learning and achievements is advised. The use of the child’s individual learner journal could help in this regard.
- The practitioners are advised to begin the process of building formal links with the staff of the local primary schools. The addition of a ‘Transition Box’ that includes photographs of the layout of the school and samples of the school’s uniforms will help in the discussions about the move from pre-school to primary school.

**CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE**

The owner/manager, lead practitioner and the assistant practitioner attended the post-inspection feedback meeting. They engaged in co-professional dialogue and expressed a commitment to implementing the actions advised in order to support a quality learning experience for the children. 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>
</tr>
</thead>
<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>
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</tr>
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<td>Quality of children’s learning experiences and achievements</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of management and leadership for learning</td>
<td>Very good</td>
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</table>

### Language used in Early-Years Education-focused Inspection reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<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.

I found the inspection report to be fair and easy to read, the actions advised were very helpful. Overall I was very pleased with the report.

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

Since the inspection we have developed a visual daily routine and we are currently making now and then card. We have improved our cultural diversity display with language, maps and flags of the world and a family tree. We have reduced our use of work books allowing for more self-expression in everyday play. The practitioners and children developed a job chart which is displayed at child height, the jobs include feed fish, line leader, set timer, help at snack time, help tidy up, all the children will have a job each week. We have photos of the local schools on display for the children who are starting school in September. We are currently putting a letter to give parents to invite them to discuss their child’s progress. Practitioners are working on improving their skills at observing, recording and planning for learning. The practitioners have 15-20 minutes of non-contact time each week to discuss and plan for the week ahead.