**EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION**

**REPORT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Name</th>
<th>Little Smarty’s</th>
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| Setting Address    | 2 Holesworth Close  
                     | Swords           
                     | County Dublin    |
| DCYA number        | 09FL0124        |

**Date of Inspection: 02-04-2019**
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 02-04-2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inspection activities undertaken</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting with setting owner and practitioner</td>
<td>Interaction with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation of interactions during a session</td>
<td>Review of relevant documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback to setting owner and practitioner</td>
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CONTEXT OF SETTING

Little Smarty's is a private setting which is based in Swords, Co. Dublin. It provides a morning session for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the day of the inspection, ten 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 good.
- The atmosphere in the setting is pleasant and caring. Practitioners interact warmly with parents and children on arrival and at home time.
- Practitioners are responsive to the children. They know the children well and engage in friendly conversations with them regarding what is happening in their lives. These affirming interactions support the positive relationships that exist between the children themselves.
- The daily routine provides ample opportunities for children to make decisions in their learning. Activities are predominantly large group and individual learning experiences. At the time of the inspection a visual daily schedule to help children predict changes in the activities was not on display.
- Transitions between activities are well managed. During the session, the practitioners’ effective use of verbal reminders and the five-minute visual prop ensured children had sufficient time to finish what they were doing before starting the next activity. The use of action songs successfully motivated children to actively participate in tidying up.
- The children are encouraged to become competent in managing their own self-help needs. For example, children hang up their coats, put their lunches in the fridge on arrival, and independently put away materials when finished with them.
- Snack time is used to promote positive social interactions. The practitioners and children sit together and engage in friendly conversations as they eat their snacks.
- There is effective use of imagery in the pre-school room to nurture children’s sense of identity and belonging; the photographs and displays that include the children’s comments help children to develop an appreciation of themselves as unique individuals.

Actions advised
- The practitioners are advised to review the daily routine so as to provide regular opportunities for the children to participate in planned small group activities. This will aid the facilitation of learning experiences that focus on the children's individual interests and their stages of development.
- The practitioners are advised to create and display a visual schedule in the pre-school room. This will help children to predict changes in the activities.
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.
- The setting’s play-based curriculum is informed by Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. Generally, planning for children’s learning and development is thematic based and incorporates the practitioners’ ideas. Previously, planning documentation was detailed and included children’s interests and the next steps in their learning. At the time of the inspection, children’s emergent interests were not used to inform short-term planning.
- Observations on all the children’s learning are conducted by one of the practitioners. A variety of methods are used to record children’s learning. These include photographs, anecdotal notes and occasional learning observations which are linked to the themes of Aistear. This information is not used to inform the next steps in the children’s learning or shared with parents.
- From time to time, whole group, project learning books/posters are created. These outline the children’s learning experiences as part of a large group activity. An example of this effective practice included the ‘Shell Project’ which recorded the children’s exploration of shells. Each child had the opportunity to bring the project book home to review with his/her family. Parents were encouraged to record their comments in the book.
- The practitioners use a number of positive interaction strategies to support children in their learning. During the inspection, they sat alongside the children and joined them in their play activities. On a few occasions, the practitioners’ use of open-ended questions and comments to extend children’s understanding was positively noted.
- The indoor learning environment has a good range of sensorial materials that sufficiently encourage children to engage in imaginative play on their own and in small groups. The provision of more real, open-ended and socio-dramatic materials would enhance children’s exploratory play experiences.
- The practitioners promote the children’s early language and literacy skills. On the day of the inspection, there was effective use of storytelling activities, songs and rhymes to foster these emergent skills. The practitioners’ recording of the children’s voices on their mark-making achievements and the entries in their learning journals is noteworthy.
- The practitioners promote an inclusive learning environment. They work in partnership with parents and outside agencies to ensure the participation of all children in the learning programme.

Actions advised
- The practitioners are advised to develop planning practices that are more responsive to the children’s emergent interests and their individual learning needs. The use of the ‘Planning and Assessment’ pillar of the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide will provide guidance in this regard.
- The practitioners are advised to more regularly use the information they gather on the children’s learning, including their dispositions and skills, to inform the next steps in learning and their progression. The practitioners are advised to share the findings with parents on a more regular basis.
- The practitioners are advised to review their roles as play partners in helping children to extend and move their play to the next level. The practitioners’ consistent use of open-ended questions and comments will help to stimulate and enrich children’s learning. The tip sheet ‘Thinking Together’ from the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide will assist in this regard.
- The practitioners are advised to use the audit tool in the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide to review and enhance the availability, breadth and variety of real, open-ended and natural materials. This will help to provide more opportunities for children to experience enquiry-based learning experiences.

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 are enthusiastic and eager to join their peers and the practitioners as they arrive into Little Smarty’s. On the day of the inspection, they demonstrated interest and fun in the learning activities. This was particularly noticeable during the free-play element of the session and the children’s self-initiated play experiences.
• The children are developing positive learning dispositions such as being curious, using their imagination and concentrating on tasks. During a scientific experiment the children, with the support of a practitioner, predicted possible changes to the eggs when water and vinegar were added.
• The children experience success and display the ability to share their achievements with others. On a number of occasions, a few children displayed a sense of pride in what they had achieved. For example, a child showed a practitioner her ‘Humpty Dumpty’ creation. At the time of the inspection, formal opportunities for children to share their learning and achievements with the practitioners and their peers was not a regular feature of the daily programme.
• The children are provided with a wide variety of experiences to support their creativity. On the day of the inspection, opportunities included children independently mark making, painting, using play-dough and singing songs. These experiences help children to use their imaginations and to express themselves creatively.
• During the pre-school year, personnel from a local homeless charity visit the pre-school to help raise the children’s awareness of others in the community. This is followed by a fund-raising event involving the children, their families and the practitioners. There is potential to extend children’s awareness of others in the local community.
• On the day of the inspection, it was evident that the positive relationships which exist among the children contribute to the effective collaborative and co-operative play opportunities which they experience. Many children displayed their developing personal and social skills which helped them to deal with turn taking and to have empathy for others.

**Actions advised**

- The practitioners are advised to provide regular formal opportunities for children to share their learning and achievements with each other and the practitioners. This could be facilitated at snack time and through the provision of opportunities for children to review their individual learning journals.
- The practitioners are advised to provide a greater range of learning experiences to help maximise and foster the children's awareness and understanding of members of the wider community. The provision of additional activities where the children can explore and develop an appreciation of the roles of others will strengthen their sense of identity and belonging.

**AREA 4**

**QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING**

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is good.
- The practitioners hold daily and weekly informal discussions on learning activities and children's progress. Formal self-review and professional reflection are not a regular feature of the practitioners' practice.
- The positive relationships that exist between the practitioners contribute to the strong ethos of collaboration and teamwork in the setting. There is potential to build on this teamwork through the extension of the practitioners' roles and responsibilities with regard to the organisation of educational experiences.
- The practitioners demonstrate an awareness of the value of continuing professional development and mentoring in enhancing the provision of quality learning outcomes for children. Previously, the practitioners had taken part in aspects of the Síolta Accreditation Programme. The owner/practitioner has participated in the Better Start Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) Programme.
- The practitioners use a number of strategies to communicate with parents. When children commence in the setting, parents are e-mailed the setting’s handbook, which includes information on the curriculum, and the setting’s policies and procedures. Information on the children’s activities and experiences is shared with parents through discussions and the use of social media.
- The practitioners support the children’s transition into and from the setting. Prior to commencing Little Smarty’s, children and parents are invited to meet the practitioners. Towards the end of the pre-school year, discussions and socio-dramatic play are facilitated to aid children in their understanding of what happens in primary school. At the time of the inspection, strategies for sharing information on children’s learning between the setting and primary schools had yet to be developed.
Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to use the *Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide* to help them to further develop formal self-review and professional reflection practices. During regular team meetings the practitioners could use the guide to address agreed prioritised areas for improvement. This action could commence with a review of the key-person approach. This approach is one in which the practitioners are assigned particular responsibility for a small group of children. The practitioners develop a close, secure relationship with this group and act as a link between the pre-school and the parents of these children.

- National training to support practitioners in the use of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* is to be offered to early-years settings in 2019. Participation in this programme would support the practitioners as part of their continuing professional development.

- The practitioners are advised to develop strategies for sharing information with primary schools to ensure continuity of experiences and progression in children’s learning.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the setting to implement the actions advised above is 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>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>Good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 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>
</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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