

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION**

**REPORT**

<b>Setting Name</b>	First Steps Montessori
<b>Setting Address</b>	Naas GAA Hall Sallins Road Naas County Kildare
<b>DCYA number</b>	09KE0188

**Date of Inspection: 12-02-2019**



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agus Scileanna  
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## **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(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 setting's provision in each area.

## Early Years Education Inspection

<b>Date of inspection</b>	12-02-2019
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting with setting manager and practitioners</li><li>• Observation of interactions during a morning session.</li><li>• Interaction with children</li><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Feedback to setting manager and practitioners</li></ul>

### CONTEXT OF SETTING

First Steps Montessori is a private setting which has been in operation for thirteen years. It provides one morning session for children participating in the Early Childhood Education (ECCE) Programme. There were eighteen children and three practitioners present on the day of the inspection. In addition, one staff member employed under the Access and Inclusion Model [AIM] was present together with a transition year student from a local post-primary school who was availing of a work-experience opportunity. Also present was the setting owner who is not part of the normal daily staff. 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 excellent.
- The atmosphere at the setting is very affirming, warm, friendly and nurturing. The practitioners demonstrate a high degree of sensitivity and respect for families and children. They use even tones throughout the morning and the relationships with the children are very secure and supportive.
- A visual routine is displayed for the children and they are fully aware of the routines of their day. They move between activities with ease. The very effective circle time routine observed included an opportunity for the children to engage in deep breathing exercises, to discuss their feelings and worries through the use of anxious Teddy, to use a worry box and to celebrate their own uniqueness using a mirror.
- The children are recognised as capable, curious, confident enquirers and decision makers and there is an excellent balance between adult directed and child directed activities.
- The child centred class rules which the practitioners have developed with the children promote positive behaviour. The children revisit these rules regularly signing off on them through the use of their handprints. This is excellent practice.
- The practitioners sit with the children at snack time and use it as an opportunity for open-ended, friendly and relaxed conversations.
- The children's sense of identity and belonging is nurtured in commendable ways. Their photos and names are displayed on the stairway coming into the setting. Individual and group photos are displayed well in the room and group photos are evident in the group learning journal. The children have a storage box for storing their art work which they transfer into their learning journals. The children have created a 'family tree', and a birthday display.
- Parents are very involved at the setting. They share their talents, skills and jobs regularly and photos of these visits are displayed to provide children with a visual connection. Parents attend events at the setting such as at Halloween, Christmas, an art exhibition, an end-of-term graduation and they take part in a school tour.
- The practitioners recognise and affirm diversity in social, cultural and family backgrounds, through the provision of a relevant print-rich environment with resources, books and language prompts relating to the children who attend. Cultural events are celebrated such as Chinese new-year. An inclusion policy is in place at the setting.

- There are very strong connections with the community. Pictorial maps of the local town are available to the children and there are strong links with the local GAA. An inter-generational event is currently being organised to connect the children with the elderly in their community.

## 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 curriculum has been informed by the Montessori Method and by the principles of *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. The curriculum is emergent and enquiry led. Short-term, medium-term and long-term planning has been very effectively developed. Currently the short-term planning is not displayed for parents.
- The practitioners' documentation of the children's learning is very good. They compile an individual learning journal for each child with children deciding what goes into their journal. A group learning journal is also in place. Varied observations are carried out such as strengths-based observations. Plans for the next steps in the children's learning are documented. There is scope to continue the evaluative cycle in the next steps of learning provided for. Regular photographs are taken and displayed.
- The indoor environment provides for varied learning experiences. The Montessori resources afford significant opportunities for the children to engage in experiences such as practical life, sensorial, mathematical, language and culture exercises. There is an art area, dressing up area, kitchen and nature table and a very good range of sensorial materials together with a sensorial tent. The environment is print rich and labelled, group projects are displayed, and there is a well-resourced and accessible library area with soft seating. The books are rotated and reflect the themes of *Aistear*.
- The outdoor environment consists of an enclosed grassed pitch which is part of the GAA Grounds. Resources from indoors are brought outdoors to enable the children to have varied play experiences. Use is also made of a large hall where alternative physical activities are planned for when outdoors is not available.
- The practitioners position themselves well in the room. They know when to wait and when to step in to support the children, and active listening is a hallmark of their relationships with the children.
- The interactions between the practitioners and the children are very effective and practice is very inclusive of all children.
- The practitioners use a wide range of prompts to support the development of children's emergent language and literacy skills including songs, rhymes and specific tailored strategies. The children use Irish and mathematical language also and they explore mathematical concepts.
- The setting works in conjunction with parents to support children with individual needs and specific plans are developed and implemented for these children. Very positive links have been made with external agencies to support these children further.

#### *Actions advised*

- The practitioners are advised to make the short-term planning available for parents to view on the parent noticeboard.
- Continuing the cycle of evaluation in the provision for the next steps of learning for individual children is advised.

## AREA 3

### QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is excellent.
- The children present as very happy, content and motivated. During the inspection, a group activity about dinosaurs held the attention of the children involved for a considerable amount of time.
- The interactions between the children are of a high quality and rich child-to-child conversations are evident. The children take turns, negotiate and support the ideas of each other. They engage together in pairs, small groups and as a large group. Some children engage happily in activities independently such as reading and using a magnifying glass.

- The children are developing excellent self-regulation skills and emotional competency. They present as highly independent.
- The children take great responsibility for their environment and tidy up after themselves.
- On the day of the inspection the children enjoyed a variety of rhymes and games which included 'What time is it Mr Wolf?' and 'Duck Duck Goose'.
- The children engage in art and mark-making, in gluing and sticking, and in creating from junk art. Their mark making and art are displayed for them to see and their comments are evident on their creations.
- The children engage in regular yoga, relays and they use dance ribbons in the large hall supporting the development of their gross motor skills.
- The children enjoy regular nature walks and engage in planting activities indoors.

## AREA 4

### QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is excellent.
- The owner has established comprehensive organisational systems to ensure efficiency in the settings day-to-day functioning. She provides excellent leadership to her staff.
- Monthly staff meetings are held and documented. The practitioners also share daily practice and reflective thoughts through the use of a messaging application.
- The owner has developed induction procedures and support and supervision practices. Appraisals take place and job descriptions are evident. The practitioners discuss, plan and evaluate practice informally on a daily basis and the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* is used to inform reviews. Parents are involved in setting reviews, providing feedback through the use of surveys and a comment box. Regular practice reviews take place. Currently reviews at the setting are not documented.
- The practitioners regularly engage in continuous professional development. Most recently this has included equality and diversity training, and specific training to support communication, and speech and language. The owner has completed the Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) Programme and two practitioners have recently completed their early year degree and masters programmes. The owner attends various training events and she shares knowledge gained with her staff.
- The owner networks with other providers and she is a member of organisations that support the children's learning and development. She engages with her local County Childcare Committee.
- An open-door policy and a key worker system are in place at the setting.
- Transition year and early years' students are welcomed at the setting.
- The setting has commendable communication practices with parents both formally and informally, verbally on a daily basis, through social media and a setting website. Information is regularly shared through individual learning journals and a group learning journal. An end-of-year report is completed for each child and an annual parent teacher meeting is held. Policies and procedures are available to parents and a parent handbook and noticeboard are available. A bi-monthly newsletter informs parents of events at the setting.
- The respect for the voice of the child is very evident at this setting, in conversations, in planning and in specific practices.
- The setting has a transitions policy, and the practitioners support children to transition into the setting and to primary school. Parents and children are invited to attend an open-day in advance of starting at the setting. Record cards are used to gather information about children to support their transitions into the setting. The principal of the local primary school visits the preschool and a child centred report *Mo Scéal* is completed at the end of the year for parents to share with the primary school. Children who have attended the setting in the past return to share their experiences with the practitioners and the pre-school children.

#### *Action advised*

- Documenting the excellent reviews of practice undertaken is advised.

### CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the setting to implement the actions advised above is excellent.

### Summary of Overall Inspection

<b>Area</b>	<b>Quality Level</b>
Quality of context to support children's learning and development	<b>Excellent</b>
Quality of processes to support children's learning and development	<b>Very good</b>
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	<b>Excellent</b>
Quality of management and leadership for learning	<b>Excellent</b>

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

<b>Excellent</b>	Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of children.
<b>Very good</b>	Provision that is very good is highly effective in meeting the needs of children.
<b>Good</b>	Provision that is good is effective in meeting the needs of children but with some aspects to be developed.
<b>Fair</b>	Provision that is fair requires practice to be improved to meet the needs of children.
<b>Poor</b>	Provision that is poor is inadequate and requires significant improvement to meet the needs of children.