An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Name</th>
<th>First Impressions Montessori</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting Address</td>
<td>Tinvaun</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stoneyford</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>County Kilkenny</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>09KK0032</td>
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Date of Inspection: 20-01-2020
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of inspection</th>
<th>20-01-2020</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Review of relevant documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review of educational provision and materials</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-inspection feedback meeting with the setting owner and lead practitioner</td>
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**CONTEXT OF SETTING**

Established for over twenty years, First Impressions Montessori is a private sessional pre-school located in the rural area of Stoneyford, County Kilkenny. It moved premises in May 2019 from a purpose-built building to a new purpose-built building. This setting operates the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme on a four-day week basis. On the day of the inspection, the owner/lead practitioner, lead practitioner and twelve children were present. The early years setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised of the report, and the response of the setting will be found in the appendix of this report.

**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 warm atmosphere and caring ethos is very evident in the setting. Practitioners show sensitivity and positive regard for the children and their families.
- The practitioners’ affirming comments effectively acknowledge the children’s efforts and achievements in their learning.
- The owner/lead practitioner acts as the key person linking with parents. Through this system, the key person is responsible for gathering and sharing information about the children’s learning.
- The balance of large-group and small-group learning experiences fosters the development of relationships between the children. The daily routine provides for two periods of child-initiated free play; one indoors and one outdoors. On the day of the inspection, the period for indoor child-led play included a practitioner-initiated activity. This colouring activity offered by the practitioners did not sufficiently support free play.
- Children’s individuality, backgrounds and interests are recognised and celebrated. The photographic displays of the children and their families encourage the children to reflect and discuss. During the inspection, there were some opportunities for children to explore cultural diversity within the setting.
- Suitable opportunities are available for the children’s families to be involved in the setting. Grandparents are welcome to visit and parents are encouraged to share their interests with the children.

**Actions advised**

- Practitioners are advised to further support free play in the daily routine. In this time of child-led play, the practitioners could support the children to lead and develop their own learning experiences based on their interests and abilities.
- It would be worthwhile for the practitioners to further acknowledge, recognise and celebrate diversity within the setting. This could be achieved through discussion to support the children’s awareness and understanding while they freely explore materials and visuals.
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 effective curriculum is informed by the Montessori approach to education. It broadly reflects the principles underpinning *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*; for example, the curriculum promotes learning through play, relationships and the environment.
- Planning for Montessori exercises takes account of the children’s interests and previous learning. The progress of the children in their use of the Montessori materials and exercises is suitably documented.
- The planning board noting the weekly theme, activities, celebrations and reflections is a helpful tool in documenting short-term planning. At the time of the inspection, the setting’s practice was to choose one child per week and to plan activities for the full group, based on that child’s interests. A more flexible approach would be beneficial.
- A minimum of three observations per child, using a learning story format, adequately capture their learning progress and experiences through play. These are shared with parents. Practitioners add comments which interpret to some degree what the learning story says about the child’s learning. The next steps for the children’s learning are not sufficiently explored.
- Practitioners use a range of appropriate interaction strategies to facilitate the children’s learning. They effectively lead play, direct play and act as play partners with the children modelling an extended vocabulary.
- The bright indoor learning environment is neatly arranged into distinct areas which provide suitable materials and experiences to support the children’s learning. The home area has a small number of natural and real items to support authentic socio-dramatic play. The owner reported that resources to support water play are added to the home area.
- Suitable outdoor learning experiences are provided for the children in two spaces; there is a large grass area and smaller space with plastic play houses. The children have access to a private laneway for guided walks.
- The practitioners adopt an inclusive approach to ensure the engagement of all children. Previously, they used Lámh, an Irish sign language, and visuals to support communication and understanding.

*Actions advised*

- In place of the current approach to planning, the practitioners are advised to adopt a more flexible and spontaneous approach and to use their observations of the children’s varying interests as they arise to inform the short-term plans. The practitioners could note these interests on the planning board.
- In order to further develop assessment for learning practices, it is advised that the practitioners interpret and describe in more detail the child’s competencies and dispositions toward learning in the learning story. The next steps need to be identified to ensure progression and continuity of experiences for individual children.
- Practitioners are advised to further develop the provision in the home area by adding more natural and real resources to enrich the pretend and role play experiences for the children.

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 interest and enjoyment in their learning experiences. This was very event during child-initiated play and free play.
- The children confidently use their communication skills to share their personal experiences and interests and to reflect on past experiences. A number of children use mathematical language in their play.
• The books available to children that document their learning journey do not fully capture the range of their experiences.
• The guided mindfulness activities and stretching exercises support the children to gain increasing control of body movements and body awareness.
• During the inspection, the children participated in a guided walk of the laneway. They enjoyed finding stones, listening to the birds and looking at the horses.
• On the day of the inspection, the planned practitioner-led activity to explore shades of yellow was overly formal and directed at the beginning with limited opportunities for children to freely explore.
• The children engage in a valuable programme to support their understanding of emotions.
• Each child brings a cushion from home and it is placed in the comfortable book area. The children display a love of books and an interest in print materials.

**Actions advised**
• Practitioners are advised to use a variety of methods to reflect the rich learning journey of each child within their learning books. Within the learning books the broad experiences promoted in Aistear could be reflected to a greater degree.
• Practitioners are advised to facilitate planned group time experiences that further enable the children to be active learners by using their senses to explore and work with objects and materials in their unique ways.

**AREA 4**

**QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING**

• The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
• The well-established team work very effectively to plan and provide suitable early learning experiences for the children. There is clarity around roles and responsibilities.
• In the development of the new premises the practitioners reflected on practices and sought to improve the opportunities and provision for play. The views of parents were sought and used to inform change. The practitioners are familiar with the materials of the Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide but have not yet utilised them to inform self-review practices.
• Professional growth is nurtured through the practitioners’ attendance at training events. The lead practitioner completed the Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) programme. She very effectively implemented this learning, for example by developing the planning board and visual to promote communication. The owner is planning to complete a forest school programme with the local childcare committee.
• Very effective informal and formal communication strategies are used to regularly share information with parents about their child’s learning experiences and development.
• Parents and their child are welcome to visit the setting in advance of starting. Limited written information is shared to inform parents about the curriculum and the learning through play approach.
• To support the move from pre-school to primary school, discussions and activities take place with the children. Links with the two local primary schools have been established. Information is shared in the form of a postcard that children take with them to their school’s open day.

**Actions advised**
• Practitioners are advised to engage with the Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide to support the practitioners’ professional self-reflection and inform the further development of an emergent play-based curriculum.
• To further support the children’s learning and development through home-setting links, it is advised that practitioners compile information for parents on Aistear and the importance of learning through play.
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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</table>

Language used in Early-Years Education Inspection reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</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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Published December 2020
APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT
SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection 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 date of the inspection, the outdoor area has been developed further. A tree house of wooden materials has been added to the sensorial garden giving to the buddy bench, large blackboard wall and mud kitchen. A large poly tunnel has been included for growing vegetables herbs and colourful flowers, giving the children a wider range of choices for outdoor play or rest. Actions have been taken on all the advice received on the day of inspection.