

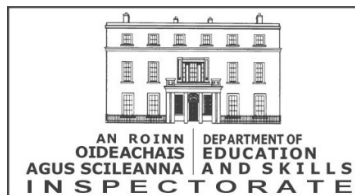
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection
Report

Ardagh Montessori
09LK0024

Ardagh
County Limerick

Date of Inspection: 8 December 2016



CONTEXT OF SETTING

Ardagh Montessori is privately managed and located within a purpose-built building behind a private dwelling in the village of Ardagh in County Limerick. It has been in operation for twelve years and offers a morning only Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the morning of the inspection three practitioners and twenty-one children were present. 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 good
- There is a very caring and welcoming atmosphere in the service. The practitioners have built up a close connection with the local community over the years and they demonstrate a warm and caring approach towards the families and the children.
- Very secure and authentic relationships between the practitioners and the children are evident.
- The practitioners make effective use of body language and tone of voice when praising and encouraging the children.
- The practitioners and practices in the setting effectively support healthy eating and the children's independence. Snack time is a very relaxed social occasion for the children and it gives them responsibility for managing their own personal belongings and care needs.
- The programme of activities promotes children's learning and development and provides some agency to the children in relation to choosing and organising their own learning activities.
- Times of transition within the daily routine are managed somewhat effectively using verbal prompts and cues.

Actions advised

- A review of the structure and organisation of the daily routine is advised, particularly in relation to limiting the number of changes, ensuring transitions are not rushed, and developing more visual cues and calming strategies. The self-evaluation tools and tip-sheets on transitions in the *Aistear*, *Síolta Practice Guide* will aid in this regard.
- Building on the secure relationships they have established with the children and the families, the practitioners are advised to consider adopting a key person approach. Information on use of a key person approach is available in the 'Curriculum foundations' pillar of the *Aistear*, *Síolta Practice Guide*.
- To support the children's developing sense of identity and belonging, the practitioners are advised to have more visual representations of the local community and pictures of the children's families available and accessible to the children.

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 programme of activities is underpinned by Montessori principles and by *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*.
- The indoor environment is very spacious, with Montessori materials and table-top work available in a large part of the room. The remainder of the room has a variety of play areas set up. Elements of the indoor play provision include a small sand box, a chill-out area with a couch and books, some writing and art materials, a socio-dramatic play area with real and bought objects, construction blocks and resources for small world play. On the morning of the inspection, the children were observed socialising, exploring, constructing, imagining, writing, reading, matching, sorting and problem solving.
- Curriculum planning is organised on a long-term, medium-term and short-term basis and, in the main, includes enquiry-based topics from the Montessori curriculum with specific learning goals for the children.

- The practitioners use a wide range of very appropriate teaching and interaction strategies to support and facilitate learning. Those observed on the morning of the inspection included practitioners positioning themselves attentively down at the children's eye level, using mathematical language, guiding the children when using tracing templates and counting animals, and encouraging them to put on their own coats and find their folders. The practitioners also engaged in lots of natural spontaneous conversations and enquiry-focused questioning.
- Children's emergent language, literacy and numeracy skills are supported through the activities and the variety of resources provided.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to conduct observations when children are playing and to reflect on the impact that the play activities have on the children's learning and development. The practitioners' use of the self-evaluation tools and tip sheets in the 'Play' pillar of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* will further support the provision for play.
- When developing the outdoor area, the practitioners are advised to consider the advice in the information booklet, *Nurturing young children's physical well-being through fundamental movement skills* which is downloadable from the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide*.
- A review of the book area is advised, especially in relation to the variety and presentation of books. The environment audit in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* offers further guidance in this regard.
- The planning of experiences and activities that are based on the children's current and emergent interests will help to sustain the children's interest and motivation to learn. In this regard, the development of a more emergent, enquiry-based curriculum is advised. The short-term planning template in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* provides a useful structure for identifying children's interests and the learning record template in the Guide will assist practitioners in collating information about the children's developing dispositions, skills, attitudes, knowledge and understanding.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is good
- The children demonstrate genuine engagement and enjoyment in their learning. During the inspection, they were motivated by and interested in the majority of the activities provided.
- On the morning of the inspection, the children were practising for a nativity play. Some of the children very successfully remembered their individual lines and words as well as the actions to a variety of Christmas themed songs.
- The children have developed friendships and they display positive learning dispositions such as an ability to question and to solve problems as well as independence. The resources and experiences provided in this setting effectively encourage children to predict, count, interact with each other, experience success, and to think imaginatively.
- The children have developed very appropriate personal and social skills; they respond respectfully to each other, they take responsibility for the environment, and they co-operate in large group and small-group tasks.

Actions advised

- The devising of a responsibility or jobs chart in partnership with the children will further support their ownership of and desire to look after the environment.
- Documentation of the children's learning and development through the creation of learning journals in collaboration with the children is advised. These will support the children to make more connections in their learning, will deepen their understanding of their learning and development, and will help them to reflect on their achievements and successes.
- Displays of the children's lived experiences in their community and families would greatly enhance their developing sense of well-being, identity and belonging. These displays or journals could include the children's own representations, free drawings or photographs.
- The practitioners are advised to review their approaches to assessment and documentation in order to ensure that they capture the children's ongoing achievements and successes across a range of learning experiences.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- The manager is very proactive and committed to providing quality learning experiences for the children. She regularly avails of mentoring and training workshops from external sources. In recent months she has updated all of the setting policies and procedures with the help of her staff and the County Childcare Committee and has prioritised greater engagement with parents and an upgrade of the outdoor environment over the coming months.
- The management and staff discuss various aspects of practice during the year, both informally and formally.
- Some effective measures are in place for informing parents and families about the setting ethos, policies and procedures, curriculum goals and the children's learning. These include a two-day introduction phase where parents come to the setting. In so doing, the parents are enabled to see at first hand the materials and space, they view the curriculum goals and policies, they are given copies of the ECCE calendar and they can discuss aspects of the settling-in phase in respect of their individual child. Parents also receive regular newsletters as well as feedback on their children's learning twice a year.
- The manager has built up very good links with the school over the twelve years since the pre-school was established and a number of effective plans have been put in place to support children's progression to primary school. One of these involves the practitioners joining the parents and the children at an open event held in the local school every year.

Actions advised

- It is advised that the manager and practitioners use the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to focus on further developing their practice with regard to curriculum planning and sharing information with parents in respect of children's learning.
- The practitioners are advised to share the leadership role with regard to the development of quality educational activities and experiences. Regular, systematic, formal team meetings that focus on children's learning and development will facilitate continuous collaborative dialogue and reflection on practice.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is very good.

Summary of Overall Inspection Findings

Area	Quality Level
Quality of context to support children's learning and development	Good
Quality of processes to support children's learning and development	Good
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	Good
Quality of management and leadership for learning	Very Good

Language used in Early-Years Education-focused Inspection reports

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