## EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

### REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Name</th>
<th>Starting Small Standing Tall</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting Address</td>
<td>Crossagalla Industrial Estate</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ballysimon road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>County Limerick</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>09LK0121</td>
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**Date of Inspection: 08-10-2018**
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 service.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspectors 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>08-10-2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Observation of interactions within all of the pre-school sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meeting with setting owners/managers</td>
<td>• Post-inspection feedback meeting with setting practice manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interaction with children</td>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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CONTEXT OF SETTING

Starting Small Standing Tall is a private setting located in an industrial estate on the outskirts of Limerick City. The setting has been in operation for over thirteen years and provides a range of full-day, part-time and after-school services to children and families across the greater Limerick area. The setting provides five pre-school sessions to children participating in the first and second year of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. These include two Naíonraí, a Montessori room, a Playschool room and an Outdoor pre-school. The setting has two owner/managers, one of whom is also a practitioner in the Montessori room, and a practice manager who is also a practitioner in the Naíonra. Across these five sessions, eleven practitioners provide care and education to eighty-five children. The inspection took place over a two-day period. 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 very good.
- Children and parents are welcomed on arrival by practitioners to their respective rooms. Corridor space is effectively used to display the weekly plan to parents as they move through the setting. Photographic displays and children’s creations are strategically placed throughout the setting for parents to view at arrival and collection times.
- The children appear familiar with the routines which provide them with a range of different learning experiences both indoors and outdoors and through external inputs. A number of these routines are practitioner-led and in the majority of instances are informed by the routine rather than the children’s needs.
- Children are effectively informed of changes within the routine through the use of visual cues and verbal reminders. Sand-timers, songs and practitioner reinforcement are used to indicate when changes are happening. Children require practitioner guidance to know what is going to happen next.
- The children are effectively supported to engage in self-help skills and to prepare for meal-times. A ‘helper’ system encourages children to take turns at handing out plates, lunch bags and being the leader when moving outdoors.
- A key-person system is in operation throughout the setting. Parents are made aware of the key person for their child through a display sheet outside each learning environment. This key person takes responsibility for liaising with parents during the pre-school year. There is scope to develop this approach to strengthen the relationships between children and their key person.
- Children’s developing sense of identity and belonging is effectively promoted. Their artwork, family photographs and birthdays are displayed in their base rooms. An abundance of attractive photographic displays of children engaging in large-group experiences and community outings are displayed in communal areas. However, there is limited representation of the cultural diversity of the groups and family backgrounds in the children’s base rooms.
- The setting has established positive links with the local community. Children are regularly taken on trips and outings. The children go on regular nature walks in the surrounding area and visitors are welcomed in to share their skills and interests with the children.
**Actions advised**
- The practitioners are advised to review the organisation of a number of the daily routines within the setting. For example, increasing opportunities for small-group learning experiences, will maximise the benefit of building relationships with the children. This is preferable to having a lot of large-group experiences where children have limited opportunity to make choices and decisions about their learning.
- The practitioners are advised to review the role of each key person so that the uniqueness of each child is reflected within the learning environments and during planned learning experiences. This will ensure that the children’s various cultures, traditions and languages are represented in the resources and the experiences.

**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 curriculum in the setting is informed by *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*, the Montessori Method, Irish language immersion, outdoor learning philosophy and play-based learning. Within these various pedagogical approaches to learning, children are effectively supported to learn through play.
- Planning is consistently organised on a long, medium and short-term basis and implemented through a thematic approach. While there is some evidence of children’s emergent topical interests being captured through various methods in each room, it is not yet clear that children’s developing dispositions, skills, attitudes and knowledge are being fully supported.
- Consistency is evident in the assessment approaches being used to assess children’s learning and development. These approaches vary however, in terms of how children’s learning is documented. Descriptive narratives are used in some instances, but a number of the observations viewed were limited. Assessments are yet to inform children’s progressing dispositions, skills, knowledge and attitudes.
- Highly effective and supportive interactions are evident. Practitioners are responsive and tuned in to children as they use a range of interaction strategies to engage and motivate children in their learning.
- All indoor learning environments are well-organised and set up into various areas of interest. Inconsistencies were evident in how these areas are resourced between rooms: Some rooms are richly resourced, while other areas are limited in the resources available. Within the majority of rooms, learning through play and playful activity support children to purposefully explore mathematical and scientific concepts. Children experience large blocks of uninterrupted time for play in the majority of rooms.
- The setting has a variety of outdoor learning environments that are used regularly by the children. A number of the outdoor areas are under-utilised with limited resources and limited access. During the inspection, the way practitioners used the outdoor environments varied as some practitioners brought equipment outdoors for games, races and exploration. While other practitioners did not facilitate these experiences.

**Actions advised**
- Practitioners are advised to review and reflect on the pedagogical approach which underpins the practice in each room. Revisiting the principles of these approaches will ensure that children have optimum experiences when these pedagogies are put into practice.
- The practitioners are advised to review the current approach to short-term planning. This needs to reflect individual children’s developing dispositions, attitudes and emerging interests. These plans should take a purposeful approach in planning for children’s individual learning and development.
- It is advised that practitioners evaluate the purpose of observations being captured and how these observations are used to reflect meaningful moments in children’s learning and
development. The Planning and Assessing Using Aistear’s Themes pillar of the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide provides examples and ideas for practice in this area.

- It is advised that practitioners develop a strategic approach in preparing and using each learning environment to maximise the learning benefit for children in these areas.

**AREA 3**

**QUALITY OF CHILDREN’S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

- The quality of the children’s learning experiences and achievements is good.
- The children appear comfortable and secure as they engage in the learning experiences in the setting. During the inspection, the children were motivated and took initiative in their learning. This was most evident during free-play time. The quality of children’s learning experiences varied between different philosophical approaches to learning.
- The children play alone, in pairs and small groups. Children demonstrate many different learning dispositions, such as, curiosity, independence and the ability to take risks as they purposefully organise their learning.
- Consistency during the meal-time routines effectively supports children to take an active role and be independent. The children discuss healthy food, their families and recent events during these meal-times.
- The children’s engagement during large-group experiences varies between sessions. The quality of the individual children’s participation and opportunity for their voices to be heard is inconsistent.
- Children demonstrate good capacity to communicate as they share their achievements, successes and make requests. Children successfully engage in problem-solving opportunities as they independently use sand-timers to navigate turn-taking.
- The children are given ample opportunities to hear and use the Irish language. Practitioners consistently use familiar Irish phrases throughout the Naíonraí sessions.
- The majority of the children demonstrated a variety of communication strategies appropriate to their age and stage of development. They confidently and eagerly represented their ideas and thoughts through play and discussion. While very good opportunities for children to engage in mark-making was evident in a number of rooms, these opportunities were limited in others.

*Actions advised*

- It is advised that there be less emphasis on adult-directed large-group learning experiences. These activities need to allow children greater opportunities to experience tailored small-group experiences which focus on their learning needs and interests.
- It is advised that children are provided with greater opportunities to reflect on their experiences; and to think about and plan for their learning. Towards this end, practitioners could use children’s learning portfolios to prompt reflective discussions on children’s experiences.
- It is advised that practitioners consider how each child achieves an individual sense of achievement and success. As practitioners develop the documentation, this needs to reflect group learning, but also the learning of individual children. This will ensure that children gain a proper sense of their own individual achievements.

**AREA 4**

**QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING**

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- Highly effective commitment and dedication to the on-going improvement of practice is evident in the setting. Regular reflections are completed by management to evaluate practice. An annual review is completed to determine any potential improvements or changes that need to be made for the benefit of children and practitioners.
- Clear structures are in place for the smooth organisation of learning experiences for children. A supervisor takes responsibility for supporting practitioners and monitoring practice in the rooms. Both owner/managers also visit the learning environments regularly to identify areas for review. A whole staff meeting is organised every term, while monthly meetings occur between room leaders and management.
• The setting supervisor provides informal feedback to practitioners as part of her role. A formal Human Resources (HR) review is completed with each practitioner every year. Opportunities are made available for practitioners to take a leadership role for different tasks during the year.

• Continuous professional development opportunities are consistently promoted as both managers have engaged in upskilling opportunities. Practitioners are encouraged to attend training and events locally and the setting avails of these through the local County Childcare Committee. One of the managers has recently completed the Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) training programme and is currently engaged in level 9 training. The setting has also previously engaged in a ‘preparing for the Síolta QAP’ programme.

• The setting has previously engaged with the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide and has used its contents to reflect on provision. This practice is yet to be consistently embedded as part of the settings self-review processes.

• Parents are regularly consulted and informed about events and practice in the setting. A parents-handbook, online platform and monthly letters share information with parents about the setting and the curriculum. Formal individual meetings between parents and their child’s key person are held once a year. These meetings are an opportunity for parents and practitioners to discuss children’s individual learning progression. The setting is currently in the process of establishing an online application system. This will provide parents with access to information on the programme of learning for their child. They will be able to view photographs and videos and add their comments and feedback.

• Transitions within the setting are very effectively organised as children move between rooms. Practitioners have developed a ‘passport’ system. This contains valuable information on each child’s likes and needs and it moves with the child through the setting. As the setting is located in an urban area, after-school services are provided for nine primary schools. The majority of children in the setting will attend these schools and the management are currently reviewing how communication and information sharing can be strengthened to support children as they transition.

**Action advised**

• It is advised that management review the different pedagogical approaches used in the setting. Through completing a review of how these approaches translate into practice, practitioners can ensure that all approaches are fully aligned with the aspirations set out in the parent handbook.

• To support on-going review of practice, the setting is advised to engage systematically with the self-evaluation tools within the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide.

**CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE**

The capacity of the setting to implement the actions advised above is very good. The practice manager attended the post-inspection feedback meeting and demonstrated openness and commitment to developing quality experiences for children and families.
**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>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>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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