## EARY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

### REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Name</th>
<th>Hopscotch Crèche and Montessori</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting Address</td>
<td>Castle Martin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eastham Road</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bettystown</td>
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<td></td>
<td>County Meath</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>09MH0115</td>
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Date of Inspection: 04-02-2019
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(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>04-02-2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Interaction with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review of relevant documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feedback to setting owner, area manager, manager and practitioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation of interactions during a number of sessions</td>
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</table>

**CONTEXT OF SETTING**

Hopscotch Crèche and Montessori is a private setting located in Bettystown, Co. Meath. It provides full day, part-time and sessonal services with five morning sessions delivering the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The inspection took place during all five sessions. Ten practitioners, an assistant employed under the Access and Inclusion Model, and seventy-nine 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.
- The atmosphere is warm, welcoming and very friendly. On arrival and at home time, the practitioners and parents engage in conversations and informally exchange information about the children.
- Relationships between the practitioners and the children are respectful and positive. Within all of the pre-school rooms, the key-person approach is implemented. This approach is one in which practitioners develop a close, secure relationship with a designated group of children and act as a link between the pre-school and the parents of these children. The practitioners know their key children and their families. During the inspection, it was evident that the children were secure in their relationships with the practitioners and that many friendships amongst the children have been established.
- There are visual daily schedules in all of the rooms. The daily routines in the pre-school rooms are similar. The children participate in mainly large-group learning activities, including free play, snack time, activity time and outside time. Ample opportunities are provided for the children to make independent decisions in their learning.
- The practitioners use a variety of effective strategies to inform the children of changes in the routine. During the inspection, while the practitioners verbally reminded children of upcoming changes and used songs and props to indicate changes in activities, a number of transitions were overly long. This resulted in a number of children becoming distracted and they disengaged.
- The practitioners use snack time as a social occasion and a time to promote healthy eating, tasting and an opportunity for children to develop good social skills.
- Praise and encouragement are a regular feature of the practitioners’ practice. During the inspection, the practitioners acknowledged the children for their efforts and their achievements.
- The children’s sense of identity and belonging is promoted through the use of photographs and the children’s art-work on display. The ‘Family Wall’ is a feature in all of the pre-school rooms. The practitioners have yet to incorporate strategies that reflect the children’s cultural diversity and the wider community.

**Actions advised**

- The practitioners are advised to use transition times as a time to support children’s learning. The use of playful activities, such as rhyming and additional songs, will be helpful in this regard.
- The practitioners are advised to celebrate the cultural diversity and community background of the children through the provision of more displays, resources and discussions.
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 is informed by Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. At the time of the inspection, two of the pre-school rooms used a blend of the Montessori approach and a play-based curriculum, the other rooms used a play-based curriculum. There is evidence that the practitioners are developing practices towards implementing an emergent curriculum as noted in documentation provided in some of the pre-school rooms.
- The practitioners use a variety of assessment methods to record the children’s learning. These include developmental observations, individual and group learning stories, the children’s artwork and photographs. While the practitioners use the findings to plan some learning activities, there is potential to enhance this practice to consistently inform short-term planning for the next steps in the children’s learning.
- A number of effective interaction strategies and methods were observed during the inspection; the practitioners offered affirmative comments as they engaged in conversations with the children at the child’s level. From time to time during the inspection, some practitioners used open-ended, thought-provoking questions along with constructive commentary to extend the children’s thinking. The practitioners’ facilitation of appropriate challenges for children to independently solve problems were noted.
- Within all the pre-school rooms, it is evident that the practitioners value play. During the inspection, the practitioners provided ample opportunities for the children to engage in uninterrupted, sustained, child-initiated play on their own, in pairs and in small groups.
- Each of the pre-school rooms has defined interest areas with materials easily available and accessible to the children. There is a good supply of mark-making materials for children to enjoy. In two of the rooms, the Montessori materials, such as practical life and mathematical materials, are presented in discrete areas. There is potential to extend the range of open-ended, real, sensorial and natural materials to support children in the purposeful exploration in their learning within all the pre-school rooms.
- The children have regular access to a large outdoor area which provides opportunities for gross motor, creative, exploratory and socio-dramatic play.
- During the inspection, the practitioners effectively supported the children’s emergent language, including mathematical language, through natural interactions and the use of rhymes, songs and effective story-reading activities.
- There are a number of positive strategies to support children’s participation in the ECCE programme. These include practitioners working with parents to promote each child’s learning, the setting’s engagement with outside agencies to support children to learn in an inclusive learning.

Actions advised
- The practitioners are advised to use the pillar ‘Planning and Assessing’ from the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide to support them in the further development of their planning and assessment practices. This will help them to plan learning experiences which are more responsive to the children’s emergent interests and their individual learning needs.
- The practitioners are advised to use the environment audit tool in the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide with a view to maximising the potential of the learning environments and extending the range of open-ended, real and natural materials.
- The practitioners are advised to use the positive relationships and interactions they have with the children to strengthen their roles as play partners in the promotion of sustained, shared thinking opportunities with children. The tip sheet ‘Thinking Together’ from the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide will assist in this regard.


AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN’S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children’s learning experiences and achievements is very good.
- During the inspection, the children’s sense of enjoyment and interest in their learning was clearly evident. This was particularly noticeable when they were engrossed and engaged in active learning during free play.
- The majority of the children demonstrate their capability to make decisions during the learning activities they participate in. Children who need support to make independent choices receive sensitive encouragement from the practitioners.
- During the inspection, in the majority of the pre-school rooms, the children displayed positive learning dispositions, such as persistence, curiosity and collaboration. One such example was reflected in a small group of children’s collaboration during a role play scenario about travelling to China on a space rocket.
- The children have opportunities to experience success throughout the session. Examples noted include the sense of achievement displayed by a group of children during ball-throwing games and the game of ‘The Bear and the Honey’.
- The children demonstrate high levels of co-operation and collaboration. These developing skills contribute to the overall positive and affirming relationships which exist amongst the children. During the inspection, the children were observed playing co-operatively, taking turns and negotiating with one another.
- Many children demonstrate curiosity and inquisitiveness about their world. During the inspection, some opportunities were provided where they can build on their understanding of their world and their life experiences.
- The majority of the children display the ability to communicate their thoughts and ideas confidently. On the day of the inspection, many children were observed sharing their news from home. Some activities provide opportunities for children to experience collaborative decision making.
- Within all of the pre-school rooms the children have opportunities to participate in activities that promote their creativity and express their ideas. While during the inspection, the children were observed being creative through their use of a wide variety of mark-making and process art materials, templates were used for colouring-in activities.
- The children’s emergent language development is nurtured through appropriate story reading, rhyming and singing activities. In some of the pre-school rooms, children were observed engaging in symbol and playful reading activities. There is potential to increase opportunities to further develop these emerging skills.

Actions advised
- The practitioners are advised to provide additional opportunities to help deepen the children’s understanding of their world. The use of small group activities facilitated by the key worker could assist in this instance.
- The practitioners are advised to provide a greater variety of playful experiences to foster the children’s emergent language skills. The tip-sheet ‘Enhancing Language’ from the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide may be beneficial in this regard.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- There is a highly commendable ethos of professionalism, teamwork and collaboration among the management team and the practitioners. They use a number of strategies to reflect on practice. Practitioners conduct weekly reviews of the programme and there are informal room meetings with members of the management team. The Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide is not currently used as part of the setting’s self-review and reflection practices.
- The owner reported that resulting from a review of the management structure and organisation of the setting, recent changes include the appointment of an in-house mentor. This will support improvement in practice and the provision of high quality learning and development experiences for children. While practitioners are encouraged to suggest topics for the facilitation of in-house training work-shops, regular support and supervision meetings have yet to be embedded as a key element of practice.
• A very strong emphasis is placed on continuing professional development within the setting. This is evident from the owner’s commitment to supporting staff to upskill through the provision of a training bursary and the facilitation of in-house training with a sister setting. The owner provides a good role model for the practitioners and demonstrates effective use of the practitioners’ skill set.

• An emphasis is placed on developing robust connections between the children’s parents and the setting. Parents are encouraged to take the children’s learning journals home whenever they wish to. Social media is used to share information on practical issues and the children’s learning with parents. Each September, a parent information meeting is facilitated. Outside each of the pre-school rooms, the practitioners display relevant information on topics pertaining to children’s learning and development.

• Transitions into and from the setting are managed very effectively. Prior to children commencing, in conjunction with a welcome letter, they are invited to visit to meet the practitioners. The setting has established relationships with local primary schools. At the time of the inspection, the owner reported that plans were in place to redevelop the end-of-year report which is prepared to support children as they transition to primary school.

**Actions advised**

• Management and practitioners are advised to use the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to help them further develop their self-review and professional practices. During more regular team meetings, the guide could be used to help with the development of an action plan to address prioritised areas of improvement.

• Management are advised to use the newly-created structures within the organisation to embed the practice of support and supervision meetings, to further develop appropriate systems for the smooth organisation of educational experiences and to support staff in their role.

**CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE**

The capacity of the setting to implement the actions advised above is very good, as identified by the commitment of the management team and the practitioners to high quality learning outcomes for the children.
## Summary of Overall Inspection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Quality Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<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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### Language used in Early Years Education Inspection reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of children.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<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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APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT
SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

- We are happy that the content of the report is a fair representation of what was discussed with the inspection team. We are pleased that the good practice observed is acknowledged and found the inspection process to be one that has boosted staff morale.
- We are satisfied with the practical support and constructive feedback offered.
- Engagement with Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide is on a voluntary basis however in order to further develop our record keeping system we are happy to engage with this tool and implement some of its useful resources.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

Area 1:
- Transition times can prove challenging within any ECCE setting and while it is acknowledged that we already flag transitions effectively within the session we have now expanded our repertoire of songs, rhymes and games to use at times like this. This is proving very popular with the children.
- We are building on our current methods of celebrating the cultural diversity and community background of the children attending our setting through engaging with parents, reviewing our displays and adding resources. Our partnership with parents and consultation with children will play a key role in this ongoing process.

Area 2:
- We are engaging with the recommended resources from the Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide and these resources will now form part of our discussions at team and management meetings.
- We will place a strong focus on developing and strengthening our current practice in promoting an emergent curriculum within the setting using observation, key worker knowledge and reflective practice.

Area 3:
- Small group activities and chats now form part of the children’s activities during their time with us.
- Recommended resources from the Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide are now used to inform practice.

Area 4:
- Our current practice of informal meetings and of having an open door/available approach to staff will remain in place and be added to through a schedule for regular team meetings being drafted to support the actions advised. This is subject to staffing challenges however every effort will be made to adhere to scheduled meetings.
- Staff support and supervision meetings are currently ongoing and staff will also be encouraged to request interim meetings if they feel the need to do so.
- As with all areas the Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide will be consulted to inform and enhance practice and provision.