EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Name</th>
<th>Little Tots Montessori</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting Address</td>
<td>67 Balreask Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Navan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>County Meath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>09MH0192</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Date of Inspection: 13-02-2019
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>13-02-2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meeting with setting manager and ECCE practitioner</td>
<td>• Interaction with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Observation of interactions during the morning ECCE session</td>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Post-inspection feedback meeting with setting owner/ manager and ECCE practitioners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CONTEXT OF SETTING**

Little Tots Montessori has been in operation in Navan, Co. Meath for eighteen years. There are two pre-school rooms in the building where the owner/ manager provides care and education for local children availing of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. During the day the pre-school children move from one room to another led by a practitioner. On the day of the inspection, there were four practitioners including the owner/ manager and nineteen children in the setting. The setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised in this report, and the response submitted on behalf of the setting can 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 good.
- A welcoming atmosphere is evident in the setting. The parents drop their children at the door of the setting each morning and the owner/manager greets the children and parents.
- Relationships between the practitioners and the children are caring; there is open conversation and family stories are shared. The practitioners reassure and comfort children when they are upset during the day.
- The daily routine is planned and offers a long period of free play first thing each morning where children are active and have choice in their learning.
- The practitioners give children a verbal warning for the transition from free play to group activity time. Children engage in tidy up time following this prompt. Resources could be used to support transitions further.
- Snack time is a social occasion and the children have individualised placemats which they use at this time. The practitioners promote healthy eating during snack time and children take ownership of their bags during this period. The practitioners complete the majority of the cleaning and tidy up in the setting. There is scope to extend the children’s independence throughout the day.
- There are a few displays which support individual identity within the setting including a family wall. Visual resources to support the development of children’s awareness of cultural diversity and of their local community are not yet included in the environment.

**Actions advised**

- It is advised that the practitioners use displays and props to support the children’s awareness of transitions and the daily routine. This would enable them to prepare for transitions and to conclude their play in a more gradual and phased manner.
- It is advised that the practitioners review the daily routine to optimise independence and self-help skills. The children can be supported and encouraged to complete various tasks independently, including tidy-up tasks.
- It is advised that the practitioners emphasise the identity of the local community within the pre-school setting. To promote identity and belonging further, it would be beneficial to reflect on the surrounding community and extended communities associated with the children attending the setting.
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 fair.
- The curriculum is informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and a play-based curriculum is in place in the setting.
- The setting has moved away from the Montessori Method; some Montessori equipment is still available in the environment. The environment is also set up with various play areas and a good range of materials is available to the children.
- The setting has a medium-term plan in place which focuses on themes, seasons and festivals. There is potential for the practitioners to develop their planning processes.
- The practitioners use a range of observation methods including narrative observations, copybooks and individual folders containing the children’s art collections. Parents sign and date observations. There is scope to develop the observation process further.
- The children enjoy learning through play with time for them to play alone and in groups. They have access to various play including pretend play and construction play. On the day of the inspection they enjoyed playing in the home corner making food for their friends. They also played a shop game and created a restaurant.
- The practitioners lead and direct through their interactions with children. There is a focus on teaching children letters and numbers.
- The practitioners have created an inclusive environment where children have access to support through the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) support and the owner/manager has completed the Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) in the Early Years programme. The practitioners have created a sensory area within the setting to support children with additional needs.

*Actions advised*

- It is advised that the owner/manager and practitioners develop the long-term plan with a view to supporting the two-year ECCE cycle. The practitioners need to develop short-term plans which reflect the children, their interests and needs.
- It is advised that the owner/manager and practitioners gather the children’s art and photographic evidence to create a portfolio of the activities they complete with children. The practitioners can develop the children’s self-reflection skills through this experience also, by enabling the children to comment on their work and by recording these comments.
- The practitioners are advised to document more regular observations of the children, and to use the *Aistear Learner Record* to generate observation records. This is will support practitioners to implement individual future plans as part of the curriculum planning processes.

AREA 3
QUALITY OF CHILDREN’S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children’s learning experiences and achievements is good.
- The children are safe and secure in the learning environment.
- The children enjoy sensory play and have access to a wide range of materials including sand, water and playdough.
- On the day of the inspection the children had opportunities to complete freely chosen tasks during the free-play period. One child enjoyed completing jigsaws alone during this play period. This offered the child a sense of achievement.
- The setting has a large outdoor space and children have some time to play outdoors on a daily basis. There are some materials outside including plastic climbing frames, bikes and balls. Currently, the outdoor area offers limited play experiences to the children.
- The children enjoy singing and dancing, including during circle time. On the day of the inspection time was set aside for a group story to be read and the children enjoyed acting out the sections of the story.
- The practitioners use templates and workbooks as a basis for promoting the development of the children’s early literacy and numeracy skills. There are few examples of process oriented, mark-making art; the children would benefit from further opportunities to engage in creative work.
• The practitioners ask a range of closed questions during the day to test the children’s knowledge. These questions are limited in scope.
• Children hear general affirmations about themselves and their activities during the day.

**Actions advised**

• The children would benefit from a more natural and open-ended outdoor environment where they can experience risky play, creative play and extend their gross-motor skills. The practitioners can use the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to support this developmental work.
• The practitioners need to reduce the use of templates as a basis for developing literacy and numeracy skills. In place of this approach, the practitioners need to focus on activities which offer hands-on, practical learning opportunities during which these concepts can be explored. They need also to extend the opportunities for the children to engage in creative work.
• The practitioners are advised to address the children at eye level, to ask open-ended questions and to scaffold the children’s learning to a greater extent. This will extend the children’s speaking skills and vocabulary and will deepen their learning and knowledge.

**AREA 4**

**QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING**

• The quality of management and leadership for learning is good.
• The owner/manager and practitioners are professional in their work.
• There is good teamwork in the setting and practitioners support each other in their roles. The owner delegates some tasks and responsibilities to the ECCE practitioners.
• The owner/manager has a clear vision for the setting and the practitioners support her in implementing these ideas. At this juncture, she is keen to develop the outdoor area.
• The owner/manager has completed a range of training and education and she recently decided to move from the Montessori Method to a more play-based learning environment.
• The practitioners have an awareness of *Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* and this is reflected in some of the setting’s policies and procedures.
• The practitioners engage in a range of continued professional development, including workshops carried out by the local county childcare committee.
• The local county childcare committee support the owner/manager with paperwork and online applications.
• There is a range of communication channels established with parents including through a text group, a parent handbook, daily informal meetings and through social media. The setting previously had an open-door policy.
• The children’s transition to primary school is supported by displays of some photographs of the local schools. The practitioners have documented their children’s transition to school and they share these stories with the children. Previously the practitioners completed an end-of-year report which they ask parents to share with the teachers. The practitioners could further and extend these practices.

**Actions advised**

• It is advised that the manager and practitioners extend parental involvement within the setting, and re-establish the open-door policy. It would be beneficial to enable parents to have access to the setting on a daily basis, so that they can discuss and observe their children in their learning environment.
• Practitioners are advised to engage with the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide*, to support overall improvement in the setting. The ‘Supporting Transitions’ pillar would be a good starting point for the practitioners.
• It is advised that the setting access external advisory support for quality improvement provided by *Better Start*. This will support the setting to make improvements in a sustained and continuous manner.
CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the setting to continue to implement the actions advised above is good. The owner/manager and practitioners work well with each other. This will support the implementation of the actions advised.
## 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>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of processes to support children’s learning and development</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of children’s learning experiences and achievements</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of management and leadership for learning</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Language used in Early-Years Education Inspection reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provision Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excellent</strong></td>
<td>Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very good</strong></td>
<td>Provision that is very good is highly effective in meeting the needs of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Good</strong></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><strong>Fair</strong></td>
<td>Provision that is fair requires practice to be improved to meet the needs of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poor</strong></td>
<td>Provision that is poor is inadequate and requires significant improvement to meet the needs of children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Published May 2019*
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.

We have taken the following steps to address the issues advised in the report. We have created a weekly plan, Monday to Friday, with different activities throughout the day, such as junk art, children’s own creative work with a signed explanation. Storytelling with questions free play activities with identity and belonging. Caring for each other. We have made a chart list naming the children, in the different aspects of tidying up. Aistear observation records have now been put into place to record the activities of the children. We have put a plan in place to engage the children in conversation down at eye level and encourage feedback from the children. We have extended our folder giving information about the local primary schools in the area for families not familiar with the area.

We will install a number of new sections to our outdoor play area. These will include a muck kitchen. A circular table with wooden stools. A new play house, new chalk boxes, in the shape of a flower, a wooden mirror and a playhouse. We will also add a new weighing scales. We will continue to update our training to give a better service to our children. Thank you for your advice and help.