An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Name</th>
<th>First Steps Montessori</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting Address</td>
<td>Marian Hall</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Borrisoleigh</td>
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<td></td>
<td>County Tipperary</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>09TN0037</td>
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Date of Inspection: 28-11-2019
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

Date of inspection  28-11-2019

Inspection activities undertaken

- Pre-inspection meeting with the setting manager
- Introductory meeting with the practitioners
- Observation of the morning session
- Interaction with the children
- Review of available records of children’s learning and development
- Review of relevant setting documents
- Review of educational provision and materials
- Post inspection feedback meeting with the setting manager

CONTEXT OF SERVICE

First Steps Montessori is a private sessional pre-school setting. This setting operates in a community building in the village of Borrisoleigh. Three distinct play spaces are used to provide early learning experiences for children; a small room for messy play, a Montessori room and a large section of the community hall. On the day of the inspection, the owner/manager, five practitioners and thirty-two children were present. The children are divided according to age for part of the daily routine. The early years setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised of the report; a response was not received from the setting.

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 at the setting is very warm and friendly. The practitioners demonstrate a high degree of sensitivity and respect for families and children. Relationships between the practitioners and the children are very secure and supportive.
- The majority of practitioners act as a key person for a specific group of children. This contributes to building an understanding of individual children’s interests and needs.
- Practitioners use affirming comments to acknowledge children’s efforts and achievements.
- Provision of a significant period of free play supports children as active agents in their learning.
- The daily routine provides time for the children to engage in effective practitioner-initiated activities. For these activities, the group is divided in two; a group of older-aged children, and a group of younger-aged children.
- During the inspection, it was noted that the children experienced short waiting periods of inactivity during some transition times, in particular at the start of circle time, the younger-aged art group activity and the practice for the pre-school play.
- Lunch time is a social event, with the children engaging in conversation with peers and practitioners.
- The practitioners use their knowledge of children and their families to good effect; conversations recognise each child’s uniqueness. At the time of the inspection, the environment did not sufficiently reflect the identity of children and their community. A suitable variety of resources positively depicts difference in cultural backgrounds.
- Parents are invited to spend time with their child in the setting. The annual road safety programme involves parents participating on a village walk.

Actions advised

- Practitioners are advised to review the management of transitions during the daily routine. Planning for these experiences and the use of a variety of strategies to minimise waiting and increase engagement for children is advised.
- To further nurture children’s developing sense of identity and belonging, it is advised that their lives outside the setting and local community be consistently represented in the environment.
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.
- A blend of play-based learning experiences and the Montessori approach to education inform the effective curriculum. At times, a commercially sourced curriculum manual informs the curriculum. This resource is does not adequately support an emergent curriculum.
- Planning for the needs of the children is suitably organised into monthly and weekly plans. The documented emergent interests and ideas of the children are not fully utilised to inform planning.
- The practitioners’ documentation of the children’s learning is reliably maintained. Each month, a strengths-based observation is recorded by practitioners for their key children. This builds a rich picture of the children’s learning and development. Links to Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework and the next steps in the child’s learning are identified. The children’s art work collated in individual scrapbooks offers a narrow view of their learning experiences.
- The practitioners demonstrate attentiveness and a caring approach in their interactions with the children. They motivate and engage the children to follow their interests. The small and large group learning experiences nurture supportive relationships.
- The indoor learning environment is structured to ensure the children learn in a variety of contexts throughout the session. The Montessori room and hall area are purposefully structured to develop the children’s curiosity, creativity and imagination. At the time of the inspection, the messy room offered an adequately organised space for a good range of sensory-rich materials; there is potential to improve the organisation of this space.
- A compact outdoor area offers the children opportunities to explore natural materials. This space was not accessed during the inspection.
- Specific attention is paid to the learning of children with additional needs. The setting manager and practitioners have been proactive in seeking support through the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM). They have established links with a Better Start Inclusion Specialist and other external professionals with a view to optimising support for children with additional needs.

Actions advised
- To build on the good practices established, it is advised that practitioners give greater consideration to using information about children’s emerging interests to better inform planning.
- In order to enhance the current assessment methods, the practitioners are advised to further develop the children’s learning scrapbooks. The children need to be involved in the process of documenting and reflecting on their learning and progress.
- Practitioners are advised to develop the messy play space to ensure that the children can independently access a wider range of sensory-rich materials. Space needs to be organised for pairs and small groups of the children to explore materials such as water and paint. Surplus resources that are stored on the shelves need to be stored at a higher level and covered from view. This will create additional space for children to find, use, and return items from lower shelves.

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 experience enjoyment in the setting and demonstrate a keen interest in self-directed learning and exploring. During the significant period of free play, the children were active, focused and building self-confidence in their own abilities.
- The book areas are used throughout the day and the children enjoy the opportunity to freely choose to read books. Practitioners are aware of the children’s interest in books. They offer support by reading books with the children. During the inspection, at circle time, the older-aged group of children enjoyed the Owl Babies story, and they shared props which enhanced the story.
- Songs and rhymes are planned for within the daily routine and the children enjoy singing songs and using actions.
Throughout the inspection process, children were observed to play individually, in pairs and in small and large groups. The very good opportunities for collaborative play support the children in practising their developing social skills.

On the day of the inspection, some missed opportunities to allow children to be responsible for managing themselves and their behaviour were noted.

The children use their developing communication skills to confidently give and receive information, interact with others and engage in role play.

The children enjoy using mark-making materials. During the planned group activities, the children were observed to paint using their hands, brushes and sponges.

**Action advised**

- Practitioners are advised to further enable and support the children to develop their capacity to be independent and self-reliant. To develop self-regulation skills, it would be beneficial to support the children to use the sand-timers independently to organise their turn-taking.

**AREA 4**

**QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING**

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- The setting manager and the practitioners demonstrate a clear commitment to their roles in providing quality learning experiences and outcomes for children. There is a good sense of teamwork with the practitioners working well together to optimise the learning and development for the children in their care.
- Reflective practices and self-review are mostly focused on reviewing the implementation of the curriculum plans and improving the experiences for the children. The setting manager is familiar with the self-assessment resources of the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide. She has not engaged the staff team in systematic review to inform quality improvement initiatives.
- Whole-setting meetings are held throughout the year where the setting manager and all practitioners reflect on and review practice, policies and procedures in the setting.
- The manager has been proactive in engaging in continuous professional learning opportunities. She has completed the Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) programme, and a workshop on Síolta and Aistear. The staff team are encouraged to engage in professional development events.
- Communication with parents is mostly informal. The manager meets with parents at the front of the hall and engages in brief and informal conversations. Print material is used to effectively exchange operational information with parents.
- New parents and children planning to start in the setting are welcomed to spend time viewing the environment, meet other parents and receive information about the practices during an open evening. The enrolment form encourages parents to share information about their child to build an understanding of their interests and needs.
- The junior teacher for both local schools visits the children in the setting. The setting manager discusses the settling-in period and shares some information with the teachers. A number of valuable props are added to the resources for children to play with, such as uniforms in the dress up area.

**Action advised**

- The setting manager and the practitioners are advised to strengthen and formalise the ways in which practice is evaluated in the setting. A whole-team approach to reflection using the resources of the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide will support such professional practice.
### 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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### Language used in Early-Years Education Inspection reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality 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>
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<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 March 2020*