### EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

#### REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Name</th>
<th>Sonas Montessori</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting Address</td>
<td>13 Assumption Villas</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mullingar</td>
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<td></td>
<td>N91 RY27</td>
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<td></td>
<td>County Westmeath</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>09WH0065</td>
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**Date of Inspection: 17-01-2020**
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 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>17-01-2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Interaction with children, Observation of interactions during a number of sessions, Review of relevant documents, Feedback to setting managers</td>
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CONTEXT OF SETTING
Sonas Montessori is a privately-owned and operated setting. It was established in 1998 and is located in the town of Mullingar. The setting offers sessional programmes and an after-school service. Two morning sessions and one afternoon session are provided for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. On the day of the inspection, thirty-three children, three practitioners, and two setting managers were present. Both setting managers attended the post-inspection feedback meeting. 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 in the setting is warm and welcoming. Children and parents are greeted individually on arrival. Children present as comfortable and at ease; they hang up their coats and quickly become involved in an area of interest.
- Children’s sense of belonging is promoted in the physical environment through the various visual displays. There are photographic displays of children and their families and the recording of children’s voices is very visible. There is limited representation of children’s varying cultures, languages and traditions.
- The practitioners successfully use lunch time to support and promote children’s well-being. Children and practitioners engage in free-flowing conversations and they reflect on what they have been involved in earlier in the morning.
- Relationships between practitioners and children are respectful. Practitioners consistently show warmth and positive regard for children and their families.
- Overall, the children are familiar with the daily routine which provides them with choices and opportunities to make many decisions about their learning experiences. The children alternate between the two rooms, with different practitioners, on a daily basis. On the morning of the inspection, a small number of children were unsure which of the two rooms they were to attend.
- The practitioners have made links with the local community. A recent trip to the church and visits from professionals to the setting support children in gaining an awareness and an appreciation for the local community. A photographic display, which features a visit from members of An Gardaí, is exhibited in the larger of the two rooms.

Actions advised
- The practitioners are advised to build on how the uniqueness of each child is reflected in the learning environments and during the planned learning experiences. This will ensure that the children’s cultures, traditions and languages are consistently acknowledged, represented and celebrated in the resources and experiences on offer.
- Practitioners are advised to reconsider the movement of children between rooms, with different practitioners, on alternate days. It is further advised that each key practitioner remains with her group of children for the duration of the ECCE programme. This will support familiarity and greater certainty for children and strengthen their opportunities to further develop secure attachments.
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 play-based curriculum approach, linked to Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, is used to support children's learning and development.
- Curriculum planning is organised on long-term, medium-term and short-term bases. The planning incorporates adult-chosen, pre-determined themes and seasonal events.
- Practitioners observe children’s learning using a variety of methods, including individual copybooks, folders, a small number of observation records and a group learning journal. There is potential to provide a more comprehensive picture of children’s dispositions, values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding.
- The indoor environments are well maintained and safe. They are organised into various interest areas and provide opportunities for sensory learning experiences.
- Children have daily opportunities to engage in the outdoor environment. This spacious and inviting space is effectively structured to promote children’s curiosity and their desire for exploration.
- Practitioners facilitate many effective interaction strategies with children. Children are encouraged to be active in their playful explorations. Practitioners are attentive and responsive to the children and provide appropriate levels of support and guidance. On the day of the inspection, there were some missed opportunities to extend children’s learning and thinking.
- Practitioners recognise and value the importance of play as a medium through which children learn and develop. They offer a variety of play types and effectively adopt the roles of play partners to further enhance the learning opportunities during children’s experiences.
- Practitioners have been proactive in availing of additional supports for children with additional needs. For example, an application through the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) has secured learning resources to support the engagement of all learners.

Actions advised

- Practitioners are advised to regularly document children’s skills, interests and learning dispositions in their narrative observation records. As part of this process, the use of this information to inform an individualised short-term plan for each session will help to ensure that each learning programme is more reflective of the individual children and the progression of their interests and strengths.
- Practitioners are advised to broaden their use of interaction strategies that extend, strengthen, scaffold and assist children’s thinking and their learning and development. To further develop their practice, more regular use of open-ended questions and comments is advised.
AREA 3
QUALITY OF CHILDREN’S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

• The quality of the children’s learning experiences and achievements is good.
• Children present as happy and that they are enjoying themselves. They are at ease with the practitioners, their peers and the learning environments.
• Children have many opportunities to make decisions about their learning and during their learning experiences. They are interested in their playful learning experiences and remain engaged for lengthy periods of time.
• Opportunities for children to be creative are limited due to the small selection of available and accessible materials.
• Many children demonstrated a sense of achievement during the sessions. For example, a child independently put on her coat; she rejoiced in delight and shared her achievement with her peers and practitioners.
• Children demonstrate a developing awareness of numbers and print. This is fostered through their regular and purposeful engagement with a variety of numeracy, digital and literacy resources.
• Many children present as effective communicators and they use non-verbal and verbal means to express themselves. This was particularly evident during lunch time where the majority of children demonstrated confidence and the ability to listen, discuss and question during conversations. On the day of the inspection, there was little opportunity for a small number of quieter and less confident children to share their feelings, thoughts and ideas.
• Children are developing a sense of their own identity. They describe their likes and dislikes and regularly make references to family members and personal experiences.

Actions advised

• Practitioners are advised to review the availability of opportunities that promote children’s creative expression across the learning environments. In doing so, practitioners could enhance the presentation and resourcing of materials in each room. This will provide children with a greater means to express their thoughts, feelings and ideas.
• Practitioners are advised to provide all children with daily opportunities to talk about their learning experiences, what they can do, their likes and dislikes, and their family lives. The use of the existing key person approach could assist in promoting children’s communication skills during small-group times.

AREA 4
QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

• The quality of management and leadership for learning is good.
• A sense of teamwork is evident among the practitioners. They work well together and regularly communicate with each other throughout the sessions.
• Management and practitioners informally reflect on and review their practice and procedures. Formal opportunities are not provided for practitioners to meet on a regular basis to plan and to reflect on practice. While some practitioners are familiar with the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide, it is not used by management and staff in the context of self-evaluation.
• Management and practitioners exchange information with parents through daily informal conversations, and the sharing of monthly newsletters, children’s individual folders and copybooks. ‘Coochi’, a transitional teddy bear travels between home and the setting and children and parents complete a diary about ‘Coochi’s’ adventures. This effectively promotes home-setting relationships. Children’s observation records are kept in the hallway where parents are welcome to read them.
• In previous years, practitioners have engaged in training on the implementation of Aistear through the local county childcare committee. More recently, a practitioner has completed the nationally accredited Leadership for Inclusion in Early Childhood (LINC) programme and professional learning around supporting children with speech and language needs.
A flexible, settling-in phase is offered to all new children and their parents. New families are invited to visit during the annual open day and to attend ‘meet and greet’ days where they have an opportunity to meet the team and to familiarise themselves with the environment.

Various procedures are in place to support children as they prepare to move from the early years setting to primary school. This includes opportunities for the children to visit the school grounds where they meet the lollipop lady. Both setting managers report a good working relationship with the neighbouring primary school; some of the parents, who work in the school, introduce themselves to the children in the setting.

**Actions advised**

- Management is advised to facilitate and plan for regular whole-team meetings where practitioners are supported to review and reflect on children’s learning experiences and the learning programme. These meetings can also be used to establish formal professional reflective practices through management’s and practitioners’ engagement with the online *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide*.

- Practitioners are advised to regularly share with parents documented information relating to their child’s strengths, interests and learning dispositions throughout the year. Practitioners could also consider ways of encouraging parents to spend time in the setting at arrival and/or collection times. This will provide additional opportunities for parents to observe children’s learning achievements and experiences.

- The managers and practitioners are advised to participate in the newly-developed ‘Aistear and Play’ workshops. This will support them in their implementation of an emergent and enquiry-based learning programme that is aligned with current best 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>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of management and leadership for learning</td>
<td>Good</td>
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### Language used in Early-Years Education Inspection reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provision 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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APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT
SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

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:
- We will ensure to expand our involvement in the children’s cultures traditions and languages.

Area 2:
- We have changed our observation method to tailor for individual children’s interests and strengths.

Area 3:
- Circle time will be extended to promote children’s communication skills, this will be done in smaller groups.

Area 4:
- We will plan more scheduled staff meetings to develop our curriculum.
- We will invite parents to get more involved with our group activities through the year.