

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

Setting Name	Sundancers
Setting Address	Unit 7 Castlepollard Centre Oldcastle Road Castlepollard County Westmeath
DCYA number	09WH0067

Date of Inspection: 21-11-2019



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agus Scileanna
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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	21-11-2019
Inspection activities undertaken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation of interactions during a morning session • Interaction with children • Review of relevant documents • Feedback to setting owner, manager and practitioners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with setting owner and manager • Meeting with practitioners 	

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Sundancers is a privately owned, sessional setting in operation for eleven years. It provides one morning and one afternoon session for children partaking in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. On the day of the inspection fifteen children, who are in their first year or second year of the ECCE programme, the manager/practitioner and one practitioner were in attendance. Also in attendance was an Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) support worker and a third level student of Early Childhood Care and Education. The owner, manager, one practitioner and a student 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 and organisation is very welcoming, kind, patient, warm and affirming.
- The children have developed very secure and mutually respectful relationships with their practitioners.
- Routines are very flexible. A visual routine is displayed. This supports the children's understanding of the daily schedule. The small and large circle time routines provide the children with an opportunity to come together in a small and large group. The children move confidently between activities through the seamless provision between indoors and outdoors. To signal tidy-up time at the end of the day, a transition strategy using a wind chime is used. Additional routines would further support children's sense of time, and transitioning.
- The children manage their own personal care needs and they are encouraged to be independent. There is a rolling snack time with a snack station and the children are well accustomed to this. Healthy snacks are available to them and an adult sits and chats with the children at all times. Healthy eating is promoted and there is a healthy eating display. The children wash their dishes and plates after snack time. It is planned that they will soon be provided with opportunities to prepare their own snack to further foster independence skills.
- The practitioners model positive behaviour very well using calm tones, 'please' and 'thank you' and by offering consistent relevant praise and encouragement to the children. A conflict resolution visual is displayed for the children and also for the staff.
- The children are very much viewed as active agents, and as knowers and thinkers. They are consulted with in relation to decisions about them, and encouraged to make their own decisions.
- The uniqueness of each child is celebrated and affirmed. They have individual boxes to store their learning documentation, their names and photos are placed over their coat racks, there is a birthday display and a name board with photos, and there are individual and group photographs throughout the setting. Photographs of the practitioners are located at the entrance: this further supports children's sense of identity and belonging.
- Parents are fully involved at the setting. The practitioners chat with children's families at arrival and collection times. Frequent opportunities are provided for parents and families to visit the setting. Parents are encouraged to share their cultural backgrounds, interests and occupations; a dental nurse, a fire fighter and musicians have visited and recently a bike repair man demonstrated how to fix punctures. A parent from the Netherlands is scheduled to talk about Christmas traditions in the Netherlands.

Action advised

- Building on the flexible routines currently enjoyed by the children it would be beneficial to add a routine of recap and recall. This would further support the children's sense of their own daily learning and progress.

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 very good.
- Provision is informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and an emergent curriculum is in place. Long-term, medium-term and short-term plans are set out, and plans are evaluated. The setting has a planning board which is visible to parents and children.
- Children's learning is assessed using photographs, individual learning journals and a group floor book which records group learning. The journals contain photos, records of activities and events, children's art work and parents' comments are welcomed. The floor book is on view for parents and the individual learning journals are sent home each term. The practitioners record their conversations with children; providing children with a voice about what is important to them. Children's emerging interests are recorded together with the next steps in supporting them. There is additional scope to compile more focussed observations to record their strengths, needs and dispositions and to identify how individual children will be supported.
- The admirable interactions observed between the practitioners and the children extend and engage children's thinking and problem-solving skills. Open-ended questions and prompts are used, and the children are encouraged to be curious explorers and imaginers. Play is central and predominantly child-led. The adults promote, initiate and join in play when invited. All adults position themselves very well in the room; they are available when needed, and know when to step in and out.
- The stimulating indoor environment is well laid out with a range of accessible resources. There are Montessori materials, and ample play materials. These include props for socio-dramatic play, a kitchen, a farm, a creative area, a writing station and very good manipulative materials which support the children's fine motor skills. Some digital learning equipment such as a clock, desk top phones, and mobile phones are in evidence.
- The environment is print-rich and very well labelled. There are plentiful posters and a dedicated book area. This area contains books relating to the *Aistear* themes and the setting's activities, and books which reflect diversity, emotions, and various interests. In addition there are Irish books and books in the various languages of the children
- The outdoor environment is very child focussed. It includes a covered play space, a sand area, a play house, motor garage facilities, an art area, mud kitchen and open-ended resources such as large wooden boxes which the children use to make dog kennels and boats. In the planting area the children have grown fruit and vegetables such as strawberries and cabbages.
- The practitioners model language very well and the children engage in singing; they take turns to sing songs individually and as a group. Irish phrases are used throughout the day such as *bualadh bos*.
- The children benefit from very good mark-making opportunities through the use of markers, pencils, crayons, paint, glue and varied writing materials.
- Practice is very inclusive. Children with additional needs are very well supported. Access and Inclusion plans are in place. Relationships have been developed with parents and outside bodies for the sharing of information.

Action advised

- To build on the current assessment practices it is advised that children's individual strengths, needs and dispositions be recorded more systematically, identifying clearly how children will be supported in the next steps of their individual learning. Additional guidance is available in the 'Planning and Assessing' pillar in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide*.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is excellent.
- The children demonstrate sustained enjoyment and strong engagement with the activities, play and learning opportunities.
- The children have a strong awareness of their own wellbeing and a positive sense of self. There are displays which relate to emotions.
- The children create a group floor book and individual learning journals and they competently discuss them with visitors. In affinity with the children the practitioners have developed their own individual learning journals with family photos and family events. This practice empowers the children and reflects a partnership approach to learning.
- The children are independent and autonomous and are encouraged to take responsibility. They confidently negotiate and make clear decisions. Refusals are respected.
- The children communicate and interact very well together. They play independently, in pairs, small groups and large groups.
- The children are avid photographers; taking their own photographs for display.
- The children partake in activities, using experimental slime, they create volcanoes, and they learn about polar bears. These and other activities support their learning in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). They display positive learning dispositions of problem solving and are inquisitive and curious.
- The children have ample opportunities for physical exercise. They use the outdoor area in all weathers and they are highly aware of nature and the environment.
- The setting is very connected with the local community. On the day of the inspection, a neo-natal nurse visited. The children prepared questions in advance and they confidently posed them discussing medical items such as thermometers and stethoscopes. They acquired new language learning through this visit.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- The owner and team demonstrate a clear commitment to their practice. This inspired leadership motivates the whole staff team. There are commendable procedural systems in place at the setting; the setting is well-organised and runs smoothly and effectively. Team days and in-house workshops are held throughout the year. An on-line meeting is held each Friday. Documented planning meetings are held at the beginning of each week. Appraisals, induction procedures and support and supervision arrangements are in situ. Staff have a social media platform to share practice ideas and they use it as a reflection tool.
- The *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* is used to inform and guide practice, evaluation and review and parental input is sought. The setting acknowledges that there is scope to consider additional ways to build on parental involvement in setting reviews and to further develop awareness of the setting's very good assessment practices.
- The setting is *Síolta* validated and maintains strong links with the local county childcare committee.
- The setting welcomes students who wish to avail of work experience opportunities.
- Practitioners engage in regular continuous professional development. The setting has taken part in the *Healthy Ireland Smart Start Programme* for Pre-School Services through the Health Service Executive and the National Childhood Network. The manager has completed the Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) Programme.
- The setting works collaboratively with parents to support each child's learning and parents are valued and respected. An open-door policy and a key worker system are implemented. Information is shared with parents through monthly newsletters, a parents' information evening, a parent noticeboard and a handbook which contains the setting's policies and procedures.

- The children are supported very well to transition into and out of the setting. Their transition to school is supported through a transitions policy. There are relevant props and resources in the environment and uniforms are added to the dress up area. The setting uses the *Mo Scéal* transitions template. A representative from a local school visits to discuss school life with the children.

Action advised

- It is advised that additional communication mechanisms be used to build parents' awareness of the teaching, learning and assessment practices at the setting and to involve parents more centrally in setting reviews. The 'Parent Partnerships' pillar in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* will be beneficial in this regard.

Summary of Overall Inspection

Area	Quality Level
Quality of context to support children's learning and development	Very good
Quality of processes to support children's learning and development	Very good
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	Excellent
Quality of management and leadership for learning	Very good

Language used in Early-Years Education Inspection reports

Excellent	Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of children.
Very good	Provision that is very good is highly effective in meeting the needs of children.
Good	Provision that is good is effective in meeting the needs of children but with some aspects to be developed.
Fair	Provision that is fair requires practice to be improved to meet the needs of children.
Poor	Provision that is poor is inadequate and requires significant improvement to meet the needs of children.

APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report.

We would like to thank the inspector for the respect shown to children and staff on the day of the inspection. We welcome the advice, as we are always willing to find ways to further improve on our practice.

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

Action advice provided us with the opportunity for discussion as a team and to recognize and acknowledge firstly how we are currently recapping and recalling with the children and we are exploring ways to enhance this further.

Area 2

Action advice: Each member of staff is reviewing how they are currently assessing, they are providing support to each other and we plan to review in our next staff day. We acknowledge that this is something that will be ongoing as a team and we will always strive to improve and build upon what we are already doing.

Area 4

We currently have very strong relationships with our parents and partnership with parents has always been central to our practice. We are currently constructing a questionnaire to complete with parents on the level of satisfaction of engagement with Sundancers and to explore with them how we can improve on this going forward.