**EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION**

**REPORT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Name</th>
<th>Cuala Montessori</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting Address</td>
<td>3 Cuala Grove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>County Wicklow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>10WW0148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Date of Inspection: 19-03-2019**
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 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>19-03-2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Interaction with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting with setting owner</td>
<td>Review of relevant documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting with practitioners</td>
<td>Feedback to setting owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation of interactions during a number of sessions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Cuala Montessori is a privately-owned setting located in Bray, County Wicklow. It was established in 2010 and provides two sessional services, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The learning programme is informed by the Montessori Method of education. On the day of the inspection, the lead practitioner, an assistant practitioner and thirty-one children, who are in their first year and second year of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, were in attendance. The owner 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; the setting chose to accept the report without response.

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 practitioners have developed positive, respectful relationships with the children’s parents and extended family members. The practitioners take the time to chat with them at arrival and collection times.
- The children are provided with very good opportunities to be active agents in their learning. They confidently self-register their attendance by placing their photographs into the post box. They choose and organise their own activities, such as selecting their materials and deciding where they wish to play.
- Children are aware of the daily sequence of activities and the flexible routine offers opportunities for them to spend sufficient time on activities. Transitions are effectively signalled by the practitioner using a bell and a timer and by the practitioners moving around the groups to remind the children that it is time to tidy-up.
- A key person approach is effectively used by the practitioners and the list of children and their key person is displayed in the room. This approach is one in which the practitioner develops a close secure relationship with a small group of children and acts as a link between the pre-school and their parents. On the day of the inspection, the practitioners sat with their group of children for snack time and worked with them in small groups, listening to their interests and observing their learning.
- The practitioners consistently acknowledge each child’s efforts and achievements using encouraging gestures and constructive feedback.
- The uniqueness of each child is reflected in the birthday display, the height chart, the children’s self-portraits and the photographs and names on their coat hooks.
- The promotion of the children’s awareness and understanding of cultural diversity is reflected in a display of ‘hello’ in different languages and some play resources. A small number of children attending this setting come from diverse cultural backgrounds. At the time of the inspection, this was not visually reflected in the room.
- Many opportunities are provided for parents to visit the setting including going on the annual outing. Parents have come to share their work experiences and to take part in the storytelling activity and the rhyme challenge. This is where parents come to recite the rhyme of the week with the children.
- The pre-school programme includes provision for experiences that allow the children to develop an awareness of their local community. These are reflected in the community map with local road names and the display with photographs of areas of interest to the children.
Action advised

- Practitioners are advised to further reflect cultural diversity, including the range of cultures of children present, in the displays and resources in the setting. The addition of props, resources, books and discussions on differences and family celebrations will promote a more inclusive 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.
- *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* underpins the learning programme in this setting. The learning programme reflects the Montessori Method of Education and includes the use of a range of Montessori materials.
- At the time of the inspection, no formal planning was being undertaken and an emergent curriculum has yet to be developed. A large resource file with materials relating to seasonal themes and topics is used by the practitioners to plan activities for monthly themes.
- Practitioners compile a detailed scrapbook for each child with a selection of his/her art work and photographs with anecdotal notes. This is sent home to parents twice a year.
- The practitioners record children’s learning using a template linked to *Aistear* once a term. These records are broadly descriptive and do not clearly identify the planned next steps for the children’s learning.
- The practitioners use a variety of positive interactions consistently, such as open-ended questions and prompts, to extend the children’s thinking and problem-solving skills. An example of this was during the storytelling activity when the practitioner supported the children to recall what had happened through the use of questions, such as ‘What do you think happened?’ and ‘Can anybody see anything different?’
- The indoor environments are well laid out across two rooms and equipped with resources to support the specific Montessori areas.
- Children are divided into their key groups to access the outdoor area on a daily basis. A mud kitchen, a climbing frame and trampoline provide opportunities for children to practice their physical skills.
- Play is valued and encouraged by the practitioners. Interest areas, such as a home corner and construction area, provide children with a very good variety of resources to support their play experiences.
- The children’s emergent literacy and numeracy are primarily promoted within everyday learning activities and experiences, and a weekly letter and number is introduced to the children during circle time. Workbooks and dot-to-dot activities are available to older children. The practitioners modelled mathematical language as they counted the number of children at roll call, going outdoors and during the game of Snap.

Actions advised

- Practitioners are advised to document planning for an emergent curriculum that reflects the children’s individual emerging interests. The templates in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* will support them in this regard.
- The practitioners are advised to regularly undertake observations on the children’s learning experiences. Recording aspects of children’s learning and achievements and including their strengths and dispositions will further enrich the practitioners’ knowledge of the child and help identify clear next steps for their progression.
- Practitioners are advised to extend the current approaches used to promote children’s early literacy, language and numeracy skills during every day experiences, such as the use of songs, stories and rhymes. The emphasis on the formal teaching of letters and numbers and the use of workbook and dot-to-dot activities should be reduced.
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 great satisfaction and engagement in their activities. They show perseverance and are achieving success and mastery. For example, children were observed using tweezers to move objects from one bowl to another; one child announced ‘Look I did it’. They also demonstrated excellent capacity for staying on task during the table-top activities which they completed confidently.
- Children play commendably well together and strong friendships have been developed. They demonstrate enjoyment and pleasure in their actions and activities with peers and the practitioners. Laughter and chat is heard throughout the session.
- The practitioners value and respect the children’s voice and their views about their learning. This is evident in the list of classroom rules that are on display at child height and the noise metre that has been developed in collaboration with the children to manage the noise levels in the room.
- The children are learning to talk about their emotions. A chart showing different emotions and a selection of books are used effectively to help children to express their feelings. Children can bring the books home if they wish.
- Children’s acts of kindness are represented visually on a kindness tree. The practitioner writes a comment on each leaf to illustrate how children have helped each other.
- Children are learning how different languages are used. During roll call they respond to their names in different languages, such as Spanish, Irish, French and German.
- Children’s high levels of independence and their self-help skills are reflected in their abilities to take off and put on their coats and to take responsibility for their personal and hygiene needs. On the day of the inspection, children who are in attendance for a second year were observed helping younger children to put on their coats, fasten their zips and to climb the climbing frame outdoors.
- The practitioners view the children as capable and confident learners. This is evident in the recipe for playdough with photographs on display to assist them in making playdough independently. The activities are predominantly child-led with a very good balance of adult-initiated and child-led activities.
- Children make decisions about the songs they want to sing and are given a choice of playing a game or listening to a story. On the day of the inspection, children accessed the cosy book corner independently and on one occasion a child was observed reading a story to a friend.
- The provision of opportunities for all children to cultivate an appreciation of themselves as competent, capable individuals and as members of the group are clearly evident. For example, a child-helper routine gives children specific jobs throughout the session. These include recycling officers, the line leaders and the weekly chef.
- There are lots of photographs of the children engaged in activities in the room and of their families on the family wall. Many displays of the children’s art work, free writing and drawings are on the walls. These also record the comments the children have made to the practitioners in describing their pictures.
- The children’s sense of well-being and identity and belonging is reflected in the practice of bringing items from home for ‘Show and Tell’. They talk to their friends and the practitioners about what they have brought and why.
- Many children are developing very good early mathematical knowledge, such as recognising, naming and writing numbers, and they can discuss comparative sizes and shapes.
- The children are developing an understanding of the natural environment through the nature table displaying different leaves, pinecones and stones. Children are also provided with opportunities to plant flowers outdoors.
AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is good.
- The practitioners chat together every day and discuss shared plans and upcoming events. The practitioners have begun the practice of engaging in professional self-evaluation using the templates in the Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide.
- There is evidence of good teamwork and partnership in this setting. This is evident in the manner in which the practitioners talk to each other about what is happening and what to do next.
- The setting has introduced Healthy Ireland Smart Start and the lead practitioner has completed the Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) programme.
- The owner accesses information and advice from the local childcare committee. She visits the setting on a regular basis to talk to staff about their plans. She used to offer formal appraisals but now offers informal support and supervision to practitioners by offering positive feedback to sustain them in their practice.
- Computer technology is used to share an information booklet on the setting’s policies and procedures at the start of the year and monthly newsletters with parents. There is a parents’ information noticeboard at the entrance and a notice is displayed at the main door outlining the weekly plan. The practitioners chat to the parents informally about their children’s learning at arrival and collection times.
- To support children’s move into the setting, parents and children are invited to visit the setting for a ‘meet and greet’ morning during the summer term. The setting offers a staggered settling-in system at the start of the year. Children can bring a comfort item with them and parents are encouraged to stay with their child until he/she is comfortable in the new environment.
- The practitioners have taken some photographs of the local primary school and these are used in the discussions with children about their move to primary school. A transition flower, which documents children’s individual achievements across a range of skills, is shared with parents at the end of the year.

Actions advised

- Practitioners are advised to come together formally to develop, record and reflect on their planning practices and to discuss children’s learning.
- The practitioners are advised to formally share with parents at intervals throughout the year their documented observations about the children and the children’s learning journals.
- It is advised that the practitioners develop a policy and procedures to support children’s transition to primary school. The use of the transition document Mo Scéal would help in implementing this action.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The owner attended the post-inspection meeting and engaged professionally in the feedback discussion. The capacity of the setting to implement the actions advised above is good.
### 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>Excellent</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>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of children.</td>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>