Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

REPORT

Little Millers Montessori
11FL0383

Carrs Mill, Donabate
Co Dublin

Date of inspection: 18 April 2016
CONTEXT OF SETTING

Little Millers is a sessional pre-school service based in Donabate, North Dublin and has been in operation since 2011. The setting uses 2 rooms and caters for 15 pre-school children. On the day of the inspection fourteen children availing of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE Programme) were present. The owner/manager undertook the role of the lead practitioner who was absent on the day of the inspection. A Montessori curriculum which is informed by Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework is implemented in this setting. The setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised in 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 very warm and welcoming. Practitioners spend time chatting with parents and children at arrival and departure times.
• The relationships between all practitioners and children are secure, respectful and very positive.
• The service has a strong focus on parental involvement and offers ample opportunities for parents, families, and practitioners to come together in the setting and on outings.
• Children are active agents in choosing and organising their own activities.
• Snack time takes place outdoors during fine weather and provides children with the opportunity to socialise with their friends.
• Photographic displays celebrate the diversity of children’s social and cultural family backgrounds. Parents visit the setting to share cultural activities and language from their home country.
• Many positive links have been established with the local community which include visits from the hairdresser, the Gardaí and an outing with parents to the local equestrian centre.

Actions advised
• Creating a roster for children to be helpers during snack time will boost children’s independence and sense of identity and belonging.
• To build on good practices currently established that support transitions from one activity to another for the children, it is suggested that practitioners use a greater variety of transitioning techniques.

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.
• There is a strong commitment to using play as the central medium to support children’s learning and development.
• A display shows how the practitioner’s daily work routines and practice are informed by Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.
• The floor journal describes the children’s learning experiences using the themes of Aistear. This is available to parents and children.
• There are photographic displays and evidence that celebrate children’s art work in the rooms.
• Practitioners carry out regular observations of children as they engage in learning activities and these are shared with parents.
• Practitioners regularly avail of opportunities to expand children’s language and help children to recall and problem-solve through their purposeful interactions.
• In the setting children have access to Montessori equipment and the opportunity to engage in table-top activities and jigsaws. There was a limited range of reading material available to reflect the range of children’s interests on the day of the inspection.
• Children have regular access to a well-planned, inviting outdoor area that has a well-resourced play house, sand tray and ride along toys.

Actions advised
• It is advised that practitioners consider supporting children’s experience of the written word through print-rich visual displays and access to a variety of books to extend children’s interests and to reflect all aspects of their learning.
• Practitioners are advised to provide jigsaws that deliver progressively more complex, varied and challenging experiences for all children.

AREA 3
QUALITY OF CHILDREN’S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS
• The quality of the children’s learning experiences and achievements is very good.
• Children demonstrate enjoyment in their learning and express pleasure in playing outdoors and engaging in activities from the Buntús programme.
• Practitioners model very good personal and social skills and support children to understand the rules of acceptable behaviour and language.
• Children are supported by practitioner’s interactions to experience success during activities.
• Children’s experiences are enriched by their engagement in activities which involve their parents.
• Practitioners use Irish as part of the daily routine with children responding confidently to requests and instructions in Irish.
• Children engage in some learning activities, which foster positive dispositions towards early numeracy and literacy, and actively enjoy story-telling and songs.

Actions advised
• Children’s experiences in early numeracy and literacy could be further enriched through the provision of additional encouragement to use mathematical language as part of the everyday routines.
• Practitioners are advised to expand open-ended questioning techniques and to focus on developing children’s problem-solving skills by providing practical activities that will help children to ask, ‘I wonder why’, and ‘How can we?’ questions.

AREA 4
QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING
• The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
• Management and staff display strong teamwork and collaboration.
• Regular staff meetings take place and are used to inform future planning related to children’s learning.
• Parents are actively involved in activities organised in the setting and these include parents on rota, special events such as Santa visits, end of year graduations and taking part in regular outings.
• The setting uses social media to share with parents and to showcase children’s experiences in the setting.
• Parents are involved in and contribute to the development of the settings policies and procedures.
• New children and their families are given ample opportunities to visit and spend time in the setting.
Action advised

• It is advised that staff in the setting further develop relationships with local primary schools. The development of a transition policy with procedures to support transition for children from the early years setting to primary school will assist in this process.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The staff and management are very committed to developing and promoting their professional work and engaging in professional reflection. Their capacity to implement the actions advised above is very good.
### Summary of Overall Inspection Findings

<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>
</tbody>
</table>

### Language used in Early-Years Education-focused Inspection reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>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>
</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>
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APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The content of the inspection report was very good. It focused on quality relationships between practitioners/children, practitioners/parents, practitioners/community which is very important and also on the quality of learning. I was delighted to see that it also focused on management and leadership and that our hard work was recognised. I was very happy with the report and took on board suggestions for improvement. However, I would prefer to see ‘Recommendations’ instead of ‘Actions Advised’.

It was suggested that we should have a roster in place for helping at lunchtime. We do have a roster in place as we work off the class register and the children are aware of this. The children take turns giving out the plates, drinks lunch boxes. The learning is not only in the helping but also in the waiting. On the day, the children ate lunch outside. We knew whose turn it was to help. We valued the suggestion we could display a photo on the wall of children who are to help each day. The report suggests that we have nothing in place.

Regarding transitioning techniques, we always allow the children plenty of time to move from one activity to another and prepare them in advance. It is quite difficult for practitioners to behave as normal when they are aware that everything they say or do is being analysed. Usually we would say ‘in ten minutes’ then in ‘five minutes’ and when needed ‘ok! You have two more minutes’.

Overall I was pleased with the report as there were a lot of positives in it. The ‘Actions advised’ were very helpful.

Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to address the actions advised in the inspection report

My plan for September:

Area 1: I like the idea of using pictures to show who is helping at lunch time and intend to put this into practice.

Area 2: I intend to display more print rich visual displays around the room. I plan to label more. My book area needs improving. I intend to resource a variety of books to expand the children’s learning. I want to include books on diversity. We do have a selection of complex wooden jigsaw puzzles that have three levels however, not enough. There were not all out on display on the day of the inspection and we regularly change them. My jigsaw puzzles need revamping. I plan to get them in September when the scheme payment comes through.

Area 4: Children visited the local primary school earlier in the year and an invitation was issued to the staff of the primary school to visit our pre-school. I plan to approach the principal of the primary school in September and set up some strategies for next year to support children in their transitions.

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