An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Name</th>
<th>Acorn Pre-school</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting Address</td>
<td>Acorn Pre-school, 37 Dun na Mara Drive</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Renmore</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Galway</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>11GY0324</td>
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Date of Inspection: 24-01-2020
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(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**: 24-01-2020

**Inspection activities undertaken**
- Meeting with setting lead practitioner
- Meeting with practitioners
- Observation of interactions during one session
- Interaction with children
- Review of relevant documents
- Feedback to setting practitioners

**CONTEXT OF SETTING**

Acorn Pre-School is a privately owned setting, located in Renmore in Galway City. The owner/manager is the sole practitioner. Since 2011, she has provided a sessional pre-school service for children through the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. Six children are currently enrolled. On the day of the inspection, five children were in attendance; some are in their first year in the setting and some are in their second year. 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.
- A warm, friendly and welcoming atmosphere prevails. On arrival, the children busily engage in free play. They select freely and confidently from the materials.
- The daily routine is well established. There is an appropriate balance between adult led/initiated activities and child led/initiated activities.
- The practitioner interacts with the children in a positive, reassuring manner and she regularly praises their efforts.
- The children are supported to attend to their self-care needs. They freely access tissues and the toilet and they wash their hands.
- Transitions within the daily routine are well managed, enabling the children to conclude their play experiences gradually. All of the children assume roles and engage actively at these times.
- Snack time is a social occasion. The children and the practitioner sit and eat together for the full duration of snack time. Together, they participate in relaxed discussions. The setting has been validated as a Healthy Ireland Pre-School Service. Healthy eating is promoted; the children name their food and various fruits.
- It is evident that the children have a strong sense of themselves, and of belonging to a group.
- The children’s families attend the annual Christmas recital and sports day, and recently a child’s parents visited to introduce their new-born baby. The postman visits the setting. Additional visitors from family and community members would enhance the children’s experiences.
- The children’s awareness of the local community is supported. They enjoy walks in the immediate area, and to Ballyloughane beach where they explore the shoreline and find mussels, clams, limpets and periwinkle shells. Currently, within the setting’s physical environment, there are no clear visual representations of the children, their family, the local community and its geographical features.

**Action advised**

- The practitioner is encouraged to invite additional visitors to the setting to share their skills and knowledge. More visual representations and photographic displays of the children, their family, the local community and its geographical features would be beneficial. These will enhance the children’s appreciation of the local community and support them to reflect on and make connections in their learning.
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.
- Practice is informed by the play-based approach and the Montessori Method of education.
- The practitioner sets out themes, which are further developed into weekly plans. The plans are clearly linked to Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework and there are ample displays relating to Aistear throughout the setting. The children’s emergent interests are taken into account as they arise. These interests are not currently documented in the plans.
- Developmental progress observations are made when the child commences in the setting. In addition, the practitioner records her conversations with the children as they describe their work and competencies. Each child has an individual journal which is readily accessible and includes samples of their art work and photographs. The journals are sent home frequently. There is potential to create stronger links between the assessment outcomes and planning.
- The indoor learning environment is well maintained. It has a book area with a child-sized couch and sofas; a construction area; a kitchen area, a dressing up box, and Montessori materials. Some areas are labelled.
- The outdoor environment includes sports equipment, pedalled vehicles, a slide, a sand tray, and a free-standing shed which the children adapt as they play for example ‘shop’ or ‘restaurant’. There is a partially sheltered area; this enables them to access the outdoors in various weather conditions.
- The children’s language skills are very well promoted. The practitioner uses a rich vocabulary and she encourages the children to use topic-specific terminology in their descriptions.
- The practitioner’s interactions with the children are of a high quality. She acts as a play partner, and she skilfully extends their reasoning skills.
- Practice in the setting is very inclusive; the children’s specific needs are carefully considered. Where necessary, an individual plan is generated to support the child, and the practitioner carefully notes the child’s progress. She has regular discussions with parents and she has accessed support through the access and inclusion model (AIM).

Action advised
- To further support the children’s learning and development, their emergent interests need to be cited within the plans and linked to the planned activities. In addition, there is a need for the practitioner to use assessment outcomes to inform planning to a greater extent. The use of the Aistear Learning Record Template will support this action.

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 confidently express their thoughts and ideas. Free-flowing conversations take place throughout the session as they work together.
- The children manage their emotions and feelings well. There is an interactive emotions display and books relating to emotions are used.
- The children work enthusiastically with the various resources provided. They demonstrate persistence and they sustain their imaginative engagements throughout the session. To promote their curiosity, there is potential to provide more real and natural materials in the interest areas.
- The children work well independently, and through whole-group activities. During the inspection they worked collaboratively to keep a balloon in the air and they prevented it from reaching the ground.
- By singing traditional songs and topic-based songs, the children’s vocabulary is well extended. On the day of the inspection, they sang an adapted version of ‘Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star’ and ‘The Planets Song’. These included some rich phrases and vocabulary including ‘larger than the others by far’, ‘whirling and twirling’ and ‘axis’. They enjoy acting out aspects of the story at story time.
Through practical activities, the children’s early numeracy skills are developing well. They count each other and figure out how many have already been collected and how many have yet to be collected. During the inspection, they cut, named and described two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes including ovoids and cones, and they identified some simple alterations that could change one shape into another.

The children engage in many rich learning experiences. To support their exploration of the planets, during the circle-time activity, they used a homemade star gazer to view stars and they wore hats which represented the planets. Their knowledge about the planets was extended through the practitioners’ rich input and questioning. The learned that once a year, every year, the earth goes around the sun.

The children move regularly throughout the session and they demonstrate good fine and gross motor skills.

**Action advised**

- To further promote the children’s curiosity and to enhance their overall play experiences, the practitioner is advised to provide a broader range of natural, real, and open-ended materials in the various interest areas.

**AREA 4**

**QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING**

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is excellent.
- The owner/manager as the sole practitioner demonstrates strong commitment to providing high-quality learning and development experiences for the children.
- The practitioner participates in ongoing training and continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities. Recently she completed the Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) in the Early Years programme, training relating to language development, and post-graduate studies. She attends local childcare committee meetings where she meets other local practitioners.
- The practitioner has developed a comprehensive book which outlines the setting’s policies, including policies relating to visitors, settling-in and positive behaviour management. Policies are reviewed annually and distributed to parents.
- Communication with parents is facilitated through text messages, a messaging application and email. Alongside frequent informal communication, a minimum of two formal one-to-one meetings with parents take place annually. She provides practical advice about how parents can support their child’s emotional development, and she sends home materials, for example, the words of songs, so that they can support their child’s learning.
- To support improvements in practice, the practitioner uses the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide*. Currently she is focused on developing links with the community.
- To support each child’s transition to primary school, the practitioner completes an individual booklet which outlines the child’s achievements in pre-school, based on the *Aistear Curriculum*. Parents can choose to share this with the primary school. The practitioner has links with the local schools. In particular, she liaises with the schools about children who present with additional needs.
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>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of processes to support children’s learning and development</td>
<td>Very 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>Excellent</td>
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Language used in Early-Years Education Inspection reports

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<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>
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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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