An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Name</th>
<th>Mini Me’s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Setting Address | Drumahurk  
Butlersbridge  
County Cavan |
| DCYA number   | 14CN0092  |

Date of Inspection: 25-01-2019
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(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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of inspection</th>
<th>25-01-2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Interaction and discussion with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meeting with service manager</td>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Observation of interactions and activities during one pre-school session</td>
<td>• Feedback discussion with the service manager and lead practitioner</td>
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CONTEXT OF SETTING

Mini Me’s, established in 2006, is a private early-years’ service located in a purpose-built building on the outskirts of the village of Butlersbridge in County Cavan. It provides two morning sessions for children participating in the Early Childhood Education (ECCE) Programme, full-day care and after-school care. The inspection took place in one of the ECCE morning sessions with the older group of children. On the day of the inspection, a lead practitioner, two assistant practitioners and fifteen children were present in the learning room visited. The manager and the lead practitioner participated in the feedback discussion following the inspection. 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 excellent.
- There is an exceptionally warm and relaxed atmosphere in this service. The practitioners greet parents and children warmly on arrival and time is given to informal, unhurried conversation and information sharing.
- There is a consistent daily routine in place which allocates time for child-initiated play and learning indoors and outdoors, practitioner-guided activities, circle time, story time and snack time. The practitioners understand the importance of outdoor play and they are dedicated to providing it every day. On the day of the inspection, the children were comfortable and content playing outside in light rain.
- A key practitioner system supports the development of secure relationships between practitioners and the children, with regular praise and acknowledgement of children’s achievements observed throughout the session. It is also used very effectively to co-ordinate the systematic undertaking of regular observations on individual children’s learning and development. At the entrance to the learning room, a display of the children’s key practitioners is available for parents to view.
- The practitioners implement a healthy-eating policy. The seating arrangement used for snack-time provides for social interaction and conversation among the children and between the children and the practitioners.
- Transitions during the daily routine were observed to be very positive learning experiences for the children. The children moved from one activity to the next with ease and waiting times between activities were minimal. The practitioners’ use of a timer was very good to support individual children in moving to their next activity.
- The practitioners foster secure relationships with the children very effectively. They know each child extremely well and display a valuable understanding of their individual strengths, interests and capacities.
- The practitioners convey a highly positive belief in the children’s capacity to be active agents in their learning and to be independent. The children are supported to do many things for themselves throughout the day, such as choosing their own play and learning activities, engaging in hand-washing independently, storing and retrieving their lunches and putting on their shoes and socks.
- A commendable sense of identity and belonging is nurtured among the children in the service. The children participate in a variety of community-based events, including road safety initiatives and
visits to local places of interest. The manager and practitioners have introduced yoga to promote and support the children's mindfulness and positive well-being. The uniqueness of the children is reflected in the family wall, displays and photographs of the children's likes and interests, in individual portfolios, and in paintings and mark-making that is displayed in the learning room.

**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.
- Curriculum planning is suitably informed by the principles and themes of *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. The practitioners have developed an emergent approach to their short and medium-term planning that takes account of the children's interests, needs and previous learning experiences. It is commendable that the practitioners and manager review the implementation of curriculum on a regular basis. This practice will be of great benefit to them when they commence their review and development of the long-term curriculum plan.
- The practitioners use a variety of very effective approaches to collect information on the children’s learning and development. These include learning records, on-the-spot observations, photographs, samples of children's work, group learning stories and discussions with children and parents. The resultant information is used very purposefully to inform the planning of future learning and development activities.
- The interactions between the practitioners and the children are very encouraging and motivating. The practitioners engage playfully at the children’s level and they use warm tones during natural conversations. There were some missed opportunities to use more open-ended questioning during interactions to engage the children in investigative thinking and problem-solving.
- The indoor and outdoor environments are well resourced and very effectively organised reflecting the practitioners’ belief that the children are active participants in their learning.
- There is an appropriate balance of adult-initiated and child-initiated activities. Opportunities are provided to ensure that the children can participate in a variety of purposeful play experiences on their own, in pairs, small groups or with practitioners.
- Children’s emergent language skills are fostered through a language-rich environment. The practitioners encourage the children to actively participate in poems, songs, rhymes and stories.
- The children are learning in an inclusive environment. The service is linked with external agencies and the Better Start Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) to access assessment and support for children with additional needs. The practitioners know the children very well and they respond to their additional needs sensitively and appropriately.

*Actions advised*

- It is advised that the practitioners make greater use of higher order, open-ended questioning during their interactions with the children to support enquiry-based learning.
- Given the children’s varying ages and stages of development, it is advised that the practitioners develop long-term curriculum planning to further support continuity and progression in the provision of learning experiences across the two years of the ECCE programme.

**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 demonstrate high levels of interest and motivation in their learning. They engage in mark-making, sensory play and construction play for sustained periods of time. They also enjoyed using real items in the kitchen and hair-dressing areas of the learning room.
- It is commendable that comprehensive information is documented in group learning stories providing evidence of the children's previous learning and achievements in a wide range of experiences. These include physical play, exploratory play, collaborative learning and opportunities to engage with the local community. The children’s voices, in the form of their descriptions of their learning experiences, are also depicted in the group learning stories.
The children’s fine and gross motor skills are developing well. This was demonstrated by the children as they engaged in activities such as painting, creating footprints, scooping sand and using balance bikes.

The children ably use books to gain information. In this regard, they spoke confidently about new knowledge that they have acquired about the characteristics of pirates and the habitats of arctic animals.

The children demonstrate high levels of enjoyment playing in the construction area. The inclusion of additional real items in this area would engage children in deeper mathematical thinking.

The majority of children are developing very good social skills which enable them to respond appropriately to different situations. A few children require additional support to enhance their turn-taking and listening skills when interacting with their peers.

**Actions advised**
- It is advised that small group activities be planned and undertaken to enhance children’s social skills and their awareness of appropriate turn-taking during discussions with their peers.
- To further support the children’s capacity for mathematical thinking, items such as rulers, tape measures, plans and spirit levels could be included in the construction area.

**AREA 4**

**QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING**

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- There is a strong ethos of teamwork and collaboration within the setting. The practitioners are aware of their roles and responsibilities and they work in partnership to promote smoothly organised educational experiences for the children. Formal monthly team meetings are convened; contributions from individual practitioners are welcomed and valued. A review of practice, including documented reflections, has been undertaken with regard to developing community links to promote the children’s sense of identity and belonging.
- The manager and practitioners are actively engaging in continuous professional development; they are very committed to maintaining their understanding of effective practice.
- Parents are highly valued within the setting and are continually informed about procedures and events through a variety of means, including a parents’ noticeboard, newsletters, social media, e-mails and informal discussions. Curriculum planning is displayed outside the learning room for parents to view. A suggestion box is available for parents to contribute their thoughts and ideas with regard to the service’s provision. The children’s learning portfolios are sent home to parents at the end of the pre-school year.
- The children’s transition into the service is very well supported through the gathering of relevant information about each child, their life experiences, likes, dislikes, strengths and needs. Children’s transition from the junior pre-school room to the senior pre-school room takes place on a gradual basis, aligned to the child’s readiness to move on. Teachers from the local primary school are invited to visit the service. The practitioners share information with the teachers to support positive and effective transitions for children.

**Actions advised**
- It is advised that the children’s learning journals be used to garner parents’ contributions, insights and thoughts about their child’s learning and development on a more regular basis. This information would add further richness to the service’s provision of an enquiry-based, emergent curriculum.
- The manager and practitioners are advised to use the online *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to further develop their practices of review, self-reflection and quality development processes.

**CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE**

Given the clear commitment to ongoing improvement in the quality of provision as demonstrated by the manager and the lead practitioner, the capacity of the setting to continue to implement the actions advised above is very good.
## 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>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<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>Very good</td>
</tr>
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### Language used in Early-Years Education Inspection reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</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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*Published September 2019*
Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report.

The content of the report is a fair and accurate reflection of the daily preschool experience in our service. From the report, we gained insight and recommendations to further improve the quality of our preschool. The documented recognition of the quality and hard work of the practitioners is encouraging and motivating for all involved.

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 2: The practitioners have engaged in focused meetings with regards the content of their discussions and questions during learning experiences with the children and are aware of the importance of this skill to enhance and further support the children.

The preschool leader/supervisor has been allocated a block of three additional hours non-contact time per week to focus on planning and to facilitate preschool meetings between the two preschool rooms to collaborate effectively and provide greater continuity and progression for the children's learning. In addition, a greater focus on linking long-term planning with Aistear will be implemented going forward.

Area 3: A range of games, stories and puppet play have been introduced during small group play to engage the children with a view to encourage and improve turn-taking and listening skills.

Items such as spirit levels, rulers, measuring tapes, plans, photos of different types of buildings, flip-charts and materials to allow the children to draw up their own plans and ideas have been introduced to the construction area.

Area 4: We have introduced a parent reflection page in each child's learning journal to gather thoughts, ideas and conversations had with their child. The parents will be encouraged to bring their child's learning journal home more frequently. Furthermore, the practitioners will encourage parents to be more proactive in documenting their thoughts, ideas and conversations on the parent reflection page.

The online Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide is being accessed more frequently to improve all areas of development and practice.