Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Little Miracles Montessori
14CY0144

Unit 3 + 4
Old Mill Business Park
North City Link Road
Cork City

Date of Inspection: 15th November 2017
CONTEXT OF SETTING

Little Miracles Montessori is a privately owned, urban Montessori pre-school. Two practitioners run the Montessori room in the morning. In parallel to this, two other practitioners run a pre-school session for the slightly younger children. On the day of the inspection fourteen children were present in the Montessori room and nine in the pre-school room. While both rooms were visited, the main inspection took place in the Montessori room. The childcare supervisor and the room leader of the Montessori room attended the post-inspection feedback meeting. The setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised in this 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 good.
- The friendly, welcoming practitioners create a warm, affirming atmosphere where a caring ethos is prevalent.
- Children’s active agency and engagement in play activities is often interrupted and stopped in favour of adult-initiated/led activities. The daily routine as it is displayed for the families in the foyer is divided in a free-play block with pre-school materials such as a home corner, construction area, art area, and library. After this is tidied up, an adult-initiated/led circle time is followed by table-top Montessori work. After snack time, a number of adult-led activities such as art and craft work, fine-motor writing, jigsaws and further large-group activities complete the day.
- The children are very well supported to manage their own hygiene and personal care needs.
- Snack-time is utilised as a social occasion and an opportunity to promote well-being and a healthy lifestyle.
- The many transitions in the daily routine are not conducive to deep engagement in meaningful play. Transitions need to be re-evaluated, as they create long, inactive waiting times for the children.
- In their interactions, and particularly during art work, the practitioners are very consciously fostering children’s uniqueness and individuality.

Actions advised

- A change of the daily routine is advised. Practitioners are advised to amalgamate free-play and Montessori time and to offer all the materials and play areas in parallel during this time. Individual Montessori work, experiments, small-group story exploration, arts and craft activities could also be offered together as a choice to the children.
- Practitioners are advised to ensure that the children are active agents in choosing and organising their learning and development activities, that they can follow their own lines of interest and enquiry, and that they can be physically active for most of the time during the pre-school session.
- Practitioners are advised to keep transitions to a minimum and utilise them as learning experiences for the children, avoiding any unnecessary waiting times.

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.
- A broad-based Montessori curriculum, informed by Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, is documented and implemented. There is some evidence that children’s emergent interests are followed on a daily basis.
- A broad variety of assessment approaches is used to gather information about children’s learning and development.
• Very respectful, friendly interactions between the practitioners and the children are prevalent.
• The indoor environment is well maintained, safe and inviting. The print-rich environment offers a broad variety of activities to the children, including a vast Montessori work area which is very well resourced. The art area is equally well resourced and inspiring.
• Play is currently not recognised as the main medium for children to learn and develop.
• Outdoor play is weather dependant. The outdoor area was not used on the day of inspection.
• Children’s emergent literacy and numeracy skills are well supported through mark-making, play-dough work and art work, as well as a broad variety of books in the library area. The Montessori material support literacy and numeracy skills very well. From time to time there is an over-emphasis on the use of templates, for example, in activities involving colouring-in and tracing letters and numbers. This is not conducive to the learning and development of pre-school children.

**Actions advised**

• Practitioners are advised to streamline assessment and to ensure that observation records are focused on children’s learning dispositions, interests, ideas, strengths, needs, values and knowledge. The information gathered through such observations can then be used to plan for individual children and for the group curriculum.
• The creation of individual learning journals for all children is advised. These should regularly be shared with the parents.
• Practitioners are advised to engage with the ‘Interaction’ pillar of the online *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* with a view to extending their use of interaction strategies that facilitate a broad range of learning experiences; in particular, practitioners are advised to make greater use of strategies such as prompting, scaffolding, active listening, and co-constructing knowledge with the children.
• Practitioners are advised to work with the ‘Environment’ and the ‘Play’ pillars of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide*. In particular, they are advised to complete the environmental audits in order to enhance the play value of the indoor environment. Child-initiated/led, exploratory, interactive play needs to become the main medium through which the children learn and develop throughout the day.
• Daily outdoor play is advised.
• Practitioners are advised to refrain from the use of didactic teaching methods and to focus on using more songs, rhymes, finger-games, whole-body movement games throughout the day. To support children’s mathematical learning, practitioners are advised to use everyday life situations such as making playdough, measuring towers, and/or weighing ingredients in the home corner. Time needs to be made available for children to engage in free exploration of art materials, exploration of books and free play with all of the materials.

**AREA 3**

**QUALITY OF CHILDREN’S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

• The quality of the children’s learning experiences and achievements is good.
• The interested and motivated children show some enjoyment in their learning activities. During some activities the children appeared to lose interest and indicated that they wanted to play and choose their own activities.
• The children are beginning to play cooperatively in pairs and small groups.
• There is some evidence, in particular during circle time that children are developing their capacity to reflect, use judgement and make decisions.
• The children are using a variety of communication skills to interact and organise their activities. Language is used skilfully by most children to give and receive information, interpret experiences, ask questions, make requests and clarify thinking and feeling.
• The children are inquisitive and interested in exploring and thinking about their learning experiences and in using their physical skills to manipulate objects and materials.

**Actions advised**

• Practitioners are advised to keep adult-initiated/led activities short and based on children’s interests. They need to read the children’s body language and follow their cues. The typical concentration span of a pre-school child is approximately twelve to fifteen minutes; the more interesting and physically engaging an activity is, the longer the children will concentrate.
• More scope needs to be provided for the children to play in pairs and small groups. This will provide opportunities for them to practise and refine personal and social skills such as negotiating, cooperating, turn-taking, problem solving and conflict resolution.
• There is much more scope, particularly through daily outdoor play in every weather, to broaden children’s awareness of the natural environment and its features, materials, plants and animals.

AREA 4
QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING
• The quality of management and leadership for learning is good.
• Management and staff have regular team meetings to reflect on and review practice and procedures. The room leader has thirty minutes every day for review and planning.
• The service has previously engaged with ‘Better Start’.
• Some good systems for the smooth organisation of the work of the service are in place. Leaders provide a good role model for the staff and they promote a high standard.
• There is evidence of participation in continuous professional development, such as the Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years (LINC) course.
• Effective two-way communication channels are fostered between the service and the families, information between parents and the pre-school is shared in a spirit of openness and mutual respect.
• Transitions into the service from home are managed sensitively and effectively.

Actions advised
• Management and staff are advised to engage with all of the pillars of the online Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide, starting with ‘Curriculum Foundations’ pillar, in order to redefine the vision and direction for the work of the service.
• Practitioners are advised to seek and participate in courses about the emergent curriculum and play.
• Practitioners are advised to take practical steps to establish good relationships with the local primary schools in order to ease the children’s transition from pre-school to primary school.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE
The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is 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>Good</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of processes to support children’s learning and development</td>
<td>Good</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of children’s learning experiences and achievements</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of management and leadership for learning</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</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>
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