An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna  
Department of Education and Skills

**EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION**

**REPORT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Name</th>
<th>Muddy Puddles Montessori</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting Address</td>
<td>Gracefield</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Portarlington</td>
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<td></td>
<td>County Offaly</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>14OY0097</td>
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**Date of Inspection: 14-02-2019**
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

Date of inspection: 14-02-2019

Inspection activities undertaken:
- Meeting with setting owner/manager
- Observation of interactions during the morning ECCE session
- Interaction with children
- Review of relevant documents
- Post-inspection feedback meeting with setting owner/manager

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Muddy Puddles Montessori has been in operation in Portarlington, Co. Offaly since September 2014. There is one main pre-school room in the building where the owner/manager provides care and education for local children availing of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the day of the inspection, the owner/manager and five children were present. The owner/manager is the sole practitioner. The setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised in this report, and the response submitted on behalf of the setting can 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.
- A very welcoming atmosphere is evident as parents and children are greeted warmly and with respect at arrival and departure times. There is an open-door policy in place in the setting.
- The practitioner is the key-worker for the children in the group. Relationships are very respectful and responsive to the needs of children.
- There is a planned routine in the setting which children enjoy participating in and are very familiar with. Children are active agents throughout the morning routine and the daily activities are child-led. Children have many opportunities during the daily routine to make independent decisions and choices.
- Transitions between activities are seamless and minimal. The use of a clock with a buzzer notifies children of changes to the play period and snack time.
- Snack time is a social occasion and the practitioner sits with children during this period promoting healthy eating. The children have an extended period of time to have snack and can enjoy this occasion inside or outdoors. Children are independent during snack time and have good self-help skills which are effectively supported.
- There are good displays which support individual and group identity within the setting. Visual resources to support the development of children’s awareness of cultural diversity and of their local community are not yet included in the environment.
- The children’s individual identity and belonging is nurtured and celebrated in a variety of ways. Photographs and displays of the children and their families are seen throughout the environment. The practitioner invites parents into the setting to share skills and information regarding their jobs. The children also visit some local amenities in the area. Recently the children visited the post box to post Valentine’s Day cards to their families.

Action advised
- Building on the existing individual displays, the addition of resources to support children’s community and cultural awareness is advised.
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.
- The curriculum is a blend of the Montessori Method infused with play-based learning. The curriculum and planning documentation are informed by Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.
- The owner has created a curriculum statement which outlines the blended approach of Montessori and play-based learning. There are long-term, medium-term and short-term plans in place in the setting. The long-term plans focus on thematic learning and there are some anecdotal short-term plans to identify the emergent interest of children. There is scope to review these plans.
- The children’s activities and experiences are documented in a group learning journal with photographs and descriptions of the learning experiences. The children have individual journals which contain photographs and anecdotal notes of their interests and development. These journals have some evidence of children’s self-reflections and are shared with parents during the year for comment.
- The practitioner completes observations on a monthly basis, along with Montessori checklists throughout the year. The observations identify the children’s key learning experiences and plan for the next steps in learning. These observations are shared with parents but they do not sign or comment on them.
- The environment is very well planned to optimise the learning opportunities for the children. It is set up into the various Montessori areas and other play materials are also included such as in the construction area and art area. There are some documented examples of children engaging in role play.
- A blend of attractive natural and real life equipment is accessible to the children to support active and independent learning choices.
- The outdoor area offers the children choice regarding where to play and explore. These is a strong focus on natural exploration and discovering nature. There is equipment to support gross motor skills, creativity and sensory play outdoors also. There is potential to extend the opportunity for risky play.
- The practitioner scaffolds the children’s learning experiences as she becomes a play partner with the children, asks open-ended questions and offers purposeful and specific information to extend their knowledge.
- Interactions between the practitioner and the children support natural exploration and discovery of numeracy, language and various concepts including nature. On the day of the inspection the children discovered a worm while digging in the garden. The practitioner discussed the worm with the children and provided details regarding how it moves and lives. The children compared this knowledge to previous knowledge gained regarding a snail they had found in the garden.
- The practitioner is currently completing the Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) in the Early Years programme. There is a written inclusion policy in place supporting all children who attend the setting.

Actions advised
- The practitioner is advised to streamline planning and observations to ensure that the short-term plans focus on the emergent interests of the children. The observations and journals could include further parent’s comments and extended self-reflections from the children.
- The practitioner is advised to extend the opportunity for role play within the dress up area as well as the opportunities for risky play in the outdoor area. This will extend the children’s skills and imagination.
AREA 3
QUALITY OF CHILDREN’S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children’s learning experiences and achievements is excellent.
- The children are confident and competent learners. There is continuous use of previous learning to support new learning. Children take ownership of their own learning and the practitioner supports this using open-ended questions. Children discuss their learning experiences with detailed description and enjoyment.
- The practitioner uses concrete materials to support learning and a variety of hands-on active-learning experiences are documented throughout the year. On the day of the inspection the practitioner had generated displays relevant to Valentine’s Day throughout the environment to support the exploration of this celebration. There were books on the topic of love in the book area and these were read to the children. The children explored pink water in the pouring activities and the sensory tray contained pink and red resources.
- The children are active learners and choose their own area of interest. The children are intrinsically motivated to build houses in the construction area, feed the birds when they go outside and repeatedly complete the pouring exercise in practical life.
- Sensory play opportunities are freely accessible to children throughout the morning session and in the outdoor environment. These include sand, water, rice, mud, leaves and other natural materials.
- Children have the opportunity to work alone, in pairs and in small groups. This supports their social skills and sense of belonging within the group. The children have formed good friendships and a strong sense of group identity. The children are aware of friends who are not in attendance in preschool.
- The practitioner supports children to discuss and negotiate feelings, emotions and appropriate behaviour. Conflict is resolved in an open and positive manner. There are various displays to support the exploration of feelings. On the day of the inspection one child held a worm outside and the practitioner rejoiced in how brave the child was and named this feeling for the child.
- The children in the group are capable communicators and the practitioner supports this through natural conversation and by encouraging questioning and commenting from the children. The children are very inquisitive and natural explorers.

AREA 4
QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- The practitioner is very professional in her work and strives to provide a high quality learning environment for the children.
- The practitioner values continued professional development (CPD). She has completed a range of CPD courses since opening her setting including workshops with the local County Childcare Committee. She is currently completing the Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) in the Early Years programme.
- The practitioner reflects on her practice and has made various changes and developments to the setting since its opening. These include blending the Montessori Method of learning with play-based learning and developing a free-flow time for snack. Future use of the Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide will support further self-review and the documentation of quality improvements.
- The practitioner has a range of plans in place for the setting including developing a feedback form to give parents at the end of the year. She reviews some practices with the children and will extend this further as part of her development plans for the setting.
- The practitioner is aware of Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and has attended workshops on the implementation of the framework.
- The setting operates an open-door policy; this supports open channels of communication with parents. The practitioner uses effective communication strategies to support parents including social media, text messages, a parent handbook and sharing children’s learning journals.
- The setting has a very good settle-in policy in place which outlines the role of the parent in this process and how they can support and encourage their children during this period. The practitioner is planning to extend the registration form and to develop a settle-in story book.
The transition to primary school is supported through photographs and open conversation. The practitioner provided the children and parents with reports to share with their new teachers last year at their open-day. There is potential to extend the practices in place to support the transition to primary school.

**Actions advised**

- It is advised that the practitioner use the *Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide* as a resource for supporting the setting’s developmental work. The practice guide will also support the practitioner to document evidence of changes and development in the setting.
- The practitioner is advised to develop strategies and procedures to support the children’s transition to primary school. The ‘Supporting Transitions’ pillar of practice from the *Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide* will be useful in this regard.

**CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE**

The capacity of the owner/manager to implement the actions advised above is excellent. She operates her setting at a high quality level and strives to offer the families attending her setting a unique experience.
## 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>
</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>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of management and leadership for learning</td>
<td>Very good</td>
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## Language used in Early-Years Education Inspection reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality 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

Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

I was nervous before the DES inspector arrived but I must say how pleased I was with how the inspection was carried out and the positive feedback I received when it was over. It was a lovely experience overall and I am delighted with the high praise. I take the suggestions for improvement on board and aim to make changes in each of the areas as soon as possible.

Area 2  Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

The DES inspector advised I display a map of the town with images of local buildings of interest for the children such as the library, playground, primary schools, shops etc. to help the children make links to the community. This will be a project for the near future when I have finished my LINC course and I have freed some of my time to create the display.

I have already started adopting the short-term curriculum plans, which focus on children’s emergent interests, and implementing them in my setting. So far, we have studied reptiles, garden birds, dinosaurs and next frogs following on the interests of some of the children. I will start to include my observations into the learning journals and then parents can read them and comment on them when I send the learning journals home throughout the year. I have been given tips on how to encourage the children to self-reflect and their comments will be included in the learning journals from now on.

I have put up hooks on the wall making the costumes more accessible in the role play area. I find the children tend to create their own risky play opportunities; for example, my children like to climb onto the mud kitchen and the picnic table and jump off and they have pushed each other around the garden in the wheel barrow. However, I take the comment on board and think about it more over the summer.

I have viewed the Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide and filled it out as part of the LINC course. I found it a very beneficial exercise and will certainly take the time to complete it at the end of every year.

Transitioning to primary school: I invited four past pupils back to tell us all about junior infants and their primary school. It was hugely successful; my past pupils were very excited to be back and the graduates were equally excited to hear what they had to say. In May/June I will complete the Mo Sceal documents, with parents and graduates, containing developmental information on the graduates and they will be sent to the primary school teacher before September.

Transitioning to Preschool: I have made a My Preschool book for my new students which contains pictures of areas of interests and one of myself. This will be given out before the children start in September to help them settle.