EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Name</th>
<th>Great Beginnings Montessori</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service Address</td>
<td>The Bridge Hall</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Innishannon</td>
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<td></td>
<td>County Cork</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>15CC0502</td>
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Date of Inspection: 05-06-2018
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 service 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 service.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspector 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 service’s provision in each area.
Early-Years Education Inspection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of inspection</th>
<th>05-06-2018</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Observation of interactions during a number of sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review of relevant documents</td>
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<td>Feedback to service manager and practitioners</td>
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**CONTEXT OF SERVICE**

Great Beginnings Montessori is a rural, privately owned pre-school, operating a morning and an afternoon session. Three practitioners and a volunteer staff member offer early year’s education and care to a maximum of twenty-two children in the morning session. Thirty-six children are enrolled for the morning session in total. Nine of these children only started in April. On the day of the inspection, nineteen children were present in the morning session. The owner/manager 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.
- Practitioners clearly have a positive regard for the children and their families and a caring ethos is evident.
- The time line within the daily routine is very good; two long periods of free-play, one indoors and one outdoors, are afforded to children.
- The children are very well supported to manage their own hygiene and personal care needs. There were lovely examples of children brushing the floor and using a dustpan and brush on the day of inspection; these activities help establish good self-care and life skills.
- Recognition, praise and encouragement are a regular feature of the practitioners’ responses to the children. Some good guidance towards positive behaviour is also given. During the inspection, practitioners sometimes tended to solve children’s problems and conflicts for them.
- During the indoor time, children are mainly requested and directed by the practitioners to complete a number of formal table-top activities, such as work-sheets, colouring-in, puzzles, play dough, matching shapes and working with the Montessori materials. A more appropriate balance between practitioner-initiated/led activities and child-initiated/led free-play activities could be achieved.
- During the inspection, transitioning from indoors to outdoor took a long time with some children standing in line, waiting for others to finish their lunch. This resulted in some children becoming disengaged.
- Snack time is seen as a social occasion. Four children sit and eat together at one time. Practitioners have some fruit while working with children at a table.
- Children’s identity and belonging is nurtured well. Family members and people from the local community visit the setting and share their expertise and interests with the children.

**Actions advised**

- It is advised that the daily routine be displayed in picture sequence in the play room at a height accessible to the children.
- Practitioners are advised to consistently promote children’s problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills. This will enhance children’s independence and empower them to become more autonomous.
and self-reliant in these situations. Engaging with the ‘Interaction’ pillar of the online Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide is advised.

- Practitioners are advised to afford the children much more choice and agency, letting them follow their intrinsic motivation in choosing and organising their learning and development activities.
- Practitioners are advised to develop and implement strategies which will engage the children more purposefully as they wait to transition to the outdoor environment.
- It is advised that the lunch area be extended, so that more children and one practitioner at a time can sit, eat and communicate together. This will provide more scope for the creation of a relaxed meal-time atmosphere conducive to small-group conversation and provide more opportunity to promote well-being and a healthy lifestyle.

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 curriculum is documented and utilised. It is evident that the setting is committed to implementing the Montessori curriculum. The short-term curriculum plan, which is on display for the families, includes the weekly Montessori activity, a daily account of the ‘work from the shell’, outside play and the theme for circle time. Building on the positive practices in place, further links could be generated between the current approaches and Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, and further emphasis could be placed on planning for an emergent curriculum.
- A variety of assessment approaches is used to gather information about children’s learning and development. These include an art collection folder, a book comprising a collection of group photographs and individual folders containing observation sheets. Practitioners keep daily observation records of children’s letter, number, colour and shape cognition. An extension of these approaches would be beneficial.
- Some lovely, supportive interactions between practitioners and children were evident during the inspection; practitioners engaged and motivated children in their learning and development in a respectful and caring way. This was particularly striking during the work with the sand-paper numbers.
- The indoor and outdoor environments are well maintained and safe. The outdoor play area in particular offers very good play value, with a broad variety of play and exploration opportunities. Practitioners are encouraged to continue in their great efforts to secure more ground for this area.
- During the inspection, meaningful, effective examples of exploratory, interactive, child-initiated/led free play were observed during outdoor play, and some examples were also noted in the indoor environment during the latter part of the morning. Child-initiated/led free play could be further promoted.
- Children’s emergent language, literacy and numeracy skills are fostered well through the use of the Montessori materials, songs and rhymes, and a very richly-resourced art and craft area which provides great scope for mark making. During the inspection, there was also lots of evidence that the children complete many formal learning activities; they complete worksheets and colouring-in sheets, they trace numbers and letters on paper, and they spell words. While the setting reports that the children freely choose and enjoy these activities, the extent to which formal activities are undertaken by the children needs to be reviewed.

Actions advised
- Within the planning documents, practitioners are advised to generate further links between their current approaches and Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. Practitioners are also advised to extend assessment approaches to incorporate a focus on children’s interests, strengths, skills, attitudes, knowledge, values and learning dispositions, and to use the outcomes to inform planning for an emergent, enquiry-based curriculum. The ‘Planning and Assessment’ pillar of the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide will support this work.
- Child-initiated/led free play needs to become the main medium through which the children learn and develop. Accordingly, a review of the indoor environment is needed to ensure that it promotes and provides for a broader range of interesting and inspiring play options. The ‘Environment’ and
'Play' pillars and the self-evaluation audits in the online Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide could be used to support this review.

- Practitioners need to increase their use of interaction strategies and methodologies, such as active listening, asking open-ended questions, following children’s lead, prompting and scaffolding, in order to co-construct knowledge with the children during child-initiated/led free play.
- A review of the current approaches to promoting the children’s early literacy and numeracy skills is needed. Practitioners are advised to focus more on using mathematical language and on promoting mathematical thinking and learning through the use of practical, open-ended resources and games, linked to the children’s everyday lives. The daily interactive exploration of a high-quality story, linked to children’s interests and extended over a period of time through role-play, puppet-shows and story-sacks is further advised.

**AREA 3**

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

- The quality of the children’s learning experiences and achievements is good.
- The majority of children arrive happy and confident. On the day of the inspection, a few of the children appeared more reluctant and took longer to settle.
- The children are interested and motivated and display some positive learning dispositions such as initiative, self-confidence and resourcefulness.
- The children have a range of opportunities to interact and thus develop and refine their skills such as problem-solving, negotiating, co-operating and conflict resolution particularly during outdoor play.
- The children use verbal and non-verbal communication skills very effectively to give and receive information, to ask questions, make requests and to interpret experiences.
- The children use information and communication technology to autonomously copy and print out pages to colour-in from colouring books.
- The children avail of a broad variety of opportunities to engage with, explore and experiment in the outdoor environment, using their developing physical skills to manipulate objects and materials. The environments offer very little challenge and opportunity for the children to develop and refine their core strength, their gross motor skills and their sense of balance.

*Actions advised*

- It is advised that children be given more choice and agency to make decisions, to reflect, use judgements and to be creative in expressing their ideas, thoughts and feelings throughout the day by utilising a broad variety of play options.
- It is advised that additional opportunities be provided for children to play co-operatively in pairs and groups, particularly during indoor time. This will further support the development and refinement of their personal and social skills.
- Greater emphasis on the creation of an environment and an approach that helps the children to develop and refine their physical body is advised. This includes the promotion of their physical fitness, gross motor skills, core-muscle strength, refining muscle-tone and spatial awareness.

**AREA 4**

**QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING**

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- Management and staff engage in regular meetings to reflect on their practice and procedures and to plan for ongoing improvement. The outcomes of these meetings are documented. At this juncture, it would be beneficial for the setting to reflect on its curriculum. An ethos of collaboration and teamwork is evident among practitioners.
- There is clarity around the roles and responsibilities of practitioners with regard to educational activities and each practitioner has opportunities to take a leadership role in promoting learning.
Effective two way communication channels have been established between the service and the families.
Transitions into and from the service are managed effectively and sensitively to ensure continuity of learning experiences. Good connections are made with the local primary school to ease transitions for the children.
Effective strategies are in place for practitioners to engage in continuing professional development (CPD). The learning from CPD is evidently shared among practitioners and utilised in practice.

Actions advised
Practitioners are advised to engage in-depth with all areas of the *Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide*, starting with the ‘Curriculum Foundation’ pillar. It would be beneficial also for the setting to access the video podcasts on how to practically link Montessori to *Aistear*; these are available on the Early Childhood Ireland website. It would be beneficial also to engage with external advisory supports, such as *Better Start*, to develop and embed an emergent curriculum.
Building on the caring, respectful and positive relationships which exist between the practitioners and the children, it is advised that the voice of the children be actively promoted and included to a greater extent in decisions that affect them.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE
The capacity of the service 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>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>Good</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-focused 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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Published May 2019