**EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION**

**REPORT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Name</th>
<th>The Garden Outdoor Pre-school</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service Address</td>
<td>Ruthstown</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ballyfoyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>County Kilkenny</td>
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<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>15KK0140</td>
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**Date of Inspection: 21-11-2017**
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(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 service’s provision in each area.
Early-Years Education Inspection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of inspection</th>
<th>21-11-2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meeting with service manager</td>
<td>• Observation of interactions during one session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meeting with practitioners</td>
<td>• Interaction with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Feedback to service manager and practitioners</td>
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CONTEXT OF SERVICE

The Garden Outdoor Pre-school is a privately owned service. It was established in 2015 and is located in the townland of Ruthstown. The service offers a morning sessional pre-school programme for children enrolled on the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the day of inspection, the owner/practitioner, two early-years practitioners, and eleven children were present. The service adopts the High/Scope curriculum approach and provides this predominantly through an outdoor play environment. 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 very good.
• There is a very warm, intimate and genuinely welcoming atmosphere in the service. Each child and family member is welcomed individually by name by the practitioners at arrival time. Many relaxed and lengthy conversations with parents and children were observed. These included discussions about the arrival of a new sibling and the loading of turf with grandparents.
• Relationships are secure and respectful of children. The setting successfully operates a key person approach. Practitioners know the children very well and provide a significant amount of individual attention to them. There is an open-door policy in place and parents are supported to settle children at their own pace. On arrival, children display great enthusiasm and excitement and are keen to go outdoors with the practitioners.
• The practitioners in the service follow a consistent and flexible routine which allows for adaptation based on children’s emerging interests and their focus on the activities. The children are confident and secure in the daily sequence of events.
• Practitioners promote children’s sense of anticipation and involvement in the transitions in the routine. Children take the lead in announcing changes in activities by giving verbal reminders and by using visual cues such as ringing a bell to indicate the upcoming change in the routine to their peers.
• Practitioners model positive pro-social behaviours. They provide very clear behavioural guidelines and consistently use encouragement strategies such as, “You were really listening to your friend” and, “I see you are helping tidy up to support children to meet behavioural expectations. The children were observed to take responsibility for many group tasks such as tidying up their activities and reminding each other to “wipe your feet when coming inside.”
• Practitioners place a strong emphasis on promoting self-care skills, well-being and healthy behaviours such as sustained physical activity outdoors. Children also have a commendable level of opportunities to just sit quietly, observe, listen and absorb the sounds of the natural world around them without adult interference.
• Snack time is a very relaxed occasion where adults sit and chat with the children as a whole group. There is scope to optimise the learning opportunities further for individual children during this activity using smaller groups and the existing key person system.
Practitioners demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of children, families and the wider community. Many positive comments highlighting children’s individuality, were heard throughout the day. Children’s viewpoints and real lived experiences are actively sought and authentically responded to by practitioners. Children discussed many events such as getting a new red car, and building a play house with pallets at home. Significant community based events are organised to build children’s sense of knowledge of and belonging to a wider community. These include trips to local forests and to a centre in Castlecomer to learn about the history of coal mining in the locality. There are limited visual and photographic representations on display for children to reflect on this rich aspect of their learning.

Actions advised
- It is advised that more images of the children, their families, and representations of some of the unique events occurring in the setting and community be regularly displayed. This will support children to make more concrete connections and help embed their emerging sense of self and belonging to a wider group identity.
- More opportunities for children to experience snack time as a smaller group activity with their designated key person and peers are advised. This will aid children’s engagement in more sustained personal and reciprocal discussions than is possible in large-group learning experiences and will support their developing interpersonal skills and affiliations with members of their peer group.

AREA 2
QUALITY OF PROCESSES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN’S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT
- The quality of the processes to support children’s learning and development is very good.
- The service implements a High/Scope curriculum that is aligned to Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. The curriculum is delivered predominantly through the context of the outdoor play environment in line with the service ethos, vision and philosophy.
- Highly effective practices have been established in planning for children’s learning. These capture the children’s current and emerging interests. On the day of the inspection, practitioners planned a large-group activity based on children’s interest in tyres in the outdoor area and a smaller group activity based on their interest in water exploration using sponges.
- There is an effective process in place to record and assess the children’s progression in learning and development. Each practitioner records strengths-based anecdotal observations on their key group of children informed by the High/Scope curriculum content. The observations are used to inform planning and support and extend the next steps in children’s learning progression. A learning record is maintained for each child. This contains descriptions of their learning experiences, photographs, and samples of their work accompanied with some of their comments on that work. There is scope to develop the assessment process further to incorporate the most updated version of the High/Scope Child Observation Records system. (COR).
- Adult-child interactions are of a very high quality. There are many examples of calm, responsive and intentional interactions. Examples of these include copying children’s actions, acknowledging children’s play ideas, and extending learning through the use of many open-ended questions such as, “What do you think will happen when you shake the water up?” and, “How do you think the water is getting out?” to support children’s thinking and reasoning, promote problem-solving skills, and encourage more complex play.
- The outdoor area is a large and well developed space and offers an extremely rich variety of play experiences to promote learning and development such as sensory exploration, early mathematics and science learning. The environment includes multiple sand areas, a mud kitchen, areas to grow plants and nurture children’s interests in their natural environment, and a variety of gross motor play equipment such as trampolines, tunnels and climbing structures. Practitioners demonstrate commendable commitment to the unique value of outdoor play for prolonged periods every day.
• The indoor environment is bright and spacious with many materials to support a wide range of play types. A reorganisation and extension of the indoor space in currently underway to incorporate more defined interest areas and support more creative and pretend play opportunities. This will further enhance individual children’s play intentions and choices.

• Practitioners actively promote early mathematical thinking and language utilising everyday situations as they occur in the daily routine. For example, when a parent was leaving in his lorry, the practitioner engaged the children in a fun game of guessing how many times he might beep the horn as he drove away. Similarly, at greeting time, she encouraged the children to count the number of children present or absent.

• Practitioners provide children with opportunities to initiate and plan their own learning activities and to reflect on these plans in whole-group situations. There is scope to further develop children’s abilities to anticipate and think ahead about their play intentions and to recall the sequence and outcomes of their play ideas.

• Practitioners foster children’s independence, turn-taking, negotiating and cooperation skills. They recognise and value children’s capacities to solve every day social conflicts with adult support. Practitioners’ proficient use of problem solving and conflict resolution strategies and their acknowledgement of children’s feelings to support children’s developing self-regulation is noteworthy.

**Actions advised**

• It is advised that practitioners consider using the High/Scope Programme Quality Assessment Tool and the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide when reorganising and redefining the different interest areas in the indoor environment. This will greatly enhance the children’s opportunities to engage in a comparable level of rich and complex play indoors as observed during their outdoor learning experiences.

• Practitioners are advised to carry out the planning and recall time in small groups rather than as a whole-group activity in order to maximise learning opportunities and provide optimal adult support.

**AREA 3**

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

• The quality of the children’s learning experiences and achievements is excellent.

• The children demonstrate self-motivation, persistence, enjoyment, and an eagerness in their hands-on learning and exploration throughout the day.

• Children play together in pairs, small groups and alone. They demonstrate clear purpose as they move around the outdoor learning environment investigating, hypothesising and working together.

• Children were observed to engage in collaborative learning such as thinking out loud together with their peers and also engaging in reflective discussion with the support of the practitioners.

• Very positive friendships have been established and children show empathy and loyalty towards their peers.

• Children demonstrate an ability to recall discussions and plans while also reflecting on how plans have changed and what they will do in the future.

• Children show confidence and competency in their language, early literacy and communication skills. This is evident in the many balanced conversations, their many-mark making materials and their expression of their thoughts, feelings and ideas with others during circle time, planning time and at snack time.

• Children engage in numerous mathematical thinking and reasoning activities during outside play. In so doing, they use a variety of accessible materials such as jugs, teapots, pots, saucers, cups, and mixers to add water and soap to clean the outside areas. Children were observed using measurement terms and number words such as, “I’m making tea, it’s very heavy, and, “I passed three cows on the way to school”. Such statements reflect their growing knowledge of mathematical language and concepts.

• Children demonstrate strong learning dispositions such as curiosity, inquiry and analysis as they engage in many early science concepts in their play. Children actively explore the properties of salt
and how it interacts with rain water outside and discuss possible cause and effect theories with supportive adults as they play.

- Children are capable, confident and frequently articulate a sense of personal satisfaction in their play achievements and successes. This was reflected in several comments such as, “I know how to do it myself”, “You push the lid down and make it tight”, “I know how to do everything except peel things, like an orange skin”, and, “Look, I can reach up here by myself.”
- Children demonstrate very high levels of concentration, determination and independence during planned group times. They use the sensory materials presented such as sponges and water in a variety of ways to match their own individual interests and abilities as they gather information and experiment, analyse and draw conclusions.
- Children are developing a growing awareness of music and display great interest and enjoyment in exploring musical instruments such as the ukulele and guitar and in choosing songs to sing about dinosaurs and other topics of interest to them.

**AREA 4**

**QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING**

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- An ethos of professional engagement and collegiate working is prominent across the setting.
- The owner and practitioners are a well-established team. They meet informally on a daily basis to discuss organisational routines and to plan and prepare activities to support children’s learning and development.
- Strong leadership practices are evident. The owner/practitioner has allocated time for weekly team meetings which are used to review their practice, identify gaps, and set priorities for quality improvement.
- Practitioners report consistent support from the owner for individual practitioner professionalism and leadership opportunities across the spectrum of roles and responsibilities in the setting.
- All staff members are committed to engaging in ongoing quality improvement initiatives and continuing professional development. The owner and team are both qualified and very knowledgeable in early childhood areas such as leadership and children’s rights. They have extensive experience of implementing both the Forest School and the High/Scope curriculum approaches. There is scope for practitioners to update their existing knowledge further by revisiting the recently revised High/Scope curriculum content and materials.
- The parents are successfully supported to connect with the setting in advance of their children starting pre-school through the provision of an information session for them and introductory visits for the children. Parents are invited to progress meetings about their children’s learning and development. They are provided with monthly newsletters about the key features of curriculum provision in the setting along with the use of a social media app to share children’s learning and suggest ideas about how they can support their children’s learning at home.
- Many highly commendable instances of parental participation and collaboration in children's learning were observed on the inspection day. For example, parents bring in materials from home to add to the learning areas, they share ideas about how they are bringing the outdoor learning philosophy to their home environment, and they regularly share their skills such as playing the ukulele and guitar with the children.
- Great effort has been made by the service to establish strong working connections with other professionals in the community such as the public health nurse, speech and language therapists, and, physiotherapists as part of the service’s participation in the National Access and Inclusion (AIM) model.
- Established links with the local primary school and a programme of work on transitions undertaken with the children prior to starting primary school support continuity of experiences for children and appropriate progression in their learning.

**Action advised**

- It is advised that practitioners continue to use the very commendable time set aside weekly for formal team meetings as opportunities to reflect on and review their practice using the updated High/Scope materials and the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide to identify gaps and set priorities for quality improvement.
CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is very good. The owner and practitioners engaged in the post-inspection feedback discussion in a reflective and committed manner, demonstrating clear understating of the actions advised.
### 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-focused Inspection reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</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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