**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**
Department of Education and Skills

**EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION**

**REPORT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Name</th>
<th>Handprints Montessori Pre-school</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting Address</td>
<td>St Columbanus National School</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loughlinstown Drive</td>
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<td>Loughlinstown</td>
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<td>Dublin18</td>
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<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>16DR0299</td>
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**Date of Inspection: 26-03-2019**
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 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>26-03-2019</th>
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| Inspection activities undertaken | Interaction with children  
Meeting with setting owner/manager  
Meeting with practitioners  
Observation of interactions during a session  
Review of relevant documents  
Feedback to setting owner/manager and practitioner |

**CONTEXT OF SETTING**

Handprints Montessori Pre-school is one of two privately-owned services. This sessional pre-school has been located in a primary school in south county Dublin since 2016. The setting’s curriculum is based on the Montessori Method of education. On the day of the inspection, fifteen children, who are in their first year and second year of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, the owner, assistant practitioner and a relief practitioner were in attendance. The owner and the assistant practitioner attended the post-inspection feedback meeting. 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 good.
- On arrival in the room, children independently hang up their coats, place their lunches in the fridge and select their own play activities and play partners in an area of their choice.
- The written daily routine is on display but is not visible to the children. Transitions are signalled by the practitioners’ use of verbal reminders, singing the tidy-up song and a bell. At times, during the inspection, some children were unaware of the change in activity and would have benefited from additional support at this time.
- Snack time is valued by the practitioners as a social occasion; they sit and chat to the children about what they have brought for their lunch.
- The children have developed close secure relationships with the practitioners. The list of each key person and her group of children is on display. The key person approach is used in this setting for the recording of information on the children’s learning and for sharing this with each child’s parents.
- The practitioners regularly offer praise and encouragement to the children through the use of helpful phrases and affirming gestures. They provide guidance to support positive behaviour and encourage children to be kind to each other.
- On the day of the inspection, there was some reflection of the uniqueness of each child in the setting. This was provided through the children’s self-portraits and a display with photographs of the children illustrating ‘My day in school’. The displays in the room are predominantly generic and do not relate closely to recent activities.
- The setting provides opportunities for parents to visit the setting for events, such as the end-of-year graduation and the annual sports day. Parents, including a member of the armed forces and a hairdresser, have visited to share their work experiences with the children.
- The children are developing an awareness of the local community through their walks to the local post box and the visit of the lollipop lady. On the day of the inspection, the reflection of variety of cultures present in the community was limited to a display of flags of different countries.

*Actions advised*
- It is advised that the practitioners display the daily routine at child height and extend the range of current strategies used to signal transitions. The use of additional visual and verbal cues and offering children ample time to settle to the new activity will ensure that all children have a clearer expectation of changes in activities and what is coming next.
• Practitioners are advised to reflect the diversity of children and families in the community in the setting. This could be achieved by ensuring that books, props and resources represent the range of cultures, genders and abilities. This will support the development of a more inclusive environment.
• Practitioners are advised to ensure that children’s sense of identity and belonging is clearly reflected in the room and that displays are more relevant and meaningful to the children.

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 fair.
• The themes of Aistear; the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework are displayed in the room.
• A statement outlines the long-term plans for the setting. Plans are divided into fortnightly themes and there is a list of weekly topics for circle time. At the time of the inspection, the plans did not make reference to Aistear and the children's individual emergent interests had yet to be included.
• The practitioners compile a large floor book, linked to the themes of Aistear. This book illustrates the different activities undertaken during the year and is shared with parents. A photograph album with photographs of the children’s time in the pre-school is given to parents at the end of the year.
• The practitioners use a time sample observation occasionally and an observation template with descriptions of the children’s engagement in activities; this observation broadly references the possible next steps for their progression.
• The setting promotes a Montessori curriculum. Children are introduced to the Montessori materials as a group during circle time. The Montessori curriculum areas includes a variety of Montessori materials accessible to the children. Currently, the practitioners do not track the children’s use of the Montessori materials.
• The practitioners’ interactions with the children are positive and responsive. Approaches, such as open-ended questions and prompts, support the children’s thinking and problem-solving skills. The practitioners play alongside, and with the children.
• The indoor environment is divided into specific areas for play and there is an adequate range of play resources. The limited availability of open-ended play materials and sensory activities restricts the children’s play experiences.
• An adjacent grassy area is available to the setting and children access it when the weather is fine and to practise for their sports day. On occasions, the school hall is available to the children.
• The children’s emergent literacy and numeracy are developed through the use of the Montessori materials. The practitioners also encourage the use of dot-to-dot sheets and copybooks to embed and reinforce the children’s knowledge and practice of their pre-writing and formal writing skills.

Actions advised
• Practitioners are advised to ensure that the medium-term and short-term planning incorporates, and is informed by, Aistear; the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework and the children’s individual emergent interests. The use of the templates in the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide will be beneficial in this regard.
• The practitioners are advised to extend their current approaches to observations by the inclusion of the children’s learning dispositions and strengths and the identification of clear next steps for their progression.
• Practitioners are advised to provide opportunities for children’s engagement in open-ended and sensory play experiences during the daily activities. This can be achieved by offering children a range of activities, such as sand and water play, painting and playdough.
• It is advised that practitioners reduce the emphasis on the use of copies and template-based activities to formally teach children letters, shapes and numbers. A greater emphasis on everyday experiences, such as songs, rhymes, stories and games, is advised.
AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN’S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children’s learning experiences and achievements is fair.
- The children are generally happy and show enjoyment in their self-selected activities. During the inspection, some children struggled to stay focused and on task particularly during large-group activities, such as circle time. As a result, the practitioners had to stop what they were doing in order to engage these children; this impacted on the overall involvement and engagement levels of the children.
- The children are learning to play socially together and to engage co-operatively with each other. The setting has introduced a kindness tree to encourage children to be kind to each other. During the session, a practitioner was observed writing down a kindness shown by a child and placing it on the tree.
- On the day of the inspection, a small number of children were uncertain of the rules and boundaries of acceptable behaviour in the setting and were unable to make choices about activities. They only engaged briefly in activities and needed the support of the practitioners to make choices about their play and to negotiate minor disagreements.
- Children’s sense of identity and belonging is reflected in the displays of art work and the photographs on the family wall. The displays in the pre-school room focus predominantly on adult-planned projects and generic craft activities, with very few examples of children’s own creative and imaginative art work.
- Children are encouraged to take part in the tidy-up routines and on the day of the inspection, children were selected by the practitioner to give out the lunch bags.
- An individual scrapbook and an art folder are available to each child and include samples of the children’s art work and some evidence of their free drawings.
- During the inspection, the practitioners organised the large-group activities and there was little evidence of small-group work or paired activities.

Actions advised

- To build on children’s sense of well-being and identity and belonging, the practitioners are advised to facilitate regular, focused small-group activities, led by the key persons. The use of small groups can offer differentiated activities that are aligned to the children’s varying needs and stages of development and support their engagement and concentration in activities.
- The practitioners are advised to develop approaches that promote the development of the children’s emotional well-being and social skills and support them in learning the skills of negotiation and conflict resolution. This could be supported by exploring and discussing emotions in small groups during circle time. In addition, the introduction of class room rules, developed in consultation with the children, will support them to follow their self-selected rules.
- To promote the children’s creativity and imagination, it is advised that children be provided with regular opportunities to engage in free mark making, painting and drawing. A reduction in the use of colouring-in templates and adult-planned art and craft activities will assist in the promotion of the children’s individuality and their independent skills.
- The practitioners are advised to include opportunities in the daily routine for children to practise their gross motor skills when they cannot go outside. This could include the preparation of a list of physical activities and a variety of energetic games to be played with the children, and the creation of space by pushing back the tables and chairs.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- During the inspection, the setting was undergoing a change in staffing; there was an acting lead practitioner and the appointment of a new lead practitioner was imminent. The owner was working in the setting during this change in staffing.
- The practitioners come together as a team with the owner every month to discuss the previous month and to plan for the month ahead. Decisions taken at meetings are recorded. Meetings with practitioners from both services take place once a term.
A display in the room highlights links in the setting’s activities to Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Education and the Montessori Method of education.

There is evidence of strong teamwork and collaboration among the practitioners. During the session observed, practitioners discussed whether to move on to the next activity and there was a seamless sharing of the leadership role, with one practitioner leading circle time and another the storytelling activity.

The owner is committed to providing a quality early years’ experience to the children in the setting. She accesses support and information from Barnardos, Early Childhood Ireland and the local childcare committee.

The owner visits the setting on a regular basis and provides monthly ‘job chats’ and annual appraisals to practitioners to affirm good practice and support ongoing improvement.

The owner and the practitioners show an understanding of the families in the local community and this is evident in the approaches used to engage parents in the setting and the manner in which they share information with parents.

A range of approaches is used to share information with parents. The owner telephones parents every month and practitioners share information on the children’s learning informally at arrival and collection times. To support parents’ understanding of upcoming events and their awareness of activities taking place, the owner has introduced a system of posting blue envelopes with the newsletter. The children’s names are written on the envelopes and they go on a walk to the local post box. This helps the children and parents to recognise the blue envelope when it arrives. A suggestion box is available to parents and a parents’ notice board is at the entrance to the room.

The owner plans to encourage parents to visit the setting on a more regular basis.

In advance of children starting in the pre-school, parents are invited to visit with their child and to spend time in the setting. At the start of the year, the setting offers reduced hours and encourages parents to stay with their child until he/she feels comfortable in the new environment.

The setting has developed close links with the primary school in which it is located. The children visit the school library and their new classroom. Members of staff from the school come to visit the children before they start in the primary school. Practitioners discuss the move to primary school during the summer term and children complete a ‘Transition Flower’ with their interests and likes; this is shared with the primary schools.

**Actions advised**

- In view of the imminent changes in staffing, the practitioners are advised to use the self-reflection templates in the Aistear, Síolta Practice. This will support them in reviewing their practice and procedures.
- The practitioners are advised to extend their approaches to engaging with the primary schools to support the children’s’ transition to school. The use of the transition document ‘Mo Scéal’ will be helpful in this approach.

**CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE**

The owner and assistant practitioner attended the post-inspection feedback meeting. They expressed a commitment to implementing the actions advised. The capacity of the setting to implement the actions advised is 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>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of processes to support children's learning and development</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements</td>
<td>Fair</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

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excellent</strong></td>
<td>Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very good</strong></td>
<td>Provision that is very good is highly effective in meeting the needs of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Good</strong></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><strong>Fair</strong></td>
<td>Provision that is fair requires practice to be improved to meet the needs of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poor</strong></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
APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT
SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Observations on the content of the inspection report

- We have noted the contents of this report, and are happy to acknowledge and implement the recommendations made therein.
- The inspection was a positive experience and we welcome the advice and suggestions offered on the day.