EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Name</th>
<th>St Stephen’s Pre-school Montessori and Afterschool</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting Address</td>
<td>St Stephen’s National School</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Johnstown</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Navan</td>
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<td></td>
<td>County Meath</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>16MH0325</td>
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Date of Inspection: 02-05-2019
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of inspection</th>
<th>02-05-2019</th>
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</table>
| Inspection activities undertaken | Interaction with children  
Review of relevant documents  
Post-inspection feedback meeting with ECCE room leader and practitioner |
- Pre-inspection meeting with ECCE room leader and practitioner  
- Observation of interactions during the morning ECCE session  
- Interaction with children  
- Review of relevant documents  
- Post-inspection feedback meeting with ECCE room leader and practitioner |

### CONTEXT OF SETTING

St Stephen’s Pre-school Montessori and Afterschool is in its second year of operation. It is located in a room in a national school in Johnstown, Co. Meath. The setting provides care and education for local children availing of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The pre-school is currently set up in a temporary room and will be moving to a permanent room in the national school in September 2019. On the day of the inspection the room leader, practitioner and twenty-one children were present. The early years setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised of the report; a response was not received from the setting.

### 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 welcoming atmosphere in the setting and children and parents are greeted by both practitioners each morning.
- The setting uses a key-worker system to support the observations and documentation of children’s development and learning. The relationships between practitioners and children are respectful and practitioners are responsive to the children’s needs.
- The children plan their daily routine; they organise and vote on the activities which will take place the following day. These activities are displayed for the children and the practitioners then lead the routine following the children’s choices.
- There are many transitions during the daily routine. Some are signified using verbal prompts while other transitions happen instantly and accordingly, the children take time to adjust to the change in the routine.
- Snack time promotes children's independence and social skills. The children are competent in organising their own snack and caring for themselves. The practitioners sit with children during this time discussing healthy eating.
- There are very good displays which nurture the child’s individual identity, including family walls, displays on coat hooks and a birthday display. The children enjoy visits from the local football coach and the school caretaker. They visit the various units in the school and they hold their own St Patrick’s Day parade in the school grounds. Visual resources to support the children’s awareness of cultural diversity and of their local community are not yet included in the environment.

**Actions advised**

- It is advised that the practitioners reduce the number of transitions during the daily routine, and consistently prepare children for the transitions taking place. The use of timers and props to signal transitions will benefit the children. These actions will support more prolonged play periods which the children can conclude in a more gradual manner.
- Building on the existing individual and group displays, the addition of resources to represent the community and children’s 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 good.
- The curriculum in place is play-based and is informed by Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. This is evident in the daily activities and in the children's experiences.
- The current curriculum plans are organised in the form of thematic medium-term plans. The short-term plans in place focus on breaking down themes and listing activities, songs and books to support the implementation of the theme. Some of the children’s emergent interests are listed in the short-term plans; this could be further explored.
- The practitioners use checklists and the Aistear Learner record to assess the development and learning of the children in their designated key-worker group.
- Play is the main medium for learning and children have a short free-play period where they pursue their interests and explore the activities they have planned. The practitioners lead the majority of the daily routine and some children contribute their ideas during the activities. The children engage in a wide variety of play including construction play, role-play and small world play.
- The indoor environment is laid out with various interest areas and it offers a good range of resources. The practitioners create resources to support the children's interests.
- Interactions between practitioners and children are playful. The practitioners use instructions to guide and promote children’s understanding of concepts and learning and they ask closed questions as they engage in the children’s learning experiences. Open-ended questions are currently under-utilised by the practitioners.
- The practitioners introduce maths concepts through the use of song and games. They have created various games and resources to support children to count and explore sequence and pattern.
- On a daily basis, the children have access to two outdoor play areas: a playground area and a grassed area. On the day of the inspection the children accessed the grassed area to complete a nature hunt finding various items linked to the lifecycle of the butterfly. There is potential to extend the children’s learning experiences in the outdoor areas.
- The practitioners have created an inclusive environment. The ECCE room leader is currently completing the Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) in the Early Years programme and an inclusion policy is being developed. All children are encouraged to mix socially and the setting uses the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) resources.

**Actions advised**
- It is advised that practitioners continue to develop the emergent curriculum and embed it in the setting’s documentation. A stronger focus on extending the children’s emergent interests in play is needed, and an additional emphasis needs to be placed on their individual developmental needs. Links with Aistear need to be highlighted in the short-term planning.
- The practitioners are advised to provide additional time for a purposeful free-play period where children lead the activities and experiences. Practitioners could use this time to ask more open-ended questions which scaffold the children's learning and development to a greater extent.
- Practitioners are advised to extend the children’s learning experiences in the outdoor area to include opportunities for imaginative play, risk-taking and to develop gross-motor skills. This will benefit the children’s holistic development.

AREA 3
QUALITY OF CHILDREN’S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children’s learning experiences and achievements is very good.
- The children are happy, safe and secure within their learning environment.
- The children enjoy exploring nature outside and through the various themes of the week.
- The practitioners plan sensory exploration and messy play experiences for the children. There is a sensory table in the room with homemade and AIM resources for the children. Activities including sand, water and playdough are available at certain times for the children.
Throughout the daily routine, the children enjoy reciting rhymes, they choose and sing songs at circle time, and they enjoy dancing and moving to action songs. They recently used Lámh, the Irish sign language, to perform a song. They recorded the production to promote awareness of inclusion and additional needs.

The children enjoy being creative and using their imagination to draw and design various crafts. They have access to some art during free play including a blackboard on an easel. There is evidence of many template-based activities throughout the individual folders and on display throughout the learning environment. A stronger focus on mark-making is required.

Throughout the inspection process children were observed to play individually, in pairs and in small groups. The practitioners resolve conflict instantly and children currently do not engage in problem-solving scenarios.

Practitioners read stories to children and the children enjoy listening to fantasy stories and familiar stories. Some children can recall stories which they have read before.

**Actions advised**
- The use of templates to promote early pre-writing skills, and as a basis for creative work needs to be discontinued. In place of this approach, practitioners are encouraged to extend sensory play and to create a mark-making area which will provide more opportunities for the children to engage in expressive process art, junk art and free mark-making opportunities.
- Practitioners need to provide the children with more support and guidance towards positive behaviour and conflict resolution. This could be achieved by practitioners modelling best practice for the children, by highlighting positive behaviour and by consistently implementing conflict resolution strategies.

**Area 4**

**Quality of Management and Leadership for Learning**

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is good.
- There is a professional working ethos evident in the setting. The practitioners work well together and have non-contact time on a daily basis for meetings and to complete administration tasks.
- The management supports practitioners by reviewing documentation and providing information on training. During the year, staff meetings take place in conjunction with the other company setting. The manager delegates a wide range of tasks and responsibilities to the room leader and ECCE practitioner. There is potential for further mentoring and support in this regard.
- Since opening two years ago, the setting has focused on developing the indoor environment and the emergent curriculum. A curriculum statement for the setting is currently being prepared. The Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide is not currently used to support or document this reflective practice.
- Both practitioners participate in continued professional development relevant to their work and the needs of the children in their care. The practitioners have completed compulsory training and are awaiting spaces on speech and language courses.
- There is a good variety of communication channels established with parents including a welcome pack for settling-in, a social media site and daily informal meetings. The setting has an annual open evening as part of the settling-in process. There is potential to further extend parental involvement.
- The children’s transition to primary school is supported by a tour around the primary school in which the pre-school is located. The practitioners speak with the junior infants teachers, they share information where relevant and they create a visual display of the classes which the children will attend in the primary school. The ‘Mo Scéal’ resources made available by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment will be used to support the children’s transition to school.
**Actions advised**

- It is advised that the management team support the practitioners as the endeavour to develop the setting and the quality of provision. To this end, the management team could offer mentoring and support for the practitioners to guide them in fulfilling their responsibilities in the setting.
- It is advised that the practitioners use the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to support self-reflection and as a guide in documenting the changes and developments in the setting.
- It is advised that the practitioners continue to encourage parental involvement in the setting. Parents could be involved in skill demonstrations, giving feedback and supporting setting developments and changes.
### 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>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of children’s learning experiences and achievements</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of management and leadership for learning</td>
<td>Good</td>
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#### Language used in Early-Years Education Inspection reports

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