Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

The Curragh Montessori School
17KE0394

Old National School
Athgarvan
Newbridge
Co. Kildare

Date of Inspection: 8th September 2017
CONTEXT OF SETTING

The Curragh Montessori School is located in a rural location in Athgarvan. It has been in operation for twenty-two years. It provides one morning session for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the day of the inspection, there were eighteen children and two Montessori practitioners, one of whom is the owner, present. A third practitioner 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 excellent.
- The atmosphere at the setting is characterised by very calm and caring interactions between practitioners, children and parents. The children are supported to settle in on arrival. The daily routine has been carefully planned to provide optimum learning experiences for the children. It is available to parents and is also displayed visually for the children as a timeline; this helps the children to make connections with the different routines of their day. The children move easily between activities through the verbal reminders of the practitioners.
- The practitioners encourage the children to be independent; for example, they encourage the children to take off their own coats and they assist the children in managing their school bags.
- The children are supported in making their own choices around their learning activities, moving freely and confidently throughout the room. They are respectfully afforded the freedom to direct their own learning.
- The children are learning about the rules of the service; the practitioners agree these with the children and display them visually for the children to see.
- The practitioners view snack time as a social occasion. Healthy eating is promoted and the children are encouraged to be responsible for their own lunches. The practitioners sit with the children at lunch time and participate in and extend the children’s discussions.
- The children take turns to be the leader for organisational tasks such as at lunch time. A ‘Helping Hands’ display supports the children in doing this.
- The practitioners nurture the children’s sense of identity and belonging in a variety of ways. An ‘All about Me’ wall displays information about the children and their families and a friendship tree is in place. A ‘season’s tree’ supports children in connecting with the time of the year. The children are encouraged and helped to make friends and to appreciate one another.
- Regular opportunities are provided which bring together families, children and practitioners in the service such as at Christmas and for organised walks in which the parents participate. Parents are also invited to share their talents and skills at the service. For example, a grandmother on a visit from Australia shared her experiences of her home country, bringing in books for the children to explore. As a result, the children expressed an interest in the continents and a project related to this interest was undertaken. Links with the community are effectively made. Photographs of visits from personnel of a local stud farm and a local gardener are displayed for the children to see.

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.
- Provision in the service is informed by Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework and the Montessori pedagogy.
• Planning is organised on a long-term, medium-term and short-term basis and planning. Plans are generally well considered and flexible and take into account children’s interests, experiences and dispositions. The recording of children’s emergent interests in short-term planning is more implicit than explicit.

• Each child has an individual meaningful learning journal which captures his/her individual learning experiences. It is shared with parents regularly. Assessment approaches also include the use of Montessori materials, checklist observations, photographic observations and noting of the children’s interests. A settling-in observation of each child is also carried out. These approaches to gathering information about the children are skillfully used to support planning for the next stage in each child’s learning. Parents’ comments on the documented observations are requested. A comprehensive end-of-year report focusing on each child’s individual strengths is provided to parents.

• The practitioners prepare the indoor environment in advance for the children. It is well resourced with defined areas of interest and strong attention to detail such as real cups, a tablecloth and flowers on the table in the home corner and a bed for rest. Paint, water, sand, a sensorial station, a nature table, farm and train area, together with a writing area, are in place. The full complement of Montessori materials is also evident and the children engage meaningfully with their Montessori materials at the tables. Books are varied, accessible and rotated. The environment is print rich throughout. Some labelling is evident.

• While there is no outdoor area available at the facility, opportunities are provided throughout the day for children to engage in gross physical movement activities such as, for example, the Bizzy Breaks programme, an active rhythm and exercise programme designed for young children. The children join the primary school on regular walks of their local area and have occasional picnics outdoors.

• There is a very good balance between adult-directed and child-directed activities with the children consulted at all times. The children’s views are requested, listened to and taken on board.

• The practitioners continuously stimulate and extend language throughout the morning and model it very well for the children. They position themselves well in the room to be available to children as needed. Mathematical thinking and language are promoted using the Montessori resources and the children engage with the Irish language playfully. A memory game scaffolds the children’s recall capacity and their observation skills.

• A very effective group story time was observed with a well-chosen story read for the time of year. ‘The Kissing Hand’, a tale about children settling into pre-school, held the children’s interests throughout, supported by the very effective pitch and tone of the practitioner.

Action advised

• It is advised that the practitioners refer to the ‘Planning and assessment’ section of the Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide for useful advice on the recording of the children’s emergent interests in short-term planning.

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 demonstrate very good engagement and motivation in their learning activities individually, in pairs, in small groups and in large-group activities. They share, take turns and support each other. A sustained tea party activity among a group of boys held their attention for some time.

• At the time of the inspection, many of the children were newcomers to the service; they nonetheless displayed a strong sense of self-esteem and belief in their own learning capabilities engaging with their Montessori materials with ease. They could negotiate, refuse and make their own decisions. An emotions board supported them in connecting with and recognising different emotions.

• The children take pride in their environment and in their Montessori resources as they put away one activity before commencing another. Some children were observed using a sweeping brush
and a mop in cleaning up throughout the morning. The practitioners praise the children for tidying up after themselves.

- The children demonstrate a growing capacity for the development of fine motor skills through pouring and spooning exercises, through manipulative play, and through beading and threading.
- The children express themselves creatively in painting, creating their own ‘all about me’ caterpillar, gluing, sticking and engaging in playdough activities. Their comments are displayed on their artwork in the portrait gallery in the hallway and they take their art work home regularly.
- The children greatly enjoy engaging in a range of musical physical activities, songs and rhymes and in a musical drama, the 'Farmer wants a wife'.
- The children engage very well with books, in pairs and individually, sharing the learning gained with each other and with the adults competently and confidently. Opportunities for children to use ICT at the service are not fully developed.
- The children engage in mindfulness exercises and reflect on their learning experiences before going home.
- The children have access to their own learning portfolios; this affords them continuous opportunities to connect with their own learning.

Actions advised

- To further broaden children’s understanding of their world, it is advised that additional opportunities are put in place for the children to engage with ICT which can be used to extend their interests and to enable the children to conduct research. Examples of ICT resources that could be used include calculators, phones, cameras, microphones, torches and opportunities with digital media.

AREA 4
QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- An ethos of professionalism and teamwork is very evident amongst the practitioners.
- The practitioners present as very reflective. They continually evaluate their practice. Staff meetings are held every month and the outcomes of those meetings are documented.
- Practitioners at the service work closely with the local County Childcare Committee and engage in regular continuous professional development. At the time of the inspection, a staff member was about to commence the Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years (LINC) programme.
- The service is a member of different voluntary organisations that support children’s development and learning.
- Practice is informed by a service curriculum statement and a mission statement. An open-door policy, whereby parents are always welcome, and a key worker system are in place.
- Each year transition year students engage with the children in a special project to harness their own talents and skills.
- The practitioners at the service communicate very effectively with parents through informal communications, by website, through monthly newsletter, phone calls, through a social media page, parent noticeboard, a parent handbook and parent-practitioner meetings which are held twice a year. Children’s individual learning is also shared regularly with parents by text. Parents are involved in the review of the work of the service and they receive the service policies and procedures.
- Very good strategies are in place to support children starting at the service. These include a settling-in policy, opportunities for the children to visit the service prior to starting there, and the practitioners’ gathering of meaningful information about the children at enrolment. The children are supported to transition to primary school through conversations and activities prior to starting primary school. Links have been made with the local primary school and visits from the infant class teacher take place.

Action advised

- The development of a transitions policy documenting the very good strategies currently in place to support children transitioning into and out of the service is advised.
CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is very good. Staff at the service are interested and very committed in the continuous improvement of quality practice.
### Summary of Overall Inspection Findings

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<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>Excellent</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>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of management and leadership for learning</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Language used in Early-Years Education-focused Inspection reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of children.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>Provision that is very good is highly effective in meeting the needs of children.</td>
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<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>
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<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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