EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Name</th>
<th>Little Explorers Childcare Limited</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting Address</td>
<td>The Meadows</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marlton Road</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wicklow</td>
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<td>County Wicklow</td>
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<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>17WW0309</td>
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Date of Inspection: 03-10-2019
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>03-10-2019</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Review of relevant documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feedback to setting manager, assistant manager and lead practitioners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting with setting manager and assistant manager</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Observation of interactions during a number of sessions</td>
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<td>Interaction with children</td>
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CONTEXT OF SETTING

Little Explorers Childcare Limited is part of a group of three, privately-owned services located in County Wicklow. This setting was set up in 2018 and provides full day care and a sessional pre-school service. A number of staff changes had taken place in the first month of the pre-school year, including a change of manager. The sessional pre-school room and the pre-school room in the full day care were evaluated. On the day of the inspection, thirty-two children, who are in their first year and second years of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, and four practitioners were in attendance. The manager, the assistant manager and the two lead practitioners 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 very good.
- The majority of the children attend the setting on a full time basis. These children are present and engaged in activities in the full day care room prior to the commencement of the ECCE session. As children arrive for the ECCE sessions, practitioners take the time to chat to them and their parents.
- Children self-register their attendance; they add pegs with their names to the photo board and place their lunches in the fridge before joining their friends for circle time.
- The flexible daily routine is responsive to children’s interests and their engagement in activities. Transitions are signalled by the singing of a tidy-up song and by practitioners using verbal reminders with details of the time remaining before the pending change in activity.
- Secure and supportive relationships are fostered between the practitioners and the children. A key person approach is used and the list of the groups of children and their key persons is on display in the rooms. The key person approach is used to build a close supportive relationship with the child. The key practitioner is responsible for the gathering and recording of information on the learning and development of a group of children and for sharing this information with their parents.
- Throughout the session, the practitioners regularly offer meaningful praise and encouragement to the children by using positive phrases and affirming gestures.
- The practitioners provide guidance towards positive behaviour and support the children to negotiate their minor disagreements.
- Snack time is valued as a social occasion; a tablecloth and a vase of flowers are placed on the table. Practitioners sit and chat to the children about their lives outside the pre-school.
- The uniqueness of each child is reflected in the large birthday displays and the children’s photographs and names on their coat hooks. A small number of children attending the setting come from diverse cultural backgrounds. This diversity was reflected in a visual display of the previous week’s ‘Culture Week’ theme at the entrance to the room. This display included a selection of flags, passports made by the children and details of different countries.
- Parents visit the setting for the end-of-year graduation and the Christmas party.
**Actions advised**

- The practitioners are advised to make visible the diversity of cultures, abilities, languages and gender in the setting and community within the rooms. This could be achieved through the use of displays of resources and books, by depicting the home languages of the children and through discussions on family celebrations.
- To enhance children’s sense of well-being, identity and belonging, practitioners are advised to provide regular opportunities for parents to visit the setting. This could be achieved by encouraging parents to bring their children into the room at arrival times and by inviting them to share their work experiences and interests and to take part in events in the setting with their 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 very good.
- The curriculum is underpinned by *Aistear; the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. The managers of the three settings collectively decide on the themes for the year. A template developed by the owner of the setting is used for planning. Adult-selected themes and topics are divided into monthly and weekly planned activities. There is occasional reference to group interests, such as a recent topic on transport, in short-term plans. The addition of the individual children’s emergent interests into short-terms plans has yet to be developed.
- A large ‘*Mo Aistear*’ book is compiled by the practitioners in each room and includes photographs and learner stories of children’s engagement in activities. This is available to parents at the entrance to the rooms.
- A learner template is completed for each child each month. These templates contain broad descriptions of children’s learning and general notes on plans for their progression. These observations are discussed with parents informally and parents are given a copy of the template.
- The practitioners use calm positive tones in their interactions with the children. Their use of open-ended questions and prompts supports and encourages children’s thinking and problem-solving skills. On the day of the inspection, two children were talking about going to the moon. The practitioner effectively used questions, such as ‘How do you get there?’, and extended their thinking by asking, ‘If there’s no gravity, what happens?’
- There is a good balance between adult-led and child-led activities. Children organise and lead their play. For example, they put on their dress up clothes and sort out the jobs in the home corner.
- The rooms are well organised and support children’s engagement in play. They are divided into specific interest areas, such as a home corner, construction area, table-top activities, sand and water play, and a comfortable book area. Each area has a wide range of developmentally appropriate and accessible resources to support children’s play. The book area provides a very good variety of books to suit all children’s interests.
- The children access the outdoor areas on a daily basis. The outdoor areas have yet to be fully resourced and developed.
- Play is very much valued and supported by the practitioners. They facilitate children’s play by encouraging children to collaborate and work together, for example when using the chalk board. They take part in the children’s play when invited, such as when children are playing with the baby dolls.
- Children are provided with opportunities to explore their five senses and they have engaged in different experiments. For example, they explored light through the use of a light table, they made drums as they investigated sound, and they tasted and smelled various types of citrus fruits.
- The practitioners use many effective strategies during every day play activities, songs and rhymes to support the development of the children’s early language, literacy and numeracy skills. These skills are also effectively supported through the naturally occurring, well-paced conversations, and relaxed, informal book reading and activities, such as counting and measuring ingredients while making the playdough. Some strategies, such as the teaching of letters, shapes and numbers during circle time, are less effective as they are not matched to all children’s developmental abilities.
Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to extend their current approaches to planning by developing a clear cycle of progression for children who will be attending for two years of the ECCE programme. The inclusion of the emerging interests of the individual children into the short-term plans is also advised.
- To enhance the children’s play experiences outdoors, the practitioners are advised to avail of the ‘Creating and Using the Learning Environment’ document in the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide to guide their development of the outdoor area.

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 enjoyment and engagement in their self-selected activities and the adult-planned activities. For example, during circle time children copied the practitioner’s actions as they practised their yoga movements. Many children are achieving success and mastery, such as when a child asked if she could use the camera to take a photograph.
- On the day of the inspection, a small number of children, in particular children new to the setting, struggled to make decisions about activities or to take part in the large-group, adult-led activities. As a result, they lost interest and became distracted. The practitioners stepped away from the child or group they were with so as to help these children to engage in activities.
- Children are learning to discuss their emotions and during circle time they talked about when they feel happy or sad.
- The children are developing a good sense of their own abilities and are confident in making decisions about their learning experiences. Children decide when to go outdoors or come inside and they choose to have a drink or part of their snack when hungry or thirsty. They select the songs they want to sing and are given the choice of continuing with their play or listening to a story.
- The children have developed very good relationships with their peers. They play co-operatively in pairs and in small groups and effectively negotiate the taking of turns during activities. This was particularly evident during the playdough activity and the art activity.
- Children take part in the tidy-up routines. A child-helper routine is displayed and children are allocated specific jobs throughout the session. This helps children to feel connected to their group and helps build their independence and self-help skills.
- Many children demonstrate their knowledge of letters, shapes and numbers. They count the spiders’ legs, discuss siblings’ ages, write numbers, and discuss and compare the sizes and shapes of their junk art.
- The children’s sense of identity and belonging is reflected in the Friendship Wreath, the Family Tree and the ‘Where we live’ display. Many examples of the children’s creativity and mark-making are displayed in the room. These examples also record the comments the children have made to the practitioners in describing their pictures.
- The practitioners value and respect the children’s voice in their learning. For example, the children have been involved in the development of the classroom rules on display.

Action advised

- The practitioners are advised to review their approaches to catering for the varying needs of the children. In so doing, consideration needs to be given to the provision of different learning activities and experiences for younger children and for children present for a second year of the ECCE programme.
AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- Since September, there have been major changes in staffing. This includes the extension of ECCE provision, with the opening of a second room in the sessional pre-school.
- The practitioners in the two pre-school rooms chat informally every day and at the end of the week they discuss the activities for the week ahead. A whole-team meeting takes place every month and decisions taken at these meetings are recorded.
- There is a strong ethos of teamwork and partnership among the practitioners. This is evident in the manner in which practitioners communicate and collaborate with each other. For example, they talk to each other about the time for snack and going outside.
- The management and practitioners are very motivated and consistently strive to improve the quality of provision to support children's educational learning experiences. This is evident in their engagement with external support services, such as Early Childhood Ireland, the county childcare committee and a private agency, along with their participation in continuing professional development. In-house training has taken place on Behaviour management, First Aid, Aistear and the introduction of Hanen, a Speech and Language programme.
- The manager and the practitioners are committed to their ongoing professional development and have recently begun to use the self-evaluation templates in the Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide to support them in their professional reflection.
- The manager promotes high standards and fosters a clear vision for the provision of a quality learning experience. Her role includes offering monthly support and supervision to staff to affirm good practice and to support ongoing improvement. In addition, the manager meets with the director of the company on a regular basis and the managers in the three settings meet together once a month to discuss any issues.
- The practitioners share information on the children’s learning informally with parents at arrival and collection times and formal meetings are held twice a year. An information book and a welcome pack are given to parents at the start of the year and a parents’ notice board outside each room includes details of the weekly plans. Computer technology is used to update parents on upcoming events.
- Transitions into and within the setting are managed effectively to support children’s learning and development. Over the summer, children moving from the toddler room to the pre-school visit the pre-school rooms with their key persons. A gradual settling-in system, with staggered hours, is in place for children starting in the pre-school room and parents are invited to stay with their children.
- To prepare the children for their move to primary school, the practitioners use books and chat to them and their parents about their upcoming move. A 'Leavers' report form is given to parents who may choose to share it with the school. The setting has developed informal links with the local schools through its afterschool programme.

Actions advised

- In light of the recent changes to staffing, the practitioners in the pre-school room are advised to come together regularly to discuss their plans. In addition, regular use of the professional self-evaluation tools Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide is advised to support them in the development of their practice.
- The practitioners are advised to further develop their procedures for supporting children’s transition to primary school. This can be achieved by the introduction of the National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NCCA) transition document Mo Scéal and the building of more formal links with the local primary schools.
### 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>
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<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>
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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>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 January 2019
APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT
SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 2  Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

Area 1
- The setting has taken the advised actions on board and is incorporating more diverse and inclusive materials by using books, real life items and objects within our displays and home corner to meaningfully represent the diversity of cultures and abilities within our setting and community.
- We hope to incorporate families further by linking with different celebrations and inviting families to come and share with the setting how they would celebrate these at home.

Area 2
- As a setting we feel that the children’s emerging interest is valued within our curriculum, but we need to look at how this is displayed and documented on our curriculum templates to make it more visible. We will be holding a meeting to further discuss this and aim to incorporate more of the Aistear templates.
- Our current outdoor area is a fantastic large space which we plan to enhance further with the aid of more open-ended and nature-based zones. Through consultation with the children we aim to get them involved in planning by drawing pictures, sharing ideas and visits to local parks to see what they like. We have already reached out to some of the local businesses to see if they can donate some resources such as tires and logs.

Area 3
- The setting has already implemented visual aids and words from children’s home language to further support with children’s varying needs.
- Through our key worker system, we plan to set up and provide varying levels of project-based activities and experiences that will meet the needs of both younger and older children over the course of the 2-year program.

Area 4
- As a team we are continually reflecting on our practices and plans, we have begun using the self-evaluation tools from the Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide to guide us further.
- We are taking the actions advised on board and will be introducing a transition box with pictures school bags, lunch boxes and pencil cases and using the Mo Sceal transition document.