An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna  
Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Name</th>
<th>Darling Buds Montessori and Daycare</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting Address</td>
<td>Maryborough</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Portlaoise</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>County Laois</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>18LS0143</td>
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Date of Inspection: 28-01-2019
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

Date of inspection 28-01-2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inspection activities undertaken</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Meeting with setting manager</td>
<td>• Interaction with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Observation of interactions during the three morning ECCE sessions</td>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Post-inspection feedback meeting with setting owner, setting manager and ECCE practitioner</td>
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CONTEXT OF SETTING

Darling Buds Montessori and Daycare has been in operation in Portlaoise, Co. Laois for over eleven years. There are three pre-school rooms in the building where care and education is provided to local children availing of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The children are allocated to different key worker groups according to their age and stage of development. All ECCE rooms were visited on the day of the inspection. The setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised in this report, and the response submitted on behalf of the setting can 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.
• A welcoming atmosphere is evident. Parents and children are greeted warmly and relationships are respectful and responsive to the children’s needs. Stories and information are shared with parents at arrival and departure times.
• A key-worker system is in place and there is a written policy to support this. The key-worker groups are displayed for parents’ information also.
• Children are viewed as active agents throughout the session, and they enjoy an extended free-play period which facilitates exploration and choice. Children are verbally notified of transitions in the routine. On the day of the inspection, some periods of change took time to organise and these periods were not used effectively as learning opportunities.
• Snack time is a social occasion and the practitioners sit with children during this period discussing healthy eating. The children enjoy interacting with each other during snack time. On the day of the inspection a child brought the jug of water to the table and poured drinks for all her friends. These opportunities develop the children’s self-help skills.
• The children’s individual identity and belonging is nurtured and celebrated in a variety of ways. Photographs of the children and their families are displayed throughout the environment, and children represent their families through art activities also. The local Gardaí have visited the setting to talk to the children about their roles. There are some photo albums available to the children to enable them to recall these occasions. Resources to support cultural and community awareness are not currently available to the children.

Actions advised

• It is advised that the practitioners develop more effective transition strategies, in order to reduce the waiting periods for children during transitions. They can use songs and activities to create learning opportunities during these waiting periods.
• Building on the existing individual and group displays, the addition of resources to support children’s community and 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 very good.
- The curriculum is informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and a play-based curriculum is evident in the daily activities and experiences. The practitioners are currently moving to an emergent curriculum and this is evident in their planning and daily activities.
- The setting outlines a curriculum statement, medium-term and short-term planning. Medium-term plans focus on themes, celebrations and festivals. The short-term plans focus on the emergent interests of the children. The practitioners continue to develop their individual emergent plans for the children in their group.
- The practitioners use the *Aistear* learner record to observe the children. Each child has their own journal and this records anecdotal observations, photographs and group learning experiences. The children’s artwork is included in their individual journals. Each practitioner has an observation station in their room at which they spontaneously record the interests and needs of the children as exhibited by the children during the day.
- Play is the main medium for learning with extensive time given to supporting children to explore and discover their own ideas and imagination. Most practitioners are available to the children and are skillful play partners. There is some use of open-ended questioning to extend language and creativity. During the inspection, some inconsistencies in the roles of the practitioners in the different key-worker groups were noted.
- The indoor environment is well laid out with defined interest areas and it offers a good range of resources. There is opportunity to extend the resources which support numeracy and literacy development. The setting has a natural outdoor area which is accessed on a daily basis by the children.
- The setting provides an inclusive environment with a strong focus on supporting children with additional needs. There is a written policy to support this practice. Children with additional needs are availing of supports and have their individual learning needs met by practitioners.

**Actions advised**
- Practitioners are advised to generate more consistency in their practices as they support the children in their key-worker group. All of the practitioners need to use open-ended questions when interacting with the children, and they need to ensure that they are available to the children to support their play experiences. This will extend the children’s speaking skills and deepen their learning and knowledge.
- Additional resources to support language, literacy and numeracy need to be made available to the children, so that they can engage in informal activities which promote their early skills in these areas. Items could include books, paper, construction resources and recycled materials.

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 good confidence and competence. The practitioners encourage and support the development of these skills and dispositions.
- The setting has an outdoor environment which has ample natural equipment and resources. The children can enjoy gardening outside and they can also eat their lunch outdoors. On the day of the inspection some children enjoyed a group game of football while others explored the mud area by digging and measuring using pots, pans and spoons. There are limited opportunities for climbing and risky play outdoors.
- The children enjoy access to attractive book areas and throughout the day, they freely choose to read books with the practitioners. Children and practitioners sing songs and rhymes together.
- The children have access to sensory exploration and messy play. On the day of the inspection they engaged with sand, water, playdough, mud, natural outdoor materials and glue. The children enjoy these experiences, and they spend time working co-operatively to persist with their ideas and concepts.
There are displays of process art where children explore textures and various forms of creativity. Art activities are included in the daily routine, and the children have access to mark-making materials.

Children regularly discuss their activities and experiences with their friends and practitioners. They hear positive affirmations about themselves and their activities during the session. Currently, the children do not record their self-reflections.

Actions advised
- It is advised that the management team with the support of the practitioners promote and extend the children’s opportunities to explore risky play to support their gross motor skills during the various play periods.
- Practitioners are advised to support children to self-reflect and to review their assessments and learning experiences. In addition, it would be beneficial to enable the children to document their thoughts and reflections on their learning and development. Opportunities need to be developed to share this information with parents also.

AREA 4
QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING
- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- The owner, manager and the practitioners demonstrate great professionalism in the course of their daily work. There is a positive and respectful sense of teamwork within the setting, and responsibilities are shared.
- The manager is a very good role model and leader. She has created a safe and secure work environment which supports self-reflection and learning.
- There are monthly staff planning meetings and every two months the setting meets with their sister setting to share experiences and information from training events. The views and ideas of parents and children regarding the setting’s provision are not yet sought.
- The setting has accessed a range of support including mentoring from Better Start, the National Quality Development Service. The setting has reviewed and developed its environments and planning and documenting processes, and it is currently focusing on developing and reviewing the outdoor area. As part of this process, the setting is conducting risk assessments and exploring outdoor resources which would benefit the children.
- All practitioners participate in continued professional development including Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) in the Early Years, Equality and Diversity workshops and relevant compulsory training. Some practitioners are currently completing their Level 8 Degree in Childcare.
- The practitioners have an awareness of Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and this is reflected in the setting’s policies and procedures.
- The owner and practitioners communicate with parents using newsletters, a noticeboard and a parent handbook. The practitioners have an open-door policy which is linked to the settle-in policy. To support the settle-in process, parents and children can visit the setting. During this visit, information about the setting is discussed, and the children visit the ECCE room and meet their key-worker.
- The transition to primary school is supported by practitioners through discussions with the children and their parents. The setting’s practices in this regard could be further extended.

Action advised
- It is advised that the owner, manager and practitioners gather and include the views and ideas of parents and children to inform future developmental work in setting.
- Practitioners are advised to develop strategies and procedures to support children’s transition to primary school. The Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide pillar of practice ‘Supporting Transitions’ will be useful in this regard.
CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE
The capacity of the setting to continue to implement the actions advised above is very good. The manager accesses a range of supports and has a dedicated team. This will support the implementation 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>
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</tbody>
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## Language used in Early-Years Education 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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APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

Overall, we at Darling Buds found the inspection process very pleasant and we agree with all of the recommendations that have been made by the inspector. The process was very helpful to us as a service as it allowed us to gain professional feedback on our practice and to gain more understanding on how to further improve our equality of care and education that we provide here at darling Buds. We work very hard in our service to maintain a high quality of care for our ECCE children and we were delighted to see our efforts recognised within this inspection by receiving a very good rating in all four areas of assessment we will address each of these recommendations in part B further and follow up on how we have made positive changes to our service since the inspection date.

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

Since the inspection, we have improved our transitional strategies within our ECCE rooms with the use of resources such as egg timers and singalong rhymes to encourage the children to participate in the transitional activity. We have also worked on including more community focused resources to our environments through group projects based on the places we visit in our town. We have also added more story books to support the idea of cultural awareness and the different roles of people in our community. We will further develop this area going forward.

Area 2

Staff have been assisted in using more open-ended questions during their interaction with the children in order to further develop the children’s language and learning overall. Extra resources and materials have been added to our interest areas in order to support language and literacy. An example of this would be the addition of cookbooks and menus to the home corner, graph paper to the construction area and more books to the library and role play area.

Area 3

We are in the process of planning our outdoor area for the introduction of more risky play equipment in order to assist the children with their gross motor development. We will ensure the equipment added is natural material. We have begun working co-operatively with the children in developing their journey folders and the children decide which pieces of their art/crafts they would like to place in their journey book. Going forward we will encourage parent’s involvement in this journey book through informal chats about their work in the folders.
In order to encourage the transitional process of going from pre-school to primary school, we have gathered resources which we plan to share with parents in the coming weeks in order to assist with this transition. Staff will also work cooperatively with parents and children in order to develop best practice strategies with the school transition of the children in their rooms.