EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Name</th>
<th>Little Treasures Montessori</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting Address</td>
<td>100 Bishopsfield</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>County Waterford</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCYA number</td>
<td>18WD0112</td>
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</table>

Date of Inspection: 20-04-2019
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

Date of inspection: 30-04-2019

Inspection activities undertaken

- Meeting with setting owner
- Observation of interactions during the session
- Interaction with children
- Review of relevant documents
- Feedback to the practitioners

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Little Treasures Montessori is a privately-owned setting. It is based in a residential area on the outskirts of Waterford city. The setting provides a morning Montessori session for children enrolled in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the day of the inspection, thirteen children, the owner/practitioner and a practitioner were present. 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.
- A caring, calm and warm atmosphere is evident. On arrival, the children and their parents are greeted in a friendly manner. The owner and practitioner have good knowledge of each child and they know the families well.
- The daily routine includes time for the children to engage in Montessori work, circle time and outdoor activities. On the day of inspection, an adequate period of time was not dedicated to free play activities. The many adult-directed activities and a rota system for sensory and creative activities restricted the children’s choice and freedom to engage in activities of interest. It was also noted that the large group, circle time activity was overly long.
- Transitions between activities are clearly announced using verbal announcements and a timer. Books are used to maintain the children’s attention during transitions between activities.
- Snack time is a pleasant social occasion. On the day of inspection, the children were randomly selected as helpers to hand out plates and lunches to the rest of the group. When the children finished eating they washed and dried their own plates.
- The children exhibit age-appropriate, independent and personal care skills. They independently use the toilet, wash their hands and clean their noses.
- Currently, a key worker approach is not in place. The practitioners share responsibility for observing and documenting the children’s learning. The children are randomly divided into small groups for table-top, Montessori, creative and sensory activities and they are brought together as a large group for circle-time activities.
- The practitioners make good efforts to nurture the children’s sense of identity and belonging. The uniqueness of each child is represented through a birthday chart and samples of children’s art work. During circle time a naming song was used, which the children truly enjoyed. Parents are invited to yearly events at summer and Christmas and for fundraising activities. Links with the community include local walks, visits from An Garda and a bus driver, and trips to the local library and farm.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to review the current routine and to focus on decreasing the duration of circle time and on providing an adequate period of free play time in which the children can freely chose and explore activities of interest.
- The practitioners are advised to support the children’s predictability of their helper roles. In so doing, it is advised that a picture display of the daily routine and helper roles is devised and displayed at the children’s eye level.
It is advised that a key worker system is implemented. This approach will provide each practitioner with responsibility for a group of children and for planning and documenting these children's individual learning and sharing information with their parents.

**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.
- Provision for the children’s learning is informed by the Montessori Method of Education.
- A thematic and task-based approach to planning is organised on long-term and short-term bases. The children's interests are not currently reflected in these plans.
- Montessori checklists and development reports are used to track the children’s progress in their Montessori work. Some observations are strengths-based, focusing on what children have achieved, and there are references relating to what the children find difficult.
- During the inspection, the practitioners sat and engaged with the children during circle time and the adult-led, table-top activities. The quality of interactions when the children participated in other activities was less productive as the practitioners frequently moved around the room. During this time a few children were observed to be passive and they played alone while they waited their turn to participate in activities of interest.
- On a few occasions, for example at circle time, there was some evidence of sustained shared thinking between the practitioners and the children. Examples included discussion around apples on a child’s tree at home and the colour of lambs on a child’s farm.
- The indoor learning environment is well maintained and inviting. The pre-school room is divided into Montessori interest areas and there are good quantity Montessori materials and resources available. On the day of inspection, the children had limited access to creative, sensory, small world and pretend-play activities in the indoor environment. The outdoor environment has recently been developed and provides opportunities for the children to engage with the natural environment, and in pretend play and gross motor activities. On the day of inspection, due to adverse weather conditions the children did not play outside.
- The practitioners foster the children’s early language, literacy and numeracy skills through Montessori activities, books, and mark-making equipment and through songs and stories. On the day of inspection, the use of worksheets, testing of children's knowledge using questions and an overly-directed Irish activity placed an unnecessary emphasis on the formal teaching of literacy and numeracy.
- The practitioners promote an inclusive environment and link closely with parents and with external agencies to support children with additional needs.

*Actions advised*

- The practitioners are advised to consult the ‘Curriculum Foundations' pillar in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to support the development of an emergent-based curriculum linked to *Aistear; the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. It is also advised that the ‘Planning and Assessment’ pillar of the guide is used to develop a more strengths-based approach to observations and to inform short-term planning based on the children’s emergent interests.
- The practitioners are also advised to be more consistent in their approach to sitting with children during all activities, and to engage in playful interactions using open-ended questions which encourage the children to develop and explore their ideas.
- To develop a more child-led approach to learning, the practitioners are advised to support children to initiate and lead their own learning and to self-direct their open-ended play, particularly in areas of creativity, sensory and pretend play in the indoor area.
- Practitioners are advised that the use of formal teaching and workbooks to promote the development of the children’s literacy skills is not in line with their needs and that they should continue to support their early language and literacy skills through conversations, rhymes, songs and stories.
AREA 3
QUALITY OF CHILDREN’S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children’s learning experiences and achievements is good.
- In general, the children appeared happy and were comfortable in their surroundings.
- During the inspection, many children demonstrate good levels of motivation, concentration and persistence as they actively took part in adult-selected and directed activities.
- The children demonstrate good behaviour and self-regulation skills and their social skills are emerging. Opportunities for the children to freely choose to play together in pairs and small groups during play time and to develop deep friendships are limited.
- The children’s sense of identity and awareness of others and the local community is emerging. This was demonstrated as they referred to family members, discussed where they live and reflected on the visit from the community Garda.
- Most of the children communicate confidently with the practitioners and the children in the room. During circle time many of the children chatted openly and responded to the practitioners’ questions.
- A small number of children were observed to reflect on past experiences and many regularly shared their immediate learning experiences with others. This was demonstrated when children presented their finished ‘cutting work’ and discussed building a ‘big castle with sand yesterday’. Opportunities for the children to plan and reflect on learning experiences as a small group were not provided during the inspection.
- The children display good co-ordination and fine motor skills. This was evident as they used scissors, buttered bread and poured water from one container to another.
- The children’s individual learning journals, containing samples of work, are created at the end of the year. Currently, children are not involved in this process.
- The children demonstrate an awareness of the meaning of print as they refer to writing their names and display a good knowledge of concepts, such as mixing colour. For example, one child informed another that ‘blue and red makes purple’.

Actions advised
- To support the children to build deeper friendships, the practitioners are advised to allow the children to freely choose who they wish to play with, particularly during sensory and creative activities.
- To support the children to plan for and recall their learning experiences, practitioners are advised to provide opportunities for children to share experiences as a small group. It is also advised that individual learning journals be created throughout the year in collaboration with the children.

AREA 4
QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is good.
- The respectful communication and collaboration between the owner and the practitioner contributes to the professional atmosphere in the setting.
- Regular team meetings, daily chats, notes and individual support provided by the owner are used as opportunities to share information, discuss day-to-day operations, issues and concerns.
- Policies and procedures are reviewed regularly. Currently, reflections on practice using the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide are not carried out.
- Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. Each practitioner has opportunities throughout the session to lead learning and to take responsibility for table-top and circle-time group work.
- The setting has established links with the local childcare committee. The practitioner and owner demonstrate ongoing commitment to continuing professional development and often participate in professional training and workshops.
- There is evidence of effective communication with parents. This includes informal daily chats, a parents’ notice board, newsletters, phone calls, emails and computer applications. Currently, there are no arrangements in place for information to be shared formally with parents.
• An effective settling-in policy supports the children’s transition into the setting and between rooms in the setting. This policy includes visits to the setting and opportunities for children to join the summer camp before they begin the pre-school programme. A phased settling-in approach is in place where parents are welcomed and encouraged to stay with their children until they are settled.
• To support the children as they transition to primary school, the practitioners facilitate and plan circle time discussions and room-based activities.

Actions advised
• The owner and practitioner are advised to use the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to support their self-review and reflection on practice.
• It is advised that procedures be developed to offer parents more formal opportunity to discuss, share and receive information on their children’s learning and development.
• The practitioners are advised to refer to the pillar on ‘Transitions’ in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to assist in developing a policy on supporting children’s transition to primary school.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the setting to implement the actions advised above 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>
</tr>
<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>Good</td>
</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>Level</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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APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT
SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

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

- The full staff have completed Aistear and Síolta and the curriculum will be fully implemented going forward including collective practice.
- We have introduced the key worker approach in the classroom.
- The physical environment has been adapted to facilitate self-directed open-ended play.
- Small group activities provide more opportunities for children to make choices.
- With regard to formal opportunities to meet with parents. Currently the staff make appointments with parents where necessary and the meetings take place in the private office at the rear of the premises.
- We have reviewed the routine and have decreased the length of circle time. We introduced more free play where children can choose and explore activities that are of interested in.