An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

REPORT

Avoca Montessori
09WW0090

Avoca
Co Wicklow

Date of inspection: 09 May 2016
CONTEXT OF SETTING

Avoca Montessori is a privately owned and managed service which was established in 2005 and is located in Co Wicklow. It offers a morning pre-school session for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. 2 practitioners cater for 22 children. On the morning of the evaluation 15 of the 19 children present were participating in the ECCE Programme. 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 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 children’s learning and development is good.
- A caring and affirming atmosphere is in evidence and practitioners show sensitivity, warmth and positive regard for the children and their families.
- Secure relationships are successfully fostered between children and practitioners.
- A number of valuable opportunities are provided for children to choose and organise their learning activities and to be involved in the organisation of the daily routines.
- Practitioners effectively provide guidance and encouragement towards positive behaviour.
- There is some evidence that children are recognised as individuals and as members of families, as reflected in the photographic displays. Connections with members of the local community are purposefully promoted.

Actions advised
- The enhancement of children’s independent learning and self-help skills, through their greater involvement in the daily routines of the setting, is advised.
- Increased evidence of children’s individuality within the learning environment will support the further development of their appreciation of themselves as individuals and as members of groups.

AREA 2
QUALITY OF PROCESSES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN’S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- The quality of the processes to support children’s learning and development is good.
- Provision in the setting is informed by the principles of the Montessori method of education and Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. A thematic approach to planning supports the provision of an integrated approach to learning for children.
- Positive interactions between practitioners and children are in evidence, including a number of examples of the constructive use of open-ended questioning to support children’s thinking and learning.
- A variety of play-based activities are provided for children and a broad range of developmentally appropriate resources, including Montessori equipment, is effectively used to support their learning and development.
- Indoor and outdoor environments are safe, inviting and well maintained.
- Practitioners effectively foster children’s mathematical language and productive use is made of song and story to support children’s learning. Some suitable opportunities are provided for the progression of children’s early literacy and numeracy abilities with due regard for their stage of development.

Actions advised
- To further develop good practice, it is advised that greater cognisance of children’s interests and their developmental stages will contribute to the creation of a more enquiry-based curriculum and allow for a more in-depth exploration of learning activities.
• Further use of questioning by practitioners is advised, in order to sustain and extend the children’s thinking and to support the enhancement of their problem-solving abilities.
• An additional focus on the development of the children’s emergent literacy and numeracy skills with less emphasis on the promotion of their formal letter and number formation skills is advised.

AREA 3
QUALITY OF CHILDREN’S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

• The quality of the children’s learning experiences and achievements is good.
• Children demonstrate enjoyment in their learning and engage with interest in the range of learning activities provided.
• Children express their ideas and creativity through a variety of play activities and a combination of art templates and a number of making art and mark-making opportunities.
• Some detailed observations and records of children’s learning and development are maintained.
• Children are developing the capacity to make decisions during their learning and to play co-operatively in pairs and in small groups.
• Children show an understanding of and regard for the views of others. They are developing personal and social skills such as turn-taking, negotiating and building relationships and are also developing an evolving capacity for self-regulation.

*Actions advised*
• To build on the current approaches to assessment, an increased emphasis on assessment for learning and the consistent use of assessment information to plan for, record and monitor children’s learning and progression is advised.
• The further development of the children’s decision-making abilities, through increased opportunities for them to plan, talk about and discuss their play and learning experiences, is advised.
• The enhancement of the children’s creativity, through additional opportunities for their engagement in imaginative art activities across a range of media, is advised.

AREA 4
QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

• The quality of management and leadership for learning is good.
• An ethos of teamwork and partnership is evident and there is clarity around the roles and responsibilities of practitioners with regard to educational activities.
• The manager demonstrates a clear vision for the ongoing development of the setting. Continuing professional development is actively promoted and practitioners avail of external advisory supports.
• Some good channels of formal and informal communication with parents are evident and are worthy of extension.
• Transitions into and from the setting are managed effectively and good links are maintained with the local primary school.

*Actions advised*
• The use of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* will help guide the setting’s self-review process and support the sharing of good practice and a consistent approach to the implementation of identified priorities.
• Consideration should be given to the development of additional opportunities for sharing children’s learning experiences and their learning journeys with parents.
CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

Staff in Avoca Montessori demonstrate a good capacity to implement the actions advised in this report.
## Summary of Overall Inspection Findings

<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>Good</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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Language used in Early-Years Education-focused Inspection reports

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

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

Much of what we do and provide in our service is not outlined within this report. For example, some of the areas mentioned in the report, creative activities to name one, were planned for later in the week.

Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to address the actions advised in the inspection report

Area 1
Practical life and exercises to promote independence are very much part of the Montessori curriculum. We plan to create more 'helper tasks' to get as many children involved daily. The children's family photos will be moved to a lower point on the wall to be in full view of the children. More labelled photos and art work will be displayed at children's eye level.

Area 2
In relation to the curriculum, we plan that each teacher will keep a diary detailing areas of interest derived from the children and this information will form the basis of future lesson planning. More discussion with children in relation to areas of interest will be included in circle time for future planning. Daily time for reflection with the children on activities carried out during the morning will be included in our scheduling to deepen children's understanding of their work and experiences. We acknowledge the benefit of open-ended questions. We currently include philosophising as an activity with children as a means of extending their thinking and problem-solving skills and will continue with this.

In relation to pre-literacy and numeracy, we have a large number of Montessori exercises and activities that deal with exactly this. As a direct result of the inspection we no longer depend on templates and/or formal letter practice sheets.

Area 3
See plans advised under Area 2. Also in relation to creative activities, as evident from previous lesson plans, the children enjoy lots of opportunity for regular weekly varied free art and craft activities.

Area 4
We aim to follow the recommendations as set out under Area 4.

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