An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

Setting Name	Abacus Montessori
Setting Address	11 The Faythe County Wexford
DCYA number	09WX0075

Date of Inspection: 09-04-2019

An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

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	11-04-2019
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with setting owner/manager and practitioner • Observation of interactions in two learning room during the session • Interaction with children	• Review of relevant documents • Feedback to setting owner/manager and practitioners

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Abacus Montessori was established in 2004 and is a privately-owned pre-school setting. It is located in Wexford town and provides a morning session for children enrolled in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the day of the inspection, three practitioners, one of whom is the owner/manager and thirty children were present in two pre-school rooms. 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.
- There is a very warm and caring atmosphere in the setting. Children and family members are greeted in a relaxed and friendly manner.
- Relationships are positive, respectful and nurturing; the practitioners know the children very well. At arrival and collection times, the parents and family members are welcomed into the room where they assist children them with their coats and bags. During this time they also engage in general conversations and the sharing of information with the practitioners.
- There is a consistent documented daily routine in place, with times allocated to indoor and outdoor free play periods and practitioner-facilitated learning activities. The practitioners encourage the children to be active in their learning and to choose activities of interest.
- Snack time is a calm and unrushed social occasion. The practitioners sit and chat openly with the children. There are established routines for the children to assist in preparing and clearing away their food; at the end of snack time, they moving to the book area to wait for the whole group to finish.
- The children manage the daily transitions very well. Transitions are smooth and calm and are signalled by the practitioners' use of verbal reminders, countdowns and a timer.
- A key worker approach is in place. Each key worker is responsible for a group of children, for documenting their development and interacting with them at snack time.
- The practitioners use positive behaviour management techniques, such as conflict resolution strategies of encouragement, affirmation and guidance to help children to resolve minor conflicts.
- The children are visually represented in the environment through photographs, their art work, handprints and a height display for each child. The cultural diversity of all the children in the group is not reflected in the environment.
- Parents are invited to the setting to celebrate seasonal events, to accompany their children on trips and local walks, and to participate in 'Community week' activities.

Action advised

- The practitioners are advised to make more visible the cultural diversity of all the children and their families in the environment. In so doing, the development of resources, such as signage and books in the children's own language and props that represent the different cultures within the group, 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 good.
- A Montessori curriculum informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* is implemented. The practitioners provide the children with opportunities to engage in activities at a pace that is suitable to their ages and stages of development.
- The practitioners engage in long, medium, and short-term planning to support the children's learning. In general, planning is thematic, based around seasonal events and adult-led activities. The practitioners reported that they occasionally adapt plans to take account of children's knowledge and interests.
- Approaches used to document and track the children's learning and development include scrapbooks, photographs, developmental checklists and narrative observations; some of these observations are strengths-based and also make reference to some of the children's emotional behaviours.
- Interactions between the practitioners and the children are positive, supportive and caring. The practitioners sit with the children at their level and offer guidance and support when necessary.
- The learning environment is divided into interest areas which include provision for creative, sensory, gross motor and Montessori activities. The Montessori equipment and materials available are of good quantity and are age appropriate.
- During the session the practitioners spontaneously follow the children's interests and respectfully encourage their participation in adult-led activities. It was noted that the use of open-ended questions and sustained shared thinking by the practitioners was to some degree limited.
- The children's access to pretend, open-ended play activities, such as socio-dramatic play and construction play is restricted. There is no designated area for play equipment or materials; most are stored away in cupboards and are not freely accessible to the children. During the inspection, when the equipment was offered to the children, they did not have a sufficient amount of time to develop ideas and some of the children became unsettled.
- The practitioners foster the children's literacy, numeracy and language skills in a very effective manner. This is achieved through the use of songs and rhymes throughout the session, along with the print-rich environment, books and mark-making and drama activities The practitioners draw the children's attention to counting in meaningful situations and use mathematical vocabulary in their play interactions with the children.

Actions advised

- Practitioners are advised to enhance their approaches to observation and short-term planning. To this end, a strengths-based approach to observations, focusing on what children can do, their emergent interests, likes and dispositions. The 'Planning and Assessment' pillar of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* will be useful.
- To further support the children's expressive and imaginative skills, it is advised that open-ended, pretend play areas, such as a socio dramatic and construction be set up in both learning rooms. Consistent ease of access and a longer period of free play time would help support children's positive engagement.
- The practitioners are advised to engage in additional sustained shared thinking opportunities and to increase their use of more open-ended questions, such as 'why' and 'how' in order to scaffold learning and help foster the children's thinking skills.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is very good.
- Overall, the children demonstrate enjoyment and happiness in their learning experiences. Their positive sense of well-being is evident as they arrive into the setting in an upbeat manner and when they purposefully engage in activities of interest.

- The children are persistent in their approach to choosing and completing activities and they demonstrate suitable problem-solving skills. This was particularly notable when a child waited to play with the rice and, as she did, she discussed what the other child was doing.
- The children demonstrate very good communication and social skills and they show a good awareness of self and others. The children confidently introduce themselves and talk about their parents and their friends. Good friendships are emerging and children are developing the ability to play co-operatively, in pairs and in small groups.
- Throughout the session the children were provided with many choices about their own learning. For instance, they coloured in art templates, engaged in cutting and gluing exercises and played with kinetic sand and playdough. While there were opportunities for the children to engage in these activities, all equipment and materials were not provided in adequate amounts.
- During the adult-led art activity, many of the children passively engaged, as the activity was overly directed and focused on the end product.
- The children effectively share their learning with the adults in the room. This was most notable when the children presented their drawings and the playdough shapes and food to the practitioners.
- The children's early language, literacy and numeracy skills are emerging appropriately. They show great interest and enjoyment in songs and rhymes. They demonstrate a developing understanding of number and mathematical concepts. For example, they referred to having one hundred dollars as they played with the cash register, counted the pizza slices, and calculated that there were four children in the group.

Actions advised

- It is advised that greater amounts of sensory materials, such as sand and playdough, is provided. This will help in further stimulating the children's creative skills and in enabling them to participate in activities alongside each other at a pace suitable to their ages and stages of development.
- The practitioners are advised to provide the children with greater autonomy over their use of creative materials during adult-led art activities; it is advised that the use of template art is discouraged.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is good.
- The team of practitioners and the owner work together in a professional, respectful and friendly manner. There is clarity regarding assigned roles and responsibilities. The owner/practitioner leads by example and each practitioner has opportunities to lead learning.
- The owner/practitioner supports the practitioners through informal daily discussions and monthly documented team meetings. Individual practitioner support and supervision is provided when required. The practitioners use meeting times to for plan the curriculum and to discuss issues and concerns.
- At the time of the inspection, the practitioners were not engaged in self-review practices and were not using the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* practice to support reflection. Information on *Aistear and Síolta; the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education* is not provided for parents and is not cited in the parents' handbook.
- The setting avails of support from the local childcare committee, Montessori Alliance and private early years consultants. Communication with other early years professionals has also been established through a social media group. The practitioners have participated in accredited training; at the time of the inspection they had not engaged in training on inclusion, equality or diversity.
- Communication with parents includes informal daily chats and the sharing of information through a parents' handbook, notices, letters, social media and texts.
- The views of parents are sought form time-to-time. For example, most recently their views on the timing of 'Play' within the routine was sought.
- To support the children's transition into the setting, practitioners hold an induction meeting and obtain 'All about me' information on each child from their parents. A phased-in approach is not utilised to support the children to settle into the setting.
- To support the children's transition to primary school, the practitioners take the children who are leaving the setting on a walk to the school grounds.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to familiarise themselves with the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* and to use this as a resource to assist in their self-reflections and reviews of practice. It is advised that the outcomes of these reviews be documented.
- It is advised that management builds on the practitioners' skills through provision for continuing professional development. The practitioners are advised to consider participating in training on the Access and inclusion model (AIM) and the Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years (LINC) programme to support them in their roles.
- It is advised that procedures be developed to offer parents a more formal opportunity to discuss, share and receive information on their children's learning and development. It is also advised that the parents' handbook is updated to include information on *Aistear*, and *Síolta; the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education.*

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

During the post-evaluation feedback meeting, the owner and practitioner proactively and openly engaged in discussion. The capacity of the setting to implement the actions advised above is good.

Summary of Overall Inspection

Area	Quality Level
Quality of context to support children's learning and development	**Very good**
Quality of processes to support children's learning and development	**Good**
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	**Very Good**
Quality of management and leadership for learning	**Good**

Language used in Early Years Education Inspection reports

Excellent	Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of children.
Very good	Provision that is very good is highly effective in meeting the needs of children.
Good	Provision that is good is effective in meeting the needs of children but with some aspects to be developed.
Fair	Provision that is fair requires practice to be improved to meet the needs of children.
Poor	Provision that is poor is inadequate and requires significant improvement to meet the needs of children.

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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

- All the staff at Abacus were delighted to have the opportunity to have our DES Inspection. It was very encouraging for the staff to find that we are providing a very warm and caring environment for the children attending. We are already working on the implementation of actions advised and we will continue to provide a quality learning experience for the children in our care.

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*: Although we do have some visible cultural objects in our classroom we have already upgraded our library and signage around the room.

- *Area 2*: We follow the needs and interests of all children, but we will work towards developing short term curriculum plans from the Aistear/Síolta Practice Guide. In our classrooms we have added more open-ended pretend play areas to support children's positive learning, expressive and imaginative skills.

- *Area 3*: Our Montessori classrooms always has playdough, water and sand for the children to freely use. We will aim to expand this to bigger amounts to further stimulate the children's creative skills. On the day of inspection our craft activity was an group activity aided by the teachers; this is not always the case. We always in our classroom have two mark making/sensory tables which we change regularly. These are freely available to the children. Paper, colouring pencils, markers, crayons, paint, glue, glitter, scissors are available at all times for the children to create their own work.

- *Area 4*: Our ECCE staff aim to complete course/training on the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) and (LINC) programme. At Abacus our partnership with parents is very good. Parents are free to discuss any matters with us at any time. We will strive to offer a more formal opportunity to discuss share and receive information.