An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

Setting Name	Acorn Academy
Setting Address	Manulla Castlebar County Mayo
DCYA number	14MO0177

Date of Inspection: 25-09-2019

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	25-09-2019
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with the setting manager • Meeting with the practitioners • Observation of interactions during one pre-school session	 • Interaction with the children • Review of relevant documents • Feedback with the setting manager and practitioners

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Acorn Academy is a privately-owned crèche and pre-school facility located in Manulla, County Mayo. It offers one morning pre-school session for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The pedagogical approach adopted in the setting is informed by the principles of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. On the day of the inspection, one owner/manager, one lead practitioner, three assistants and twenty-two children were present. The owner/manager and all the 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.
- There is an extremely warm, welcoming and caring atmosphere in the setting. A large welcome space creates natural opportunities for personal interactions to occur between the children, their parents and the practitioners.
- There is an effective visual routine on display which offers the children a sense of security through their familiarity with the outline of activities. This, along with further auditory and verbal cues are used to successfully create smooth transitions that promote the participation of the children in all activities.
- A key-person approach is in place, whereby each practitioner takes particular responsibility for a group of children. The parents and the children are familiar with the designated groupings through the useful photographic display available in the welcome hall and the provision of regular electronic observations of the children's learning.
- Snack-time is a very sociable occasion. The practitioners sit alongside the children conversing openly and enjoying the group experience in a relaxed manner.
- Practitioners are sensitive and respectful towards the children. They are responsive to their needs and guide their behaviour using a warm and positive approach. Timers are used effectively to encourage turn-taking during play.
- The uniqueness of the children is represented on the family wall and through the displayed buddy system, birthday balloons and a height chart. The cultural backgrounds and home-languages of the children are not strongly represented in the range of displays, resources and activities.
- There are some opportunities provided for the children to gain an awareness of community roles during outings and when parents occasionally come into the setting to share their occupations. There are events organised at Christmas and the end of the year for parents and children to experience together within the pre-school.

Action advised

- It is advised that the children's cultural and family backgrounds are visually represented along with the provision of consistent experiences and additional discussions that fully nurture their identities within the setting.

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.
- A broad-based curriculum is provided which is organised in a long, medium and short-term format. The plans are electronic and are informed by *Aistear* with some emergent planning apparent. During the inspection, it was noted that weekly evaluations were not recorded.
- An electronic application is used to record the children's observations which are shared with parents and printed out for their individual folders. The next steps in learning are identified and recorded to support the children's learning.
- Practitioners view the children as highly competent and encourage them to assume responsibility for the environment, for personal care and through helper roles during the session.
- There is an appropriate balance between adult-initiated and child-led activities. Practitioners know the children very well and are highly responsive and sensitive to their needs.
- Some practitioners use effective interaction strategies such as modelling and open-ended questions during interactions. This practice could be further nurtured and used consistently to develop the children's vocabulary, mathematical language and cognition.
- The indoor and outdoor learning environments are well defined. They have been carefully planned to offer a range of multi-sensory, creative and physical spaces for the children to explore. There is a large cosy area for the children to read books, which is frequently utilised. Access to books in a wider number of play areas as well as access to information and communication technology (ICT) could be maximised in the environment.
- A commendably inclusive environment is provided for the children where they are encouraged to engage and learn at their own pace. The manager has completed the Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) Programme and practitioners regularly engage with the local early intervention team (EIT), Enable Ireland and Better Start Access and Inclusion (AIM). Many successful strategies have been introduced to support the children's learning in the setting.

Actions advised

- Practitioners are advised to further develop planning so that visible connections are made to the children's interests and to the next steps in learning. Regular evaluation of practice is advised.
- It is advised that the practitioners intentionally promote the development of language and numeracy during interactions, using expanded vocabulary including mathematical language. The introduction of books to a wider range of play areas and the promotion of ICT experiences will benefit this action further.

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 enjoy and are motivated by sensorial activities such as the coloured rice, playdough, splashing in puddles and playing with the sand outdoors.
- It is evident that the children's voices are heard and that their requests are responded to during the session. There is scope to strengthen this further by creating more opportunities to represent the children's voices within the environment.
- The children make decisions during free-play, both indoor and outdoor, as to their preferred areas of play. They are developing strong capabilities to play co-operatively with their peers and friendships are forming.
- The children are developing a sense of achievement through the availability of and access to their individual observation folders. Success is experienced during construction, physical play and creative activities whereby the children are regularly affirmed for their efforts.
- The children are developing a sense of belonging through the numerous photographs on display of their play experiences, their families and the individual storage boxes for their personal belongings. The children's handprints hang from a beautiful tree which celebrates their group identity.

- The children are developing empathy and caring dispositions towards their peers. There were a number of instances whereby children attended to their peers and excitably encouraged them during activities.
- The majority of children are developing the ability to make requests and communicate their needs and ideas. They enjoy circle-time and song-singing on a daily basis which promotes language and communication skills. Further opportunities could be provided for the children to problem-solve, plan for and reflect on their learning.
- The children are developing a sense of the natural environment by regularly accessing the outdoor area, using natural materials and exploring the many nature boxes in the pre-school room. There is a 'wormery' in the outdoor area for observation. Some children were observed to use books to gain information and encourage their thinking.

Actions advised

- It is advised that the children's voices are frequently represented in the environment so that they realise the impact of their ideas thereby gaining a deeper sense of empowerment and achievement.
- It is advised that children have regular opportunities to plan for, reflect on, problem-solve and make judgments about their learning during both planned and spontaneous play. Further use of open-ended questions will encourage the development of higher-order thinking skills.

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- The manager and practitioners have previously used the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* whilst engaging with Better Start Quality Development Service. They engage with the Better Start AIM specialist and the early intervention team on an on-going basis to develop and implement strategies that support the children's learning.
- The practitioners are highly aware of their roles and responsibilities and the organisation of the session is seamless. Time for planning, assessment and staff meetings is not consistently managed or effectively organised in the setting. This minimises the opportunity for collaborative review.
- The manager and practitioners frequently engage in continuing professional development (CPD) to inform practice and they value CPD highly.
- There is an informative mission statement available which effectively reflects the practice and ethos of the setting. A long-term curriculum plan, informed by research, provides parents with detailed information of the aspirations for learning in the setting.
- The management team provides good role models for the practitioners, promoting high standards of practice within the setting. There are many opportunities provided to encourage leadership amongst the practitioners within the pre-school room.
- Parents are informed about their child's learning experiences regularly through informal discussions, access to their child's individual folder and the parents' notice board. Although parents have continuous access to their child's observations throughout the year, there are no formal opportunities organised to allow parents meet with their child's designated key-person regarding their learning and development.
- A handbook is shared electronically with parents once the child is enrolled in the setting. An open-day and parents' evening is organised to inform parents of the curriculum and procedures in the setting.
- The transition to school is supported through the use of some transition-themed resources. There is some communication between the manager and the principals of the local schools regarding the supports required for the children transitioning. Formal information, summarising the children's learning experiences, is not shared with the parents or with the primary schools.

Actions advised

- It is advised that the manager adopts appropriate systems to support planning, assessment and staff meetings. Embedding regular collaborative review that is guided by current research together with the involvement of the children and their parents will support on-going improvements.
- The manager and practitioners are advised to adopt formal procedures for communicating with parents and the local primary schools regarding the children's learning prior to their transition. This will facilitate the sharing of useful information that will support a smooth transition experience for the children.

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	**Very Good**
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	**Very Good**
Quality of management and leadership for learning	**Very 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.

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

Actions Advised- that the children's cultural and family backgrounds are visually represented.

- We have displayed a world map where we have marked all the countries the children's or their parents come from. Their name labels are used so the children can clearly see and understand. A map of Ireland is displayed to mark all the towns we come from also learning all about our communities. To further acknowledge the children's backgrounds and different languages, through discussions with the children, we made the decision to learn to count in Russian and Irish. To include the other languages spoken at home we asked the parents to help us to create signs for different areas of the room.