An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

Service Name	Acorns Pre-school
Service Address	Hollywood Community Centre Hollywood County Wicklow
DCYA number	17WW0308

Date of Inspection: 06-06-2018

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 service 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 service.

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 service's provision in each area.

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Date of inspection	06-06-2018
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with service owners/practitioners • Observation of interactions and activities during the pre-school session • Interaction with children	• Review of relevant documents • Post- inspection feedback meeting with the service owners/practitioners

CONTEXT OF SERVICE

Acorns Pre-school is a privately-owned service which was established in 2005. The new owners took over the service in 2016. It is located in Hollywood Community Centre and provides a morning sessional pre-school programme for children enrolled in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the day of the inspection, three practitioners, two of whom are the owners of the service, and fifteen children were present. 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 good.
- The atmosphere in the service is welcoming, friendly and warm. On arrival, parents and children are greeted by the practitioners; parents assist children with hanging up their coats and bags.
- Secure relationships are evident and the practitioners relate to the children in a respectful and responsive way. They foster positive child/child relationships as they encourage children to join with others in their learning activities.
- The daily routine provides opportunities for the children to learn in a variety of contexts throughout the session and children are encouraged to be active in their learning. On the day of the inspection, some children seemed unsure of the daily sequence of events.
- During the inspection, many children appeared uncertain during times of transition and unprepared for the change to the next activity. This resulted in children becoming disengaged during the tidy-up time.
- During snack time the children sit together and socially chat with their peers. From time-to-time the practitioners also sit with the children. On the day of inspection, there were a small number of missed learning experiences, for example when the children asked to taste the lemon.
- The children's uniqueness and their sense of identity are effectively represented in the environment through photographs, samples of their art work, a world map, a hand-print tree and a birthday chart. The parents are invited to attend key events during the year, such as Christmas and Halloween activities.
- Links have been established with the local community. There are displayed photographs of the local area and the children have participated in trips in the locality. In addition, visits to the setting by the post woman, fire personnel, and members of the local Irish Countrywoman's Association (ICA) have been arranged.

Actions advised

- To support the children's understanding of the routine and sequencing of daily activities, it is advised that the daily routine be documented and visually displayed for the children.
- To assist the children as they transition between activities and to encourage their participation in tidy-up time, a review of the approach to transitioning between activities is advised. In so doing, the practitioners are advised to give timely signals, such as verbal and visual clues, to bring children's attention to the ending of the activity and to allow for a more purposeful tidy up-time. To support this action the practitioners are advised to consult with the 'Transitions' pillar in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide.*

- The practitioners are advised to sit with the children for the duration of snack time. This will provide opportunities to engage children in conversation, to support a healthy lifestyle and to explore learning experiences such as their knowledge, likes and dislikes of various food.

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 play-based curriculum is implemented, informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*.
- Effective short-term planning promotes children's learning and development. Planned activities are thematic based, with some links to children's interests. The long-term plans outline monthly activities and are overly general.
- Children's learning and development are recorded through the use of focused individual child observation, learning records and daily notes of children's interests. Information on learning is also documented in children's scrapbooks. The links between the information recorded and short-term planning are not always made obvious in documentation.
- Interactions between practitioners and children are positive and inclusive and there is a good balance between practitioner-led and child-led activities. From time-to-time during the inspection some meaningful examples of adult/child engagement in playful activities were observed; during these times the children were seen to display a deeper level of engagement in their learning.
- Play is the central medium through which the children learn and develop. During free-play time the children move between areas of interest and engage in a range of activities. These include creative, sensory, socio-dramatic, gross and fine motor activities.
- The indoor environment is inviting and well maintained. It is brightly decorated and is laid out in purposefully structured interest areas. These include a house area, a book area, table-top activities, small world areas, and construction, sensory and mark-makings areas. These areas are well resourced and equipped and materials are available and freely accessible to the children.
- The practitioners also make use of the hallway for some activities and have access to the large indoor sports hall in the building for some gross motor activities. Due to limitations on the use of outdoor spaces, which are beyond the control of the practitioners, the children do not have daily access to the outdoors.
- The service adopts an inclusive approach to facilitating all children to participate in the service and have availed of support under the Access and Inclusion (AIM) model.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to review their approach to long-term planning. In so doing, the inclusion of the service's pedagogical approach, its aims and objectives is advised.
- To further develop the emergent curriculum, it is advised that the practitioners make obvious in short-term plans the link between the children's observations and their planning. The pillar on 'Planning and Assessment' in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide*, will be a useful guide to support this development.
- The practitioners are advised to consider seeking the support of the community and parents to explore possibilities regarding the provision of opportunities for children to have daily access to the outdoor environment.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is good.
- The children demonstrate a positive sense of well-being and display contentment and enjoyment in their learning.
- The children' independent skills are emerging. During the inspection, children confidently put on dress-up-clothes, washed their hands independently and also demonstrated the confidence to ask for assistance when required.

- The children effectively make decisions about their own learning as they plan and lead learning in activities of interest. During the inspection, there were some missed opportunities for practitioners to extend their learning through the use of more open-ended questioning and allowing sufficient time for the children to reflect on their answers to questions.
- The children's sense of identity and their social skills are developing well. During the inspection, many friendships were observed among the children and the majority of children showed a sense of camaraderie as they engaged with each other in pairs and in small groups. Children willingly held doors open for their peers and shared personal experiences with the practitioners.
- The majority of children demonstrate good self-regulation skills and a developing understanding of the boundaries and rules of acceptable behaviour. During the inspection, a small number of the younger children needed additional encouragement and assistance to problem solve and to take turns.
- Many children display good exploration and imaginative skills. During the inspection, this was particularly evident as they engaged in some multi-sensory learning experiences with playdough and water, and as they played with the fresh fruit and vegetables. The children cut up the vegetables to make pretend soup and served it in the café.
- The children's communication skills and their use of language is developing. During the inspection, opportunities for the children to plan and discuss their learning with the group were limited and children did not have access to their learning journals.

Action advised

- To scaffold and support the children's learning and to encourage their higher-order thinking, it is advised that practitioners consistently use more open-ended questions such as 'I wonder why?' and 'How?' It is also advised that the practitioners provide a greater balance between speaking and listening so that children have sufficient time to respond to questions and to reflect on their answers.
- The practitioners are advised to place a greater emphasis on the promotion of conflict-resolution strategies in order to support children to develop their independent self-regulation, problem-solving and turn-taking skills.
- To support the development of the children's language and communication skills and their ability to make connections between their new and previous learning, the provision of more opportunities for the children to plan for, discuss and reflect on their learning experiences and achievement with the group is advised. The provision of access to their learning journals will help with this process.

AREA 4
QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- A professional atmosphere is evident in the service. The partnership between the practitioners is highly effective and ensures that a positive, child-friendly approach to children's learning is promoted.
- The day-to-day roles and responsibilities of practitioners are clearly defined and a key worker system is implemented. The practitioners' commitment to quality provision for children is clearly evident. Since the change of ownership in 2016, the practitioners have been developing and refining their vision for the service.
- In addition to daily informal debriefing meetings, the practitioners also meet on a monthly basis to discuss plans, to reflect on activities and to discuss general day-to-day matters. The views of parents and children on provision in the service are sought from time-to-time. For example, a parent provided advice to practitioners on healthy eating.
- The service avails of external support, advice and training from the local county childcare committee. Both practitioners are committed to developing their skills through their participation in accredited training courses and some workshops.
- Effective channels of communication with parents are in evidence. These include the open-door policy and the formal and informal sharing of information. The service's policies and procedures are shared in the parents' handbook and other information is shared through text and on the notice/picture board.
- The children's transition into the service begins in June when children and their parents are invited to visit the service. A phased-in approach to settling children into the service is in operation.

- While contact with the local primary school is limited, the practitioners actively seek to link with the school. Transition to primary school reports are completed at the end of the year and the practitioners meet with individual parents prior to the children's transitioning to primary school.

Action advised

- The practitioners are advised to review and reflect on the service's mission statement and ethos to ensure that it reflects their vision and guides the direction and continuing development of provision.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

During the post-evaluation feedback meeting, the practitioners proactively and openly engaged in discussion. The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above, as evident from the practitioners' commitment and vision, is excellent.

Summary of Overall Inspection

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

Language used in Early-Years Education-focused 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

While we appreciate that on the day some of our regular practices were not observed, such as, notifying children before changing activity, this is a paramount aspect of our daily routine and staff will continue to facilitate ease within transitional periods. In order to further support children's transition times between activity periods, staff have now implemented a dally visual schedule complete with photographs to show each part of the session from free play to going home time.

In the report, it is implicated that during break, staff sit with children from time to time. Acorns value this period and are fully present sitting together with the children. Staff only leave the table if necessary for the benefit of the children i.e. getting a drink.

***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 2: Staff have reviewed our planning taking guidance from Aistear pillar 'Planning and Assessment'. Staff have further explored our pedagogical approach under the areas of aims and objectives.

Acorns have explored our options for an outdoor play environment within our community, we currently await a response. While an outdoor space would be fantastic, we feel fortunate to have access to the large exercise hall and continue to provide daily physical activity to the children.

Area 3: Staff actively encourage independence and self-help skills within the preschool environment. Staff have ensured to extend children's higher order thinking opportunities through circle time and organically throughout our daily practice and language. Children are encouraged to problem solve amongst one another and we have introduced additional literature to support this such as I'm Sorry by Sam McBratney.

Children's learning journals are permanently accessible to children. The children can take home their journals when wish and share their families.

Area 4: Acorns have reviewed our mission statement and have together as a team reiterated our ethos and our mission in providing the highest standard early children education and care to the children of our service.

Thank you,

Acorns Preschool