An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)

Final Report

Setting name	An Scoil Beag Montessori Kilmeena
Setting address	St. Brendan's National School Myna Westport County Mayo F28WT73
TUSLA registration number	TU2015MO005
DCEDIY number	12MO0161
Date of inspection	22-03-2024
Date of issue of report	17-06-2024

What is an Early Years Education Inspection?

The Early Years Education Inspection model is used to provide evaluative information, advice and support in relation to the education of children aged birth to six years in early learning and care settings. The inspections will affirm good practice and provide advice to support internal quality development processes that optimise children's education experiences and outcomes.

How to read this report

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

- Quality of the context to support children's learning and development
- Quality of processes to support children's learning and development
- Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements
- 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

Dates of inspection	22-03-2024

Activities conducted during the Inspection

- Pre-inspection meeting with the owner/manager
- Review of setting documentation and records relating to the children's learning and development
- Review of the education resources and facilities
- Observations of interactions during an Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme session
- Interaction with children
- Interaction with early years educators
- Feedback meeting with the setting owner/manager and an early years educator

Context of setting

An Scoil Beag Montessori Kilmeena is a privately operated setting that is located in St. Brendan's National School in the rural townland of Kilmeena, County Mayo. Established in 2012, the setting provides a morning session for children participating in the ECCE programme. Eleven children, two early years educators and the setting owner/manager were present. The early years setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised of the report; a response was not received from the setting.

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 was excellent.
- The educators created a wonderfully warm and welcoming atmosphere. On arrival, the educators interacted gently with the children and they engaged in unhurried and informal conversations with their parents. The children eagerly greeted one another and were quick to initiate their play experiences.
- The daily routine consistently promoted the children's developing learning dispositions and skills. Substantial time was allocated to child-led play alongside complementary educator-led individual and small-group learning experiences.
- The educators used noteworthy strategies to inform the children of pending transitions in the daily routine that included verbal announcements and reminders, and the soft calming sound of a Tibetan bowl.
- Snack time was a very relaxed and social occasion and was highly valued by the educators. They sat and ate with the children and engaged meaningfully in conversations about topics of interest and family life.
- The educators used a key person approach to support nurturing and responsive relationships with the children and their families. They were highly attentive to each child's individual needs. As a result, the children's sense of security in the setting was very evident. This practice supported the children's emotional development, growing sense of wellbeing and enabled them to fully engage in their exploratory play and learning experiences.
- The educators utilised a broad range of strategies to nurture the children's sense of identity and belonging. Among these were highly attractive friendship and birthday displays, and the children's very detailed family drawings that were displayed alongside photographs of their families.
- Community engagement events were initiated by the children's emerging interests. Photographs of these events were displayed at child height that included a visit from a farmer and lambs and a trip to the post office. There were two photograph albums in the library of local landmarks and amenities. The children used these resources during reflective conversations with one another and with the educators.

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 was very good.
- The educators implemented a highly effective play-based curriculum that was informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and elements of the Montessori approach to early childhood education.
- The educators compiled curriculum plans to support the children's learning progression that were informed by educator-led thematic topics, seasonal changes and group interests. These were shared with parents through an online childcare management application.
- Learning folders and occasional electronically recorded observations were used to gather information about each child's learning experiences and to track progression in learning. A review process was underway of the curriculum planning and assessment procedures across the three sister settings.
- The educators used highly effective playful and language-rich interactions with the children that were authentic, affirming and encouraging. These interactions supported the children's early language acquisition and concepts relating to science, technology engineering, the arts and mathematics (STEAM). For example, a child discovered that she had made a new colour while mark-making with paint. The educator extended the child's learning through the use of very descriptive science-based language.
- The print-rich indoor environment was very well organised into interest areas that included some Montessori materials. Among these resources were a cosy library tent, a large home area, construction and transport areas and a wide variety of small world play resources.
- The outdoor environment complimented the indoor environment and included many natural materials and loose parts. There was a climbing frame with a slide, and a well-resourced sandpit and mud kitchen. In addition, the pre-school children had the use of the adjoining primary school all-weather sports ground and playground.
- Play was valued as the main medium for learning by the educators. A wide variety of play types available to the children included manipulative, creative, construction, socio-dramatic, symbolic, multi-sensory and whole-body physical play opportunities.
- In partnership with parents and external agencies, an inclusive approach was adopted to ensure the engagement of all children within the setting.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to record each child's play interests and to use these, together with children's developing knowledge, skills and dispositions, to inform the short-term curriculum plans and the children's observation records. They are encouraged to involve the children more in compiling and reviewing their learning journals.

Area 3: Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements was excellent.
- The children were highly motivated and displayed significant enjoyment. This was supported by a very well-prepared learning environment and attuned educators. At circle time, one child wanted to demonstrate his Irish dancing skills. This resulted in everyone present joining in on the experience to much laughter and excited conversations between the children and the educators.
- The children displayed a growing sense of well-being. They were active agents in choosing their activities and confidently moved between playing alone, in pairs and in small groups.
- The children were developing many positive learning dispositions. The children displayed co-operation, persistence, creativity and problem-solving skills while they engaged in small world play that included a farm, home life, travel, and construction scenarios. Commendably, many of these play resources were left untouched for the children to re-engage with later in the session.
- The children experienced mastery and success during their play and learning experiences and through reflective conversations with the educators. They revisited past learning experiences by discussing the many photographic displays. They confidently shared their thoughts and ideas through songs, dancing, mark-making, play dough modelling and storytelling. A lot of their artwork that was on display had their comments included.

- The children displayed highly developed self-regulation skills. Consideration for others and very good sharing and turn-taking skills were evident. For example, when some children invited others to join in their play they articulated how the actions of others made them feel.
- The children were making sense of their world through playful inquisitive exploration. Through sustained shared thinking and open-ended questioning with the educators they explored topics such as farming, traveling abroad and how to organise a parade.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was excellent.
- The setting owner/manager had management responsibility for the three sister settings and regularly attended the setting to support the educator team. On the day of inspection, she was a very good role model for the educators.
- There was a noteworthy ethos of teamwork and professionalism among the educators and a strong commitment to engagement with continuing professional development opportunities. The Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years (LINC) programme was one of the more recently attended courses.
- The lead educator had responsibility for the day-to-day running of the setting and oversaw the programme for learning and care.
- The owner/manager had recently commenced formal support and supervisor sessions that incorporated the strengths and training needs of each educator. Formal staff meetings were conducted monthly and informal meetings were frequently undertaken to engage in reflective practice and to plan upcoming play and learning experiences.
- The educators periodically used the full suite of the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* self-evaluation tools to support quality development. Parent input to these reviews was actively sought.
- Commendably, practice review outcomes were among the information that was shared with parents through an online childcare management application. Conversations at drop-off and collection times were valued as times to exchange information about the children's learning progress. In addition, parent-educator meetings were facilitated to discuss the children's progress.
- The children's inclusion in all appropriate events held in the adjoining primary school supported their transition to junior infants. The principal and junior infant teacher regularly visited the pre-school children. Play props, uniforms, photographs and the *Mo Scéal* resources were also used to support the children's transition to primary school.

Summary of overall inspection

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

Language used in Early Years Education Inspection Reports

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the setting using the language which is shown below.

Level	Description	Examples of descriptive terms
Excellent	**Provision that is excellent** is exemplary in meeting the needs of learners. This provision provides an example for other schools and settings of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Excellent; exemplary; outstanding; exceptionally high standard; with very significant strengths
Very good	**Provision that is very good** is very effective in meeting the needs of learners and is of a very high standard. There is potential to build on existing strengths to achieve an excellent standard.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful
Good	**Provision that is good** is effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to build on existing strengths in order to address the aspects to be developed and achieve a very good standard.	Good; of good quality; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; strengths outweigh the shortcomings; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Requires improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard** is not sufficiently effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is good or better.	Fair; less than effective; less than sufficient; evident weaknesses that are impacting on learning; experiencing difficulty; shortcomings outweigh strengths; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard** is not meeting the needs of learners. There is immediate need for significant action to address the areas of concern.	Weak; poor; ineffective; insufficient; unacceptable; experiencing significant difficulties; serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated; requiring significant change, development and improvement to be effective

The following resources can be used by ELC settings in their quality improvement:

Aistear Siolta Practice Guide

Department of Education Insights – Quality in Early Years Education webinars

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