An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION - FOCUSED INSPECTION

REPORT

Service Name	Ballyvary Pre-school
Service Address	Ballyvary Castlebar Co Mayo
DCYA number	13MO0170

Date of Inspection: 03-05-2018

WHAT IS AN EARLY YEARS EDUCATION-FOCUSED INSPECTION?

The Early Years Education-focused 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	03-05-2018
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with service manager • Meeting with practitioners • Observation of interactions during a number of sessions	• Interaction with children • Review of relevant documents • Feedback to service manager and practitioners

CONTEXT OF SERVICE

Ballyvary Pre-school is a privately managed service which has been in operation for over eleven years. It is located in a two-storey modified building on the main street in Ballyvary, Co. Mayo. The upstairs of the building has recently been renovated. It provides two morning sessions that run concurrently for children availing of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. One of the morning ECCE sessions caters for younger children and the other session is for children availing of their second year of the ECCE Programme. The evaluation was conducted in the room catering for children availing of the second year. Sixteen children and three practitioners were present, one of whom is the owner manager and one who is employed under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM). The setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised in this report, the setting chose to accept the report without response.

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 excellent.
- A very positive, open and welcoming atmosphere has been successfully created in this service. The practitioners know the children and their families very well and there are many opportunities for informal natural conversations and the sharing of children's achievements at arrival and departure times.
- There is a well-established, consistent, yet flexible, daily routine which provides familiarity for the children and offers them opportunities for learning in many different contexts.
- The children engage in lots of self-directed purposeful play. The practitioners are alert and adept at providing the children with opportunities for enquiry-based, hands-on learning experiences that consistently build on children's interests and lines of enquiry. One of the many fine examples of this was a family's upcoming holiday to Canada. This propelled a big interest in finding Canada on the large map and globe in the room and wondering how the family might get to Canada and what they might do while there. The children, in partnership with the practitioners, created a very large aeroplane with a hand-painted Canadian flag and drawings made by the children of the family and their suitcases. On the morning of the inspection this inquiry and interest was reflected in the socio-dramatic play. A small group of children were observed packing a suitcase with all the essentials they needed to take their babies to Canada. They discussed and worked together as nappies, blankets, bottles and food were neatly packed into the suitcase.
- The children confidently direct their own learning in partnership with the practitioners who respect their choice of materials and play partners. The children manage their own personal and care needs very competently.
- Transitions are a very positive learning experience for the children. The children have a key role during transitions and various effective strategies are used to alert the children to change and give them time to finish what they are doing. These include the use of timers, visual aids, verbal prompts, and a small bell.
- Relationships between the children and the practitioners are warm, caring and respectful. The children appear to be very securely attached to the practitioners and strong friendships between the children are evident.

- Snack time is utilised very effectively as a social occasion, for promoting healthy-eating and fostering independence and responsibility.
- The practitioners are very good role models in providing guidance and encouragement towards positive behaviour.
- The children's sense of identity and belonging is very successfully nurtured in the service through the ethos, documentation, resources, the various attractive photographic displays, and the programme of activities. The displays viewed during the inspection reflected various aspects of the local community, the children's experiences outside of the service, their current and emergent interests, their families, pets, birthdays and group-learning experiences. The displays also included self-portraits and many annotated free drawings.
- Very positive relationships are established with the local community, external agencies and the local primary school. The children enjoy many and varied activities and excursions in the local area. There are many opportunities used to bring the children, their parents and the practitioners together throughout the year.

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 excellent.
- The service provides a very broad, emergent, enquiry-based curriculum which very effectively supports children's learning and development. It is clearly shaped by the principles and aims of *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.* These principles are seen in the environment, the activities and routine, the pedagogical documentation and displays, and the relationships.
- Curriculum planning is documented on a long-term, medium-term and short-term basis. Seasonal themes and projects which are informed by the children interests, needs, prior knowledge and experiences are reflected in the weekly plans. The practitioners demonstrate understanding and knowledge in developing an emergent enquiry-based curriculum. The weekly plans provide a clear rationale and purpose for the experiences and activities.
- Various assessment approaches are used successfully to build a picture of each child's learning and development. The learning record template from the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* is used effectively as an observation and evaluation tool which is shared with parents regularly. The children's individual scrap books include work samples, photographs, annotated free drawings and dictated notes from conversations with the children. The practitioners' excitement when sharing information about children personalities, significant learning moments and achievements throughout the morning was noteworthy. One such example was when a child shared his thoughts for the first time, when asked about a picture he had created using stickers and colouring pencils. The practitioner wrote his thoughts down and shared her excitement with the child, the other practitioners, and the parents at collection time.
- The indoor environment is homely, spacious and purposefully prepared as various appropriately-resourced key learning areas. The outdoor area provides the children with various opportunities for social, creative, exploratory and physically-challenging learning experiences. The manager is awaiting news of a grant to upgrade the outdoor area to include a covered-in area and more equipment to support the development of large motor skills and exploration.
- Providing children with opportunities and invitations to play is a central and very intentional part of this service. The practitioners display a clear understanding of the importance and effectiveness of play in children's learning and development. The time given to play, the prepared environment, the rich open-ended multi-sensory resources, as well as the practitioners' willingness to support the children in following lines of inquiry and to fully engage with them as play partners are all commendable.
- The children confidently and eagerly tidy and sort the play materials and look after their own personal hygiene needs.
- The quality of adult-child interactions is excellent. Children are respected and treated as capable and competent learners. Many varied and highly effective interaction strategies and pedagogical methods were observed during the inspection. Excellent use is made of open-ended questions to develop the children's higher-level thinking and to encourage them to make predictions and to recall their past and recent activities.

- Emergent language, literacy and numeracy skills are fostered very successfully. The children have many opportunities to talk, and to share their thoughts, ideas and stories from home. They also participate in stories, rhymes and songs. The play materials and the programme of activities help appropriate emergent literacy and mathematical skills to develop at children's individual pace.
- The wall displays and pedagogical documentation are commendable in the service. These positively support the children to experience success and to have a sense of pride in their creative achievements and in their own uniqueness. They also foster a sense of belonging to the group, to unique families and to the wider community.
- Ballyvary Pre-school has a very inclusive approach and strives to ensure the engagement of children of all abilities in the activities. The service has established positive links with external agencies to optimise support for children with additional needs. This year they have a staff member employed under AIM and they regularly engage with speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and Western Care to provide the best support for each child.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is excellent.
- The children demonstrate very high levels of engagement and motivation. They enthusiastically and confidently make decisions about their learning activities, they lead their own play and they appear to be happy, relaxed and confident.
- The children demonstrate very positive learning dispositions and skills. Examples of collaboration, communication, kindness, taking turns, critical-thinking and creativity and confidence were observed during the inspection.
- The children regularly experience success and mastery during learning activities and clearly enjoy taking responsibility in looking after the environment and their own personal needs.
- The children are developing a broad range of skills to respond positively to challenges and minor conflict situations. They are very respectful to each other and to the practitioners. A number of the children demonstrate high levels of emotional intelligence and the ability to regulate their own behaviour.
- The children engage in an extensive range of activities that support them in representing their thoughts, ideas and feelings. They are also encouraged to question and make sense of their world and to build on their prior knowledge, interests, skills and understanding. For example, on the morning of the inspection, one child very proudly drew pictures of tractors, explaining front loader tractors and silage trailers in detail. While engaging in socio-dramatic play with others, another child got a toy laptop and then announced that she had to look up information about fluoride. A small group of children engaged in high-level collaborative socio-dramatic play in which they took on the role of caring for their new born babies using dolls, clothes, blankets, toy prams and real-life props such as baby bottles, nappies and bibs that had been brought in by a practitioner.
- The children demonstrate a very keen awareness and understanding of the use of print, pictures and numbers as means of communicating. They enjoy being able to make predictions, as was demonstrated during story-time. They recognise and make reference to the letters in their name and print on a page.

Actions advised

- To further support the children's keen interest in writing, drawing, and predicting, as well as their emergent understanding that written words have meaning, the practitioners are advised to create books with the children based on their interests and needs. Topics could include families, daily routines, caring for babies, being kind, farms and farming, holidays, and road safety. The story lines could be based on imaginary characters or they could have the children themselves as the main characters. The children could draw pictures, take photographs and dictate the text and they could be asked questions to encourage them to add more ideas. These stories could be re-told by the children using words, or through drama, and they could be shared with their families.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is excellent.
- The service has a clear vision and a strong sense of collegiality and professionalism is evident. There is clarity regarding the sharing of different roles and practitioners' specific skills are effectively utilised. The taking of responsibility for aspects of leading the programme and for the maintenance of pedagogical documentation is well established.
- The manager and practitioners meet informally on a daily basis to discuss organisational routines. They meet formally once a month to plan activities and discuss additional props, displays, group projects, songs, and stories that will support the children's learning and development. This is based on the children's needs, lines of enquiry from the children, or family or seasonal events.
- The practitioners use a diary to reflect on their practice daily and they are committed to engaging in continuous professional development. They attend various workshops and training initiatives facilitated by the local childcare committee and childcare organisations.
- The parents are successfully supported in establishing connections with the setting in advance of their children starting pre-school. This happens through the provision of a one-to-one information session and introductory visits for the children. The practitioners prioritise getting to know the children and building positive relationship with them and their families through the key person approach. They also spend one-to-one time, with the children, as well engaging with them in small groups, throughout the year.
- The parents are very pro-actively involved in the setting. They bring in a variety of resources and real-life props to add to various play areas. They also attend and assist at various events and outings.
- Every month parents, grandparents or visitors from local businesses are invited to the service to share their talents, skills and expertise with the children. Many attractive photographic displays, children's drawings and annotations capturing these experiences have been created with the children. They are used purposefully to support children's thinking, discussion and sense of identity and belonging.
- Parents receive regular photographs and stories about their children's learning and development throughout the year, through texts, emails and a private social media app. Extensive documentation is shared with parents, through the attractive displays in the welcome area, on the windows and in the rooms. The children's families receive detailed observations and anecdotes every month on their children's learning achievements and their progression in learning and development.
- A smooth transition to primary school is a joint undertaking between the pre-school and the local primary school.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to make further use of the self-evaluation tools in the 'Curriculum foundations' section of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide*.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is excellent.

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	**Excellent**
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	**Excellent**
Quality of management and leadership for learning	**Excellent**

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.

Published November 2018