An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION - FOCUSED INSPECTION

REPORT

Service Name	Castlerock Montessori
Service Address	33 Castlerock Ennis County Clare
DCYA number	09CE0033

Date of Inspection: 05-03-2018

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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(s) 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	05-03-2018
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with service manager/practitioner • Observation of activities and interactions during the pre-school session • Interaction with children	 • Review of relevant documents • Post-inspection feedback meeting with the service manager/practitioner

CONTEXT OF SERVICE

Castlerock Montessori is a private, sessional service located in a residential housing area in Ennis Co. Clare. It has been in operation since 2009 and provides a morning session for pre-school children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The owner/manager is the main practitioner in the service and is supported on three days of the week by a second practitioner on a part-time basis. On the day of inspection, eleven children were present with two practitioners. 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 very good.
- A warm, welcoming, playful atmosphere is evident as the children arrive to the service. Practitioners dedicate time to speak with parents and families informally at arrival and collection times. Practitioners know children and families well and a community spirit is evident.
- Children independently hang their coats and get settled in to their learning environment by choosing materials to use and play with. A daily routine is displayed and used to guide the daily activities. This routine provides opportunity for the children to come together as a group for large-group activity time and also to engage in individual work with Montessori materials and have free play time in the morning. A few children became restless as the daily routine involved sustained periods of sitting for table top activities. These children showed interest and eagerness in getting active and engaging in active play experiences.
- Meal times are a relaxed social experience where the children and practitioners join tables to sit together and discuss events from home or share news while eating.
- Transitions during the daily routine are adult-initiated as the practitioners give children a five minute verbal announcement to prepare for a change or to tidy-up. The children are eager to complete jobs that are handed out as part of a 'jobs rota' when dispensing the mats for break. There is opportunity to also include children as partners in announcing transitions.
- Sensitivity, warmth and playfulness are key features of the interactions that support secure relationships between practitioners and children. Strong attachments are evident within these relationships and the children eagerly look to share, converse and play with practitioners during the daily routine.
- A range of opportunities is provided to allow children develop an understanding of and a sense of belonging to their local community; these include regular walks through the neighbourhood, trips to local nature area, the library, playgrounds and a specially organised end-of-year trip to the beach or adventure parks.
- Practitioners frequently organise and prioritise visits to the service from individuals from the community to share knowledge and skills with the children. Displays enhance reflection for children of these special events as photographs exhibit in the learning environment memories from these visits. Recognition of children as individuals is also supported through the use of displays including a 'Friendship Quilt', 'Junior Chefs at Work' and images of the children in the service.

Actions advised

- To build on the range of learning experiences available to children, it is advised that practitioners review the daily routine to ensure that children have a more appropriate balance between active movement experiences and sitting for table-top activities during the pre-school session.
- To build on the very good practice of announcing transitions and times of change for children, it is advised that practitioners develop strategies to actively include children as part of these transition routines. Children will benefit from being involved and at times leading transitions as control is shared to build children's confidence and capacity to lead.

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 broad-based curriculum that is informed by the principles and practices of the Montessori Method of education and *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* is evident.
- Planning for curriculum implementation is organised on a long, medium and short-term basis. These plans outline topics and themes that will be introduced to children during planned activities. Children's emerging interests and investigations have not yet been established as core elements of curriculum planning.
- Children's learning and progression is monitored by practitioners through the observation of children's mastery of the graded Montessori materials. At the time of the inspection, these learning observations did not capture the holistic nature of children's developing skills, knowledge, attitudes and dispositions in learning.
- Different approaches to showcasing children's progression in learning throughout the year are in place. For children in their second pre-school year, individual folders are prepared and added to containing worksheets, photographs and sample art work. For children in their first pre-school year, a large poster is prepared at the end of the year that includes images of children, samples of their art work and comments recorded by the practitioner.
- The practitioners support children as they express their play intentions with comments and suggestions to guide and progress their learning and development. Acknowledgement and praise and a sense of fun are key features of the practitioners' interactions when the children ask for help or look to share their achievements.
- The learning environment and resources provide suitable opportunity for the children to engage in a range of play experiences. Discrete interest areas allow space for children to work alone, in pairs and in small groups at the tables or on the floor. A wide range of suitable resources stimulates children's interest in socio-dramatic play. These include, small world play items, dress-up clothes and pretend play props.
- Mark-making and creative art materials are freely available to children in the learning environment in the form of paper, pencils, paint, glue and scissors. There are limited open-ended, exploratory resources that support sensory and tactile manipulation for children. Planned experiences for the development of pre-literacy and mark-making skills focus heavily on worksheets and templates that do not readily facilitate exploratory learning.
- Practitioners effectively embed the use of Irish language in a natural way during circle time to stimulate the children's interest in the language and to enable them to recall the Irish word for items.
- Differentiation for children's learning and tailoring of planned learning experiences for the mixed age group of children is effectively supported by practitioners. Practitioners support children to experience success as they co-ordinate the materials and jigsaws in line with their ability to successfully complete these tasks.

Actions advised

- It is advised that practitioners develop the short and medium-term planning to support the development of children's needs and interests as starting points for curriculum development and implementation. The short-term planning template, available in the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* will support this.

- It is advised that practitioners begin to record children's individual learning and progression through the use of a range of observation methods, including individual learning records and the extension of individual learning portfolios for all children. This will support practitioners to review and celebrate children's individual progress, needs and build a rich picture of each child's learning journey.
- It is advised that practitioners develop practice to support the development of children's pre-literacy and numeracy skills in meaningful authentic contexts. A reduction in the use of templates, worksheets along with an enhancement of open-ended mark-making experiences and learning of numeracy skills through active play and use of the hands-on Montessori Materials will support this.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is good.
- Children present as happy, content and motivated as they confidently move around the room, play alone, in pairs and in small groups.
- Children show enjoyment and eagerness to engage in pretend play and playful interactions with practitioners. Children pretend to 'hide' and take on the roles of superheroes such as Batman along with other role-play characters such as doctors and patients.
- Children demonstrate competence and concentration as they engage in colouring, building tracks and creating 'birthday cakes' with play-dough. Children happily sing happy birthday as they pretend to celebrate the birthdays of their practitioners and peers.
- Children show recognition of their templates and creative items displayed on the wall. Children also demonstrate an awareness of literacy and the meaning of symbols with one child pointing out their 'letter' on the friendship quilt where their picture was placed with the first initial of each child's name.
- Children look to practitioners for support during play experiences when a problem arises. Children required support from practitioners at times to join in with others and create space for play. At jigsaw time, some children had their jigsaws chosen for them as practitioners decided on the level of complexity the children could solve.
- Children take pride in reviewing their art work and displays of photographs in the learning environment.
- Children enjoy tactile, hands on learning as they manipulate the play-dough materials and add toothpicks to their creations. There are limited opportunities for the children to extend and develop these exploratory learning skills.
- Children show interest in using books alone, in pairs and as a group. Children happily reviewed books from the book area while listening to a group story lead by the practitioner.

Actions advised

- It is advised that children be supported to develop their problem-solving skills so that they can independently chose, initiate, lead and direct their play and learning in the service.
- It is advised that children have access to more open-ended exploratory play experiences within the learning environment. Open-ended resources and materials that children can manipulate, explore and use to enhance their interactive socio-dramatic play will support this.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- A strong sense of partnership and team work is evident between both practitioners as they share roles and responsibilities in the service. Although no organised staff meetings take place between practitioners, informal discussions occur on days when both practitioners are present.
- The owner/practitioner takes the lead role in attending continuous professional development training and events organised by the local County Childcare Committee.
- Parents are frequently consulted and informed on practice in the service and about their child's learning and development. Newsletters from the pre-school to parents periodically share

information on events and also request resources for trips, special events and celebrations. An online social platform is frequently used to communicate with parents and practitioners.

- Parents are regularly invited in to the service throughout the year for different events, these include the Christmas nativity play, end-of-year graduation and the St. Patrick's Day celebrations.
- The service feeds in to three primary schools in the local area and has had informal communication opportunities with the local principal of one school. This involved the informal sharing of information as children begin the transition from pre-school to primary school. Practitioners talk to children about the transition to primary school to support children in their preparation for this significant change.

Actions advised

- It is advised that practitioners establish the practice of conducting regular staff meetings to review and identify improvement priorities and strategies and the impact these have on practice and children's learning and development.
- It is advised that practitioners engage in regular review and reflection that monitors the impact of curriculum that is being delivered. The *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* as a support tool provides practitioners with tools to frame reflection while giving concrete ideas and examples to support quality improvement.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is very good. The owner/practitioner attended the post-inspection feedback meeting and engaged in discussion on the progression of children's learning and development.

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	**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.

Published October 2018