An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)
Final Report

Setting name	Castlewarden Playschool
Setting address	Whitegate Hse Castlewarden Straffan Kildare W23WD92
TUSLA registration number	TU2015KE151
DCEDIY number	09KE0216
Date of inspection	25-02-2023
Date of issue of report	07-06-2023

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(s) 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	25-02-2023
Inspection activities undertaken • Pre-inspection meeting with the setting owner/manager • Review of setting documentation and records of children's learning and development • Review of the education resources and facilities • Observations of interactions during two morning sessions • Interaction with the children • Feedback meeting with the setting owner/manager and three early years educators	

Context of setting

Castlewarden Playschool is a privately-owned and operated setting. It was established in 1999 and moved into a purpose built premises in 2000. The setting provides part-time and sessional services, including two morning sessions to children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the morning of the inspection, there were twenty-seven children, most of whom were participating in the ECCE Programme, four educators, one of whom was the setting owner/manager, present. The owner/manager and three educators 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 was very good.
- A warm and welcoming atmosphere was evident in the setting. Children, parents and grandparents were greeted on arrival where there was an informal exchange of information. Children independently entered the setting where they were supported to wash their hands before becoming involved in their various learning experiences.
- The daily routine provided great opportunities for children to choose and organise their learning. During the inspection, both morning sessions came together for one large circle time. This resulted in some missed opportunities for quieter and younger children to contribute to the discussion. The manager reported that the doors between both learning environments rooms would normally be closed and that circle time would usually be organised in two individual groups.
- Meal time was a relaxed occasion where some educators sat with the children and engaged in rich conversations about family members and the children's plans for their birthday cakes.
- Most times of transition, where the children moved between areas and experiences were effectively facilitated. Children were provided with prior notice to prepare them for a change in the routine and the singing of a familiar song proved very effective in involving the children in cleaning up the environment.
- Relationships between educators and children were consistently kind and caring. The regular praise and encouragement provided to children in response to their positive actions and achievements was commendable.
- The key person approach, where educators were responsible for the overall learning and care needs of a small group of assigned children, was partially implemented. This was

evident in the documenting of children's learning where educators captured the learning for a select group of children.

- Many efforts were made to nurture each child's sense of belonging in the setting. Through the display of family photos, children's creative artwork and the many conversations between educators and children, the children presented as though they recognised themselves as unique individuals.
- Effective efforts were made to recognise and affirm the diverse community through the celebration of cultural days, such as the Lunar New Year, and a small selection of books.
- Strong links were reported between the setting, the local community and its members. Prior to Christmas, a local florist volunteered to visit the children and support them in preparing individual floral arrangements. The children also had opportunities to explore their community through their nature walks in the surrounding area.

Actions advised

- Educators are advised to review the routines of the day, ensuring that both sessions are planned and treated as two separate sessions. This would further support in the planning of experiences for children.
- Educators are advised to fully implement the key person approach. In doing so, this would positively impact the planning and organisation of the day-to-day experiences. Fully adopting this approach would also assist in the facilitation of small group experiences as well as ensuring consistently smooth transitions for all children.

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 good.
- The curriculum approaches included influences from both a play-based approach and the Montessori Method of Education. One room, consisting of the younger children, was referred to as the 'playroom' and was strongly play-based. The second room, referred to as 'Montessori', included children that were mostly in their second year of the ECCE Programme, and was strongly influenced by the Montessori Method of Education.
- Planning processes consisted of weekly and monthly themes aligned with the Montessori lessons. While there was some evidence to indicate that children's emergent interests were supported in practice, these were not evident in the curriculum plans.
- Various assessment approaches were used to gather information about children's learning and development, including regular documented observations, individual memory journals and a selection of photographs. The approaches used to analyse and inform the next steps in children's learning were not clearly evident.
- Interactions between educators and children were attentive and responsive. Many educators regularly sat with the children, offering support and guidance as needed.
- The indoor environments were well resourced with a wide variety of both Montessori and play materials. The dominant positioning of the tables in both learning environments meant that it was not possible to create many clearly defined spaces.
- All children had daily opportunities to engage in the spacious outdoor environment. The manager reported that the outdoors had recently been developed and at the time of the inspection, it offered children many attractive opportunities for socio-dramatic play, physical play and sensory learning experiences.
- There were opportunities for children to engage in a variety of play types, including construction, creative and imaginative play. Most educators engaged with children during their play.
- Children's mathematical language and thinking was intentionally promoted through the availability of puzzles, songs and the Montessori materials, such as the pink tower, brown stair and counting rods.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to further develop their assessment processes to consistently include strengths-based observations that positively acknowledge what children can do. Furthermore, educators are advised to include a detailed analysis and provision for the next steps in promoting children's learning and development. This would support educators in strengthening how they plan according to individual children's dispositions, values, skills, knowledge and understanding.
- Educators are advised to review the layout of the learning environments. Creating a variety of clearly defined play spaces would further support and enhance the quality of learning opportunities provided to children
- All educators are advised to consistently adopt an active role as partners in supporting and promoting children's learning through play. Guidance can be found in the 'Play' pillar of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide.*

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

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements was very good.
- The children presented as being very happy and content in the setting.
- The children demonstrated enjoyment during their learning experiences and were mostly well engaged. On the day of the inspection and during story time, some of the younger children became disengaged and restless.
- Children experienced great autonomy and were provided with many opportunities to make decisions about their learning.
- The children displayed a sense of their developing identity. This was particularly evident in relation to the older children who frequently shared stories and referred to family members.
- Children experienced success through their experiences and interactions. During the inspection, a child brought an educator to a table to share with her the collage she had created.
- The children worked well together. They chose materials from the shelves and often interacted and played with one another for extended periods of time.
- Many of the children were effective communicators using both non-verbal and verbal communication strategies. There were some missed opportunities for children, particularly younger and quieter children, to converse in small, safe and intimate groupings where their language and communicate skills could have been further developed and enhanced.

Actions advised

- Educators are advised to review the facilitation of story time in the 'playroom'. Keeping this period brief and at an earlier stage in the session would support children to remain engaged.
- Educators are advised to plan and prepare a small group experience that would intentionally support children to express their feelings, thoughts, and ideas. This would also provide an opportunity for children to reflect on and recall their learning.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was very good.
- Educators engaged in both informal and formal review processes. Formal team meetings took place monthly, minutes from which were recorded and used to inform future decisions. Educators reported regularly evaluating practice, making changes as needed to improve experiences for children.
- The manager demonstrated a clear understanding and an appreciation for the varied skill sets of the team. She encouraged educators to take on leadership roles, and in consultation with the team, to adapt and enhance practice as they saw fit.

- Clear roles and responsibilities were in place. For example, the manager and an educator greeted the parents each morning to ensure a consistent exchange of communication between educators and parents.
- The educators were proactive in engaging in professional learning opportunities. While one educator had completed the national Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) Programme, other educators had completed their Level 6 in Early Childhood Care and Education and training in creative outdoor play.
- The manager and educators valued the role of parents in their child's learning and often involved parents in the learning programme. They used informal and formal opportunities to exchange information with parents, such as daily text messages and monthly newsletters. Documented information about individual children's learning and development was shared with parents at the end of the academic year. Parent-educator meetings were also offered to parents of children who were due to transition to school.
- Clear settling-in procedures were in place to support new children starting in the setting. There was an initial visit, an exchange of documented information about the setting, an induction morning and a gradual setting-in period offered.
- The manager and educators were effective in supporting the children's transition to primary school. A principal visited the children in the setting each year and parents were supporting in making their application to schools. At the annual graduation ceremony, each child's time in the setting was celebrated. It was reported, that documented information was previously exchanged with schools in relation to children's learning and development.
- The manager reported a great working relationship with Early Childhood Ireland and the local childcare committee where she received regular support and guidance.

Actions advised

- Building on the effective partnership with parents, educators are advised to regularly share documented information on the individual child's learning and achievements with them. This will further support how parents are informed and consulted with as partners in their child's learning and development.
- The manager and educators are advised, in consultation with parents, to reintroduce the exchange of documented information between the setting and the primary school. This will greatly benefit and support a positive transition for children moving from the setting to school. The transition resources titled *Mo Scéal* from National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) would assist in this regard.

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	Very good
Quality of management and leadership for learning	Very good

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
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.*

APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report.

The educators and I have discussed the feedback outlined in the inspection report at our staff meetings. We have put an action plan in place to implement the report's recommendations.

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 1: Quality of context to support children's learning and development. Daily planned routines – There is a separate routine now in place for the two sessions as advised in the report. Key person approach - Is now documented and in place for the smaller group experiences.

Area 2: Quality of processes to support children's learning and development. Assessment observation & planning - Our service is adopting the format of the Aistear Early Childhood Curriculum, planning and observation template to document the children's learning and development rather than the one we previously used. This is shared with parents to inform them of their child's development and progress. Layout of the learning environments –We have now redesigned the layout of the areas, removing several pieces of equipment into storage to create more defined play spaces. Promoting children's learning through play – As recommended in the report to follow the guidelines of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide*, two educators from our team have been attending the Aistear and Síolta upskilling workshops in recent months, delivered by our local childcare committee. This information is shared and implemented, updated, and discussed at our monthly team staff meetings.

Area 3: Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements Facilitation of story time in the playroom and to have it earlier – and to have small group experiences. The story time now takes place earlier in the morning, with smaller groups as recommended in the report.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning Building effective partnerships with parents with a view to sharing documented information – Shared documentation with parents - Previously we used to share and send home the documentation to parents and often it would not be returned. The children's documented reports are shared and discussed on a one-to-one basis at our formal teacher meetings. As advised in the report, shared documented information will now be sent home monthly for parents to read and review. Parents are asked to sign their child's documents and return to the service. Mo Scéal Report moving from Preschool to Primary – Our service has reintroduced the "transition document Mo Scéal Moving from Preschool to Primary which is shared at our parent teacher meetings. It is also shared with the school principals who annually visit our service to meet the children who are transiting to their Primary School. Finally, we would like to express our appreciation for the valuable advice and recommendations shared with the educators and I throughout this report.