An Roinn Oideachais

Department of Education

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

Setting Name	Curious By Nature
Setting Address	Winetavern Stratford on Slaney Baltinglass County Wicklow W91N9T3
DCEDIY number	18WW0315
TUSLA REG NO.	TU2018WW504

Date of Inspection: 20-01-2022

This inspection took place in the context of public health restrictions necessary to limit the spread of Covid-19

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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 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 setting's provision in each area.

Early Years Education Inspection

Date of inspection	20-01-2022
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with setting manager/early years educator • Observation of interactions during the morning and afternoon pre-school sessions	 • Interaction with children • Review of relevant documents • Feedback to early years educators • Feedback to setting manager/early years educator

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Curious by Nature Pre-School was established in 2018. It is located in a rural area in Stratford/Baltinglass, Co. Wicklow. This private setting provides a morning and afternoon sessional service for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The provision of outdoor play and learning experiences is a key feature of this setting. The children have access to an indoor classroom, an outdoor classroom and a large outdoor play space. On the day of the inspection, the manager/early years educator, along with two early years educators and twenty seven children were present, across the two pre-school sessions. The manager/early years educator attended the post inspection feedback meeting.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the early years educators demonstrated a commendable commitment towards engaging with families and supporting the children's learning. They maintained an ongoing connection during this time, by facilitating the children's participation in online storytelling, yoga and music and movement. They also provided the children with resource packs, which included creative art materials, to enhance their learning experiences. 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 is excellent.
- The early years educators have very successfully created a nurturing and aesthetically pleasing environment, in which the children can learn and develop. The atmosphere is warm, calm and welcoming. The early years educators demonstrate a commendable commitment towards the provision of outdoor play and learning. The children enter the outdoor classroom to begin the preschool day and meet their friends, with great enthusiasm.
- The interactions between the early years educators and the children are exemplary. They share many warm and affectionate moments during the sessions and the early years educators use their in-depth knowledge of the children and their families to engage in rich conversations.
- The children's sense of identity and belonging is very effectively supported. The children and their families are reflected in the learning environment, through the many visual displays, which are thoughtfully displayed throughout the setting. In addition to this, the children's families regularly spend time in the setting, sharing their interests, planting trees, cooking and reading stories with the children.
- The early years educators consistently affirm the children in a positive and meaningful way. They sensitively acknowledge kind and caring behaviours, as they observe them and they promote the development of respectful relationships between the children.

- Snacktimes are viewed as a significant social occasion, where the children and early years educators sit down together to enjoy their food. This time is characterised by relaxed conversations where the children and the early years educators share information about themselves and their interests.
- The children are developing a very positive awareness of their local community. A range of community members have spent time with the children in the setting, including a *Garda*, a post person, a farmer and a lollipop person. These visits are documented through photographs, which are displayed prominently in the setting.
- A key person approach, which ensures that designated early years educators are the primary links between the home and setting, is in place. This promotes the development of positive relationships with parents and supports the early years educators in planning meaningful learning experiences for individual children.
- The early years educators have developed an in-depth understanding of the children's cultural backgrounds. They also support the children's awareness of diversity, through the variety of resources provided and through the learning programme.
- Transitions from one activity to another are used as purposeful learning opportunities. Songs and rhymes are used to good effect during the transitions, to promote the children's engagement.

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.
- Play is the central medium for learning and the early years educators are very committed to providing high quality play experiences. The children spend the majority of their time in the outdoor environment, whilst also having access to an indoor learning environment.
- The children have access to a very good variety of open-ended, natural resources. The early years educators have very thoughtfully prepared the environment to stimulate the children's thinking and engagement. The outdoor environment provides a variety of sheltered play spaces, each of which includes a range of open-ended resources including creative materials, sand, large wooden blocks and loose parts. These play areas provide the children with many opportunities to engage in deep level, exploratory play.
- The early years educators have developed clear goals for the children's learning. The learning programme is planned on long-term, medium-term and short-term bases. The long-term plan outlines the goals for the children's learning. The medium-term and short-term plans provide further detail on the themes and learning experiences. There is evidence that the daily learning experiences are consistently informed by the children's interests, questions and ideas.
- The early years educators document the children's learning, progress and achievements through the use of a computer application, which is shared with parents on an ongoing basis. They highlight the children's strengths and developing learning dispositions, along with plans to support their future learning. Aspects of the children's learning are shared on a daily basis, with more in-depth information being shared at the end of each week. Individual learning journals, which contain the children's unique paintings, art work and mark-making are also compiled for each child and are shared with their families on a regular basis. A large group journal is used to document the children's experiences and the development of shared projects.
- The early years educators are very skilled in supporting the children's learning. They act as responsive play partners, when the children invite them to do so. This was evident when they acted as guests at a birthday party and patients in the dental surgery. They listened carefully and followed the children's cues during these play experiences.
- Early literacy and numeracy is consistently supported through action songs, rhymes and stories, which are integrated throughout the sessions. The early years educators also promote the children's language skills, through the use of open-ended questions and extended discussions. A lending library has been introduced in the setting. The children browse the range of books available in the library, which is located at the entrance to the setting, on arrival and departure. They read the books at home with their family and exchange them for different books on return.

- The environment is print rich, with images and written signs used to identify the various play areas. The play areas are well resourced with paper, clipboards and writing utensils, along with weighing scales, calculators and telephones. These real life resources greatly enhance the children's play, their vocabulary and the development of early literacy and numeracy.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is excellent.
- The children present as highly competent and capable in their environment. They negotiate the various play spaces with ease, choosing where to spend their time and confidently selecting resources to enhance their play experiences.
- It is very evident that the children are developing many positive dispositions for learning, for example, curiosity, creativity, concentration and perseverance. This was observed throughout the sessions, as they engaged in deep level play and learning, for a sustained period of time.
- The children are developing a real appreciation of nature and the environment. During the inspection, some of the children realised that the bird feeder was empty and went to source some seeds to feed the birds. Many of the children drew attention to different aspects of nature during the sessions.
- The children have many opportunities to experience success during their learning experiences. They direct their own learning, confidently making decisions and choices in relation to their play.
- It is clear that the children are making sense of the world around them during their play. Through their play, they explore many concepts and experiences, such as, visiting the dentist, building a racing track for cars and hosting a birthday party.
- The children express their ideas and opinions with great confidence and enthusiasm. One child described the mixing of different paint colours to create a new colour as being one of his favourite activities. He demonstrated this with competence, as he mixed the paint and expressed his delight, as a new colour emerged.
- The children's voices are consistently respected and acted upon. This is evident in the way in which learning experiences are planned in response to the children's interests and ideas.
- The children are building very positive relationships and friendships with their peers. They seek out their friends and invite them to join them in their play. Some of the children asked their friends to take turns to push them on the swings, whilst others played happily together, for extended periods of time, in pairs and small groups.
- The children are developing their independent skills. They complete many tasks during the sessions, giving out lunches and tidying up. A helper routine, provides regular opportunities for all children to become involved in daily tasks.

AREA 4 QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is excellent.
- The manager/early years educator and early years educators present as extremely professional and caring. It is clear that they are highly committed to providing quality learning experiences for the children. The commitment to outdoor provision and the way in which it is promoted and supported is commendable.
- The structures that are in place to support the organisation of the children's educational experiences are highly effective. The early years educators discuss the children's learning on a daily basis. Formal planning and review meetings are conducted on a weekly and monthly basis. These meetings are documented and the actions are clearly identified. The team also use a computer application to share ideas and plans with their colleagues, on an ongoing basis.
- The early years educators are reflective and open in their approach and there is a very strong sense of teamwork and collaboration. Reflection is a key feature of their daily practice and it is evident that the learning programme is informed and enhanced by the early years educators' reflections. In addition to informal reflection, the early years educators consistently use the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* to provide a focus for their reflection and self-evaluation practices.

- The early years educators demonstrate a very strong commitment to continuing professional development. They engage in relevant professional learning programmes on an ongoing basis. As a result of the engagement in a wide range of training, the practitioners are very aware of the current research relating to the field of early learning and care. In recent times, the early years educators have completed learning programmes on play therapy, outdoor play, music and storytelling and mindfulness. The three early years educators have completed the Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years (LINC) Programme. There are structures in place for early years educators to share the learning from the training programmes that they have completed, with their colleagues.
- The manager/early years educator avails of support and advice from external agencies. The setting has also made links with the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) and with relevant professionals to support the participation of all children. The setting is also engaged with a programme that supports child wellbeing.
- Highly effective partnerships with parents and families are evident; they are actively encouraged to spend time in the setting. There is evidence of excellent two-way communication with parents and families. Parents are provided with detailed information on the learning programme and the benefits of outdoor play, from the outset. Parents' opinions and ideas are valued and welcomed. They are invited to provide feedback on specific areas of practice, for example, the sharing of children's learning. This feedback is then used to inform these practices.
- The early years educators have introduced effective strategies to support the children in the transition from the pre-school to primary school. These practices are guided by the setting's transitions policy. The manager/early years educator has developed good links with a number of the local schools. The early years educators support the children's understanding of the transition by including school uniforms in the dress up areas and using photographs of the school to promote discussion. The setting shares information on the children's learning with the primary school, with the consent of parents. The manager/early years educator has engaged in professional discussions around the transition with a teacher from a local 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	**Excellent**
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

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

- We welcomed the opportunity to showcase our outdoor service and we were delighted that the inspection was a strengths based approach.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

- The report reflects the Ethos of our learning environment and the learning opportunities the children are afforded on a daily basis.
- The report's findings provide parents both current and prospective with valuable information and an insight to our approach. This information will allow parents to feel confident that we provide a quality service which is supported and endorsed by the Department of Education. The report also promotes transparency of our service.
- We as a team found the inspection process very positive and we are fully committed to continually providing and promoting quality of education in our Early Learning and Care service for our children and families.