**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

# EARLY YEARS EDUCATION - FOCUSED INSPECTION

# REPORT

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| **Service Name** | Discoveryland |
| **Service Address** | 14 Newlands<br>Newton Road,<br>County Wexford. |
| **DCYA number** | 09WX0071 |

## Date of Inspection: 16-05-2018

An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

## 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

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| **Date of inspection** | 16-05-2018 |
| **Inspection activities undertaken**<br><br>• Meeting with owner/ manager<br>• Meeting with practitioners<br>• Observation of interactions during two pre-school sessions | • Interaction with children<br>• Review of relevant documents<br>• Post- inspection feedback meeting with the service manager and practitioners |

## CONTEXT OF SERVICE

Discoveryland is a privately-owned and managed full day care service established seventeen years ago. It is located in a converted private dwelling and provides two morning and one afternoon pre-school sessions using the Montessori approach to its curriculum. As part of this inspection, the two morning sessions were observed. Across the two rooms, two lead practitioners, two practitioners and twenty-two pre-school children were in attendance. A significant number of families attending this service come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, with many children presenting with English as an additional language. The service has recently undergone a number of changes in staffing. The lead practitioners, practitioners and the owner/manager attended the post-inspection feedback meeting. 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 good.
- Parents bring their children into the room and settle them at an activity before leaving. Practitioners take the time to chat to parents at arrival and collection times.
- The daily routine is on the wall but is not visible to the children. Transitions from one activity to the next are signalled by the practitioners using verbal reminders.
- Children have developed secure relationships with the practitioners. Encouragement and praise are offered to the children during the sessions. At the time of the inspection, a key person approach had not been established. This approach is one in which each practitioner is responsible for developing close, secure relationships with assigned children and acts as a link between the pre-school and the parents.
- The practitioners provide suitable guidance to support positive behaviour among children. This was evident when they were encouraging children to play cooperatively together and to be kind to their friends.
- The uniqueness of the children is reflected in the birthday display and also in the display of children's names on their coat hooks.
- There were limited resources reflecting the cultural diversity of the children in the pre-school groups and there remains scope to extend the visibility of the children and their families within the room.
- Parents are invited to the end-of-year graduation. In the past, a number of parents such as a doctor and a Garda have come to share their work experience with the children in the service.

*Actions advised*

- It is advised that the practitioners make the daily routine more visible to children in the rooms. This could be achieved by using photographs of the children engaged in activities and displaying this at child height.
- To build on the good relationships already established with the children and parents, it is advised that the service introduce a key person approach. This can be used for sharing information on children's learning with their parents.

- Greater celebration and visual representation of the cultural diversity of the children and their families within the service is advised. This can be achieved by displaying photographs of the children, discussing family celebrations and making visible the children's home language within the rooms.

## 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.
- The practitioners undertake monthly and weekly theme-based planning. The daily curriculum plan is linked to the themes of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. At the time of the inspection, these plans made occasional reference to the interests identified for the group of children but did not reflect the individual children's emergent interests.
- The service promotes a Montessori curriculum. A variety of Montessori materials is accessible to the children, including spooning and pouring activities, pre-writing activities and knobbless cylinders. There was no systematic recording of the children's progression in their use of the Montessori materials at the time of the inspection.
- A developmental checklist and observation template reflecting *Aistear* are used to record children's learning. These include some broad steps identified to promote children's learning.
- The practitioners compile the children's art work and examples of their template-based activities into a memory book that is given to parents at the end of the year.
- The practitioners engage the children in positive, respectful interactions. On occasions, some open-ended questions and prompts were used to support the children's thinking and problem-solving skills.
- The daily routine provides adequate time for children to engage in self-directed play. The limited range of play resources is not clearly accessible and offer restricted play experiences to the children.
- The practitioners regularly use circle time to introduce stories and to facilitate discussion with and among the children. On the day of the inspection, the weekly theme of bees was discussed during the storytelling. The children were encouraged by the practitioner to take an active part by asking them to think about what might bees do and they were asked if they like honey.
- Children have access to the outdoor area on a daily basis and this provides them with valuable opportunities to practise their physical skills.
- Overall, the practitioners demonstrate an awareness of the importance of developing the children's emergent literacy and numeracy skills and understanding. Some of the more effective strategies include counting how many children are present and the use of the stories. An undue emphasis is placed on the overly formal introduction and teaching of letters, shapes and numbers; unnecessary use of dot-to-dot activities and closed templates were noted.
- Children with additional needs are well-integrated in the pre-school groups. The practitioners have undertaken training in Lámh, a system of communication, in order to support the children to participate and progress in their learning.

*Actions advised*

- To assist in incorporating children's emerging interests, and in order to reflect the two-year cycle into the planning process, the practitioners are advised to explore and use the resources, self-review templates and short-term planning templates available in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide.*
- It is advised that the practitioners develop and extend their practice in relation to the learning observations to include the identification of children's strengths, skills and learning dispositions, and clear next steps that support progression in their learning.
- The use of the 'Indoor Environment Audit' from the *Aistear Toolkit* is advised to support the enhancement of the current play areas and play resources in order to further the children's learning through play.
- Practitioners are advised to reduce the emphasis on the formal teaching of letters, shapes and numbers and the use of resources such as workbooks and template-based activities. To further support the practitioners in this approach, the additional use of everyday play activities used purposefully will support the development of children's literacy and numeracy.

## AREA 3

## QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is good.
- On the day of the inspection, the children were generally happy and engaged with a number of them achieving success and mastery in their self-selected activities such as construction play.
- At the time of the inspection, an imbalance between whole-group activities led by the practitioners and small-group activities was evident. This occasionally led to a small number of children becoming distracted and disengaged as was observed during the large-group activities such as circle time and the art and craft activity.
- Children are learning the social rules of the service. They take part in the tidy-up routines and the practitioners in one room select a child to give out the cups, spoons and plates at snack time.
- The children are learning to play cooperatively together with some examples of good friendships being developed. As children arrive, they are warmly greeted and hugged by their friends.
- The children enjoy many opportunities to express their feelings and thoughts. On the day of the inspection, a small group of children were observed reading a book on emotions. The practitioner supported them to think about their own emotions and to think about sharing and examples of happy and sad feelings
- The children's sense of identity and belonging is reflected in the self-portraits and art and craft activities linked to the themes are on display.
- The children regularly explore early mathematical concepts and use mathematical language in meaningful contexts. A number of children used mathematical language in their play during the inspection visit. They counted out the cushions for circle time and engaged in a game outdoors that helped to develop their understanding of number and time, 'What time is it, Mr. Wolf?'
- Children are developing an awareness of the natural environment. They plant daffodils for Mother's Day and on the day of the inspection were observed planting seeds.

*Actions advised*

- To optimise learning and offer children individualised support matched to their stage of development, it is advised that regular small-group activities led by the key person be introduced.
- The provision of opportunities for all children to cultivate an appreciation of themselves as competent, capable individuals and as members of the group is advised. This could be achieved by offering children in both pre-school rooms opportunities to take part in a child-helper routine that could include a number of jobs throughout the session.
- To further support the children's creative, imaginative and artistic development, it is advised that practitioners reduce the emphasis on the adult-planned arts and craft activities. The provision of increased opportunities for the children to access materials for creative art and mark-making is advised.

## AREA 4

## QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is good.
- The practitioners chat together informally every day and whole staff meetings take place every two months. These are used to discuss planning and any outstanding issues. Decisions taken are recorded.
- The owner/manager accesses support and information from Early Childhood Ireland and the local County Childcare Committee. She also accesses support from a network of providers.
- The owner/manager offers formal appraisals to all staff every three months in order to support them in their practice.
- A number of staff have recently joined the service. Good teamwork and partnership was evident among the staff and the leadership role is transferred easily during the sessions.
- A number of staff have engaged in further professional development. A member of staff has recently completed a course leading to a level eight qualification in early childhood education while another member of staff has completed training in the Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years (LINC) Programme. Staff have also taken part in training on 'Diversity and Equality' and use this learning to inform their practices in the service.

- The practitioners use a variety of approaches for sharing information with parents such as a parents' noticeboard and social media. An information meeting is held with parents at the start of the year on the service's policies and procedures and a newsletter is sent home very six weeks. In addition to the informal daily conversations between the practitioners and parents, formal meetings take place twice a year to share information on children's learning and progression.
- Many of the children attend the service on a full-time basis and for these children, a staggered settling-in period is provided over the summer months. For the small number of children attending the sessional service, the manager keeps parents updated on their settling-in by phone.
- The owner/manager knows the local schools and staff very well and shares information on the children's progression if the parents request this. The practitioners discuss the children's move from pre-school to primary school with the children. At the time of the inspection, the service had not developed any other formal procedures for supporting the children's move to the primary school or for engaging formally with the schools.

*Action advised*

- The practitioners are advised to develop a policy outlining the procedures to support children's transition from the pre-school to the primary school. The addition of a 'transitions box' that includes uniforms of the local school would assist practitioners in their discussions with the children.

## CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The owner /manager and the staff from the pre-school rooms engaged positively and professionally in the post-inspection feedback meeting. The capacity of the staff in the service, Discoveryland, to implement the actions advised above is good.

## Summary of Overall Inspection

| Area | Quality Level |
|---|---|
| Quality of context to support children's learning and development | **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 | **Good** |

## Language used in Early-Years Education-focused Inspection reports

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| **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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