An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

Setting Name	Dún Laoghaire Montessori School
Setting Address	Dún Laoghaire Presbyterian Church York Road Dún Laoghaire County Dublin
DCYA number	13DR0264

Date of Inspection: 21-01-2019

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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	21-01-2019
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with setting owner and practitioner • Observation of interactions during the session • Interaction with children	• Review of relevant documents • Feedback to setting owner and practitioners

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Dún Laoghaire Montessori School is a privately owned setting. The setting was established in 2013 and is located in Dún Laoghaire Presbyterian Church. It provides a sessional, pre-school service five mornings a week for children enrolled in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the morning of the inspection, thirteen children and two practitioners, one of whom is the owner, were present. 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.
- A welcoming, caring and warm atmosphere is evident in the setting. The children and parents are greeted by name in a friendly and relaxed manner.
- Relationships are positive and sensitive. The practitioners know the children well and relate to them in a nurturing and responsive way. A key worker approach is in operation in the setting and the children have built very good attachments with both practitioners.
- The flexible daily routine allocates time for the children to actively engage in a balance of self-chosen and adult-directed activities. Transitions between the daily activities are smooth and calm; advanced notice, a timer and a bell are used to support the children's effective management of transitions between activities.
- Snack time is a social occasion. The children and practitioners sit together and engage in many discussions, including conversations about what the children plan to do during free-play time. In preparation for snack time, the children are encouraged to choose where to sit, they wash their hands and retrieve their own bags.
- In order to nurture the children's sense of identity and belonging, each child is represented in the environment in photographs, art-work displays and on a family tree. The combination of photographs and self-drawings to represent all children on the family wall is commended.
- The practitioners successfully provide opportunities for the involvement of families and the promotion of diversity in the setting. Parents are invited to Christmas events and to share their cultural experiences and information with the children. For example, a Muslim family shared its Ramadan experience with the group, and parent from America and Poland spoke about their home countries.
- The setting has developed good links with the local community and, in particular, with the church and groups that use the church facilities. For example, children use the grounds of the church for nature walks and on occasion they prepare the church flowers. From time-to-time they visit the parent and toddler group. Invites are also extended to people working in the locality, such as the Reverend, librarian and lollipop lady, to visit the setting.

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 very good.
- A Montessori, play-based curriculum is informed by Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. The practitioners demonstrate good pedagogical knowledge of Aistear and have successfully integrated a play-based curriculum into their Montessori practice.
- Curriculum planning is organised on long-term and short-term bases. The long-term plan provides an overview of the curriculum activities linked to seasons and cultural events; these activities along with adulted-selected, themed activities and Montessori work are used to inform the weekly activities.
- Information on the children's learning and development is gathered through photographs, work journals, Montessori mastery records, developmental reports, anecdotal notes and observations. At the time of the inspection, there was variation in the number of observations carried out on each child and information pertinent to children's skills and the next steps in their learning were not recorded.
- High quality adult/child interactions are apparent. The practitioners engage with children at their physical level and spontaneously follow their interests. They provide the children with opportunities to engage in activities at a pace that is suitable to their ages and stages of development. The practitioners use soft and encouraging tones and offer ongoing support as they respond to the children.
- Children are viewed as competent and confident learners. Adult-led activities are offered as free-choice activities and the children are given a choice to participate or not in group activities.
- To support the children's positive behaviour, the practitioners identify and encourage children's positive engagement and their focus is on children's efforts as the children engage in activities.
- The indoor environment is very well maintained, safe and inviting. The children have access to an outdoor play area and a large indoor hall for gross motor play and large group activities. The indoor environment is set out into discrete areas and resources are easily accessible to the children. On the day of inspection, there was potential to increase provision for sensory and creative play and to include materials such as water and paint.
- The practitioners are highly effective in fostering the children's emergent language, literacy and numeracy skills. This is achieved through the use of story, song and action rhymes throughout the day and the children's access to high quality books, Montessori equipment and a range of mark-making materials. The practitioners support and promote the children's communication skills through engagement in general conversations and active listening.
- The practitioners promote an inclusive environment; their recognition and accommodation of diversity is commendable. A strong emphasis is placed on developing children's emotional skills and their ability to interact with their peers. The practitioners link closely with parents and with external agencies to support children with additional needs. The setting has not yet availed of support under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) although the practitioners are open to seeking support should the need arise.

Actions advised

- To ensure that each child's learning and development is monitored more closely, the practitioners are advised to review and extend their current methods of observation. In doing so, they are advised to include a more detailed account of the children's interests, needs and dispositions and to use this information to guide the next steps in the children's learning. It is further advised that this information be used to inform weekly planning.
- The practitioners are advised to undertake an audit of the environment using the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide. This will help guide the development of socio-dramatic, sensory and creative play spaces. It is also advised that the practitioners ensure that a plentiful supply of these materials be made freely available to the children during free-play time.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is very good.
- The children's sense of well-being is evident in their high levels of engagement, motivation and enjoyment in their learning. They display highly developed concentration skills; this was particularly evident as they engaged in mark-making and drawing activities.
- The children are confident in making decisions and show initiative in choosing activities. Most children use equipment independently, with very few seeking assistance from the practitioners.
- The children manage their self-help and personal hygiene needs successfully. They use the toilet and washed their hands independently. They are happy to take on helper roles as they assist with ringing the bell and in organising large group activities.
- The children's sense of self is emerging. They confidently introduce themselves, discuss their family and on many occasions share their achievements in activities with the practitioners. For example, a child who was building a row of houses from bricks invited the practitioner to have a look at what he had built.
- Children actively explore and engage with many Montessori and free-play activities. The time allocated to Montessori activities affords the children opportunities to plan and complete activities to their satisfaction and to move onto another activity if they wish; less time is allocated time for free-play and does not allow for the same level of children's engagement.
- The children's fine and gross motor skills and their imaginations are developing well. During the inspection, sports cones and bean bags became ice-cream cones and kinetic sand was used as different types of food and animals.
- They children demonstrate highly developed drawing skills. For example, one child drew a full picture of herself and others going on a picnic to the mountain, and another child drew what he saw while looking at dinosaurs in a book.
- The majority of children demonstrate effective social and communication skills. Many children demonstrate the ability to play together, to share, take turns, and make requests and to listen and ask for help as required. Most can ask and answer questions in context.
- Children show a good early understanding of numbers and letters. This was observed when they participated in Montessori sand letter activities and when they wrote their own names on their mark making and drawing work.

Action advised

- The practitioners are advised to extend the length of free-play time to afford the children opportunities to fully explore equipment and to master tasks.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is excellent.
- Regular meetings and daily discussions between the manager and practitioner are used as opportunities to reflect on, plan and discuss issues and concerns. A record of meetings and agreed decisions are kept.
- The owner's commitment and her clear vision for the direction of the work to the setting, along with the respectful teamwork and communication with the second practitioner, contributes to the professional atmosphere in the setting. The owner's vision for the setting is strongly evident in practice.
- There is clarity around the practitioners' roles and responsibilities. On the morning of the inspection, it was very evident that the owner is a positive role model who works alongside the practitioner in a collaborative manner. Both the owner and practitioner have opportunities throughout the day to lead learning.
- Links with St Nicolas Montessori, the local childcare committee and Early Childhood Ireland have been established for external support and training. The owner engages with other early years professionals during monthly network meetings. The owner has recently participated in the Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) in Early Years programme and reports that information gained during the training was purposefully used to enhance the quality of provision for children.

- Good channels of communication have been established with parents. Information on the children's learning and development is regularly documented and shared with parents, both formally and informally during daily chats and at parents' meetings. Information is also shared in a parents' pack that includes the setting's policy and procedures, through email, phone conversations and on the parents' notice board.
- The setting has established a consistent approach to settling children into the setting. This includes group meetings for parents and play visits prior to children starting in the pre-school. On the first day of settling in, all family members including grandparents and parents are welcome to visit. A phased settling-in period where parents are welcome to stay with their children until they are fully settled is encouraged.
- To support the children's transition to primary school, the practitioners engage the children in group discussions regarding the move, look at the schools website and share photographs of the school with the children. They have also established links with the school personnel, information is shared with parents' consent and the principal comes to visit the children.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the setting 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	**Very Good**
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	**Very Good**
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

Thank you for your detailed report on our Montessori School. We at Dun Laoghaire Montessori School found the inspection to be very helpful and beneficial to all staff and the children.

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 2 – Quality of processes to support children's Learning and Development

1. Current methods of observation have been reviewed and extended. The number of observations on file depends on length of time a child has been in the Montessori.
2. An audit of the environment has been completed again using the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide.* Socio-dramatic, sensory and creative play continues to occur through our messy play, sensorial life sections and free play time which are freely available to the children

Area 3 – Quality of Children's Learning Experiences and Achievements

1. Free play time in our Montessori is now very lengthy and child led. We will continue to ensure children enjoy this time.