An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)

Final Report

Setting name	EARLY DAYS ACADEMY
Setting address	Level 3 Bridgewater Shopping Centre Arklow County Wicklow Y14Y744
TUSLA registration number	TU2020WW001
DCEDIY number	20WW0348
Date of inspection	06-12-2023
Date of issue of report	07-03-2024

What is an Early Years Education Inspection?

The Early Years Education Inspection model is used to provide evaluative information, advice and support in relation to the education of children aged birth to six years in early learning and care settings. The inspections will affirm good practice and provide advice to support internal quality development processes that optimise children's education experiences and outcomes.

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	06-12-2023
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 a number of sessions • Interaction with the children • Feedback meeting with the setting owner/manager and early years educators	

Context of setting

EARLY DAYS ACADEMY is a privately-owned sessional early learning and care (ELC) setting located in a shopping centre, in Arklow town, County Wicklow. The setting operates two morning sessions for children who are participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the day of the inspection, eleven children were in attendance with four educators. The two owner/managers and four 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 excellent.
- There was a commendably, nurturing and affirming atmosphere evident in the setting.
- The educators greeted the children and parents warmly as they entered the learning environment. It was clear that the educators had established positive relationships with the families, as they gave parents ample time to engage in meaningful and relaxed conversations.
- The educators had developed strong emotional bonds and attachments with the children; this was supported by the educators implementing a key person approach. This approach significantly supported them to work independently with children, to document the children's learning and development and to share this information with parents.
- The educators knew the children and their families well; they were highly knowledgeable about the children's personalities, needs and individual preferences.
- The educators planned well-paced routines and had developed a 'now and then' visual display of activities at the children's height. This display supported the children to understand the sequence of programme activities.
- The children were active agents in choosing and organising their learning and development activities. They chose their play materials, play partners and planned their activities according to their needs and interests.
- Snack time was a social occasion for the children; the children independently took out their own snacks and the educators sat and ate with them. Both the children and the educators had great fun and enjoyment sharing stories of their 'elf's' performances at home.
- Transitions were carefully planned and implemented with the individual needs of children in mind; on entry to the learning environment the children were encouraged to announce their presence by posting their photographical image on a visual attendance display. In addition,

the use of visual routines, verbal prompts, songs and timers supported the children's ease of moving from one activity to another.
- The educators had developed meaningful opportunities to include parent's participation in the setting; they encouraged parents to access their lending library, they invited parents to comment on their child's activities at home in their learning journals and invited parents into the setting for Christmas concerts, graduation day and to read books and discuss their careers.
- The educators effectively promoted diversity and had created an inclusive environment. They had developed numerous photographic displays of the children and their families and had created visual displays to support the ongoing development of communication skills for children with special educational needs and for children for whom English was an additional language. These communication prompts were actively promoted by the educators to create an inclusive environment for all children to engage in.

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 very good.
- To support the children's learning and development, the educators developed a broad-based curriculum, informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and with the use of some materials from the Montessori Method of Education.
- The planning for curriculum implementation was organised on a long-term, medium-term and short-term basis. Medium-term plans were informed by seasonal, themed and cultural events and short-term plans reflected the children's emergent interests.
- The educator's assessment approaches were highly effective. Daily notes captured the children's voices and anecdotes, photographic images, children's artwork and completion of *Aistear* learning record templates and learning journals for the children supported their assessment. The educators skilfully documented the children's learning progression and meaningfully planned next steps for their learning and development. The children had access to their learning journals daily and were encouraged to bring them home regularly, at least once a fortnight.
- The educators had developed visual displays of the children's engagement in past learning experiences and achievements. These showcased the children's active explorations and thinking and reasoning skills and included; making snow and ice painting, building robots, painting a large cardboard Santa sleigh and various Halloween activities.
- There was an appropriate balance between adult-initiated and child-initiated learning and development activities.
- The educators were very attuned to the verbal and non-verbal cues and needs of the children.
- The educators engaged with the children as play partners, following their lead in activities and maintaining a balance of listening and talking. There were some missed opportunities by the educators to extend the children's thinking and reasoning skills through open-ended questions.
- The educators had created commendable learning environments; these included purposefully structured and inviting interest areas that encouraged the children's active play engagement and which promoted their curiosity, creativity, imagination and desire for exploration. Interest areas included; book areas, home areas, a shop area inclusive of highly equipped seasonal hot chocolate stand, construction area, socio-dramatic area, mark-making area and a messy play area. An ample roof-top outdoor environment was used daily by the children.
- The resources were a blend of real and wooden open-ended materials, the children used these impressively to extend their play experiences, particularly when operating the 'hot

chocolate stand' and 'shop'. Materials included pots, pans, cookies, straws, cups, foam, pine leaves, play-dough, rice, raisons, utensils and nuts and bolts.
- The educators had created print-rich environments which supported the children's natural and fun engagement in literacy and numeracy opportunities; they counted 'one to ten' in different languages, matched numbers through activities and songs, used paper money in 'the shop' and engaged in mark-making through their use of whiteboards, chalk and drawing.
- The educators provided the children with many hands-on science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics (STEAM) experiences. They played with a diverse range of construction materials such as bricks, nuts and bolts, used magnets, calculators and toy cash register, mixed colours with droppers, created different colour foam and melted foam snow.

Action advised

- In further enhancing children's play and learning experiences, the educators are advised to develop and extend children's communication skills and thinking and reasoning language during their play activities (sustained shared thinking). They are further advised to promote children's learning through peer-support interactions and engagement opportunities.

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

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements was excellent.
- The children were very well settled, secure and content in the setting.
- They clearly enjoyed their play experiences and were impressively interested and enthusiastic in their learning. They played co-operatively in pairs and in small groups.
- The children were effectively supported by the educators to build strong self-help skills, make choices and develop positive learning dispositions such as creativity, independence, resilience and imagination.
- The children were affirmed and supported to self-regulate and name their emotions in ways appropriate to their stage of development. The educators had created child-friendly emotion visuals and a 'calm cosy corner' that was inviting to the children.
- The children had opportunities to reflect on their learning experiences and make connections to past, present and future learning during large-group time discussions. The educators prompted the children to assess the weather and demonstrate colours and letters using Lámh sign language.
- The educators had developed a strong sense of identity and belonging for the children; they had developed creative 'All about Me' forms, birthday and art gallery displays and had developed a large family tree made of cardboard that included photographs of the families as leaves. In addition, many visual aids in the children's home language were prominently displayed around the learning environments.
- The educators had nurtured children's strong connections to local community members; they had invited the *Gardaí* into the pre-school for road safety week and they regularly visited the 'farmers market' and 'baker' in the shopping centre and engaged in music sessions with the 'music lady' twice a month. An arts and crafts session with a member of Wicklow county council was planned for the coming week.
- The children displayed great enjoyment and pleasure in the many interactive experiences of songs, rhymes, jingles and storytelling throughout the morning.
- The educators enthusiastically captured the children's voices and made their comments visible on their artwork and within their learning journals.
- The children engaged in a range of sensory-rich experiences, both indoors and outdoors; they played with tuff trays using small world polar bears and snow and decorated a mini

Christmas tree with a variety of textured decorations. They had access to water, sand with large hand diggers, stones, blocks, cardboard and art supplies.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was very good.
- There was a professional ethos in the setting. The management team had strong oversight over the management of the setting, they articulated a clear vision and were committed to providing a quality service to the children and their families.
- The team met weekly informally to reflect on programme activities, share information and address any identified supports for the children. The management team organised formal meetings once a term for the whole team alongside colleagues from a sister setting. They used these meetings to discuss operations, policies and procedures and conduct internal review processes. Agendas and minutes of meetings, recorded and documented decision outcomes.
- The team engaged in some self-evaluation processes at termly meetings, the management team advised that they had used the resources of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to support this process.
- The educators were provided with non-contact time twice a week to review and plan programme activities and complete the children's assessments.
- The management team carried out support and supervision meetings with the educators three times per year.
- The educators were supported to engage in continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities; they had completed behaviour management training and were currently engaged in sensory processing in early learning and Lámh communication courses.
- The educators had developed commendable two-way communications with parents; they engaged in informal chats and formal meetings as needed, and continuously engaged and consulted parents as partners on their children's learning and development progression. They had developed a parent's notice board which was regularly updated with activities overview and support information on child development and nutrition. In addition, they communicated children's learning and development through daily updates on social media applications and monthly newsletters.
- The educators had developed effective settling-in strategies, which included onsite visits over the summer and encouragement of parents to stay with their child until they had fully settled upon commencement. The educators had implemented highly-effective transition policies and strategies for children moving from pre-school to primary school, these included; scheduled visits from the principals of three local feeder schools, development of transition leaflets for parents, completion of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) *Mó Scéal* templates and the inclusion of books, and photographs of the schools and uniforms in the dress up area.

Actions advised

- To further enhance internal review and self-evaluation processes at termly team meetings, the management and educators are advised to consistently engage with formal self-evaluation templates to inform quality action planning. This will support the division of team responsibilities in progressing quality improvement practices to support the children's learning and development. The resources in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* will support this process.
- In ensuring consistency in quality developments amongst the team in both ELC settings, the management are advised to create opportunities to effectively utilise and share the pedagogical expertise and varied skill sets of all staff.

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	Excellent
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.*

The following resources can be used by ELC settings in their quality improvement:

Aistear Siolta Practice Guide

Department of Education Insights – Quality in Early Years Education webinars

APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report.

We are very pleased with the outcome of our recent DES inspection and welcome the valuable feedback we have received. We welcome the support and positive feedback given during the post-inspection discussion with our early years educators and management.

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

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