An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

Setting Name	Geraldine Mullen's Little Rascals Montessori Pre-school
Setting Address	Cooley Fuerty Castlecoote F42 FP40 County Roscommon
DCYA number	09RN0024

Date of Inspection: 23-01-2020

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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	23-01-2020
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with setting manager and practitioner • Observation of interactions during a session	 • Interaction with children • Review of relevant documents • Feedback to setting manager and practitioner

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Geraldine Mullen's Little Rascals Montessori Pre-school is a privately-owned and operated setting. It was established in 2001 and offers a morning session for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. On the day of the inspection, eight children, one practitioner, and the setting manager were present. The setting manager and practitioner 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 is good.
- The atmosphere in the setting is welcoming and friendly. Children, older siblings and parents are greeted individually on arrival. Most of the families have been attending the setting for many years and, as a result, the practitioners know them very well.
- Snack time is a relaxed and social occasion. Children and practitioners sit together and engage in natural conversations about their siblings and family members.
- A clear distinction was made between work time and play time during the session. Opportunities for children to make decisions about their learning were limited; children were often redirected from activities such as socio-dramatic play to work time, involving jigsaws and puzzles.
- Relationships between practitioners and children are secure and respectful. Practitioners consistently show warmth and positive regard for children and their families.
- Children's sense of belonging is promoted in the physical environment through the various visual displays. There are photographs of children and their families and representations of children's artwork displayed throughout the environment.
- Practitioners provide verbal notice to inform children that a change is now happening in the daily routine. A lack of prior notice and a large number of transitions during the session impacted on children's learning experiences.
- The practitioners have made effective links with the local community. For example, the children recently attended a play in Athlone and members of the locality regularly visit the setting. These events support children in gaining an awareness and an appreciation of the local community.

Actions advised

- Practitioners are advised to review the daily routine and to provide children with greater opportunities to have autonomy in choosing and organising their own learning experiences.
- The practitioners are advised to minimise the number of transitions during the daily routine and to increase the use of visual and auditory aids in signalling pending changes. This will assist children in remaining sustained in their learning experiences while also further supporting them to manage these transitions.

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 fair.
- A play-based curriculum, linked to the themes and goals of *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*, is used to support children's learning and development.
- The short-term curriculum plans incorporate adult-chosen themes, seasonal events and children's interests.
- Practitioners observe children's learning using a variety of methods, including individual journals, monthly observation records and worksheets. These place some emphasis on children's dispositions, values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding.
- The environment provides a variety of types of play, including construction play, socio-dramatic play and imaginative play. During times of child-initiated play, children have opportunities to engage alone, with peers, and/or with the practitioners.
- The indoor environment is well maintained and safe. It offers a wide selection of play resources, including a small selection of Montessori materials.
- During the inspection, the children did not have an opportunity to engage in the outdoor environment or to develop their gross motor skills.
- Practitioners facilitate some effective interaction strategies with children. They are attentive and responsive to the children. On the day of the inspection, practitioners did not take full advantage of opportunities to extend children's learning and language development.
- Practitioners have been proactive in availing of additional supports for children with additional needs. For example, an application through the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) has secured ongoing mentoring to support the engagement of all learners in the setting.

Actions advised

- Practitioners are advised to regularly document children's skills, interests and learning dispositions in their observation records. As part of this process, the use of this information to inform the short-term plan will help to ensure that the learning programme is more reflective of the individual children and the progression of their interests and strengths.
- Practitioners are advised to provide all children with daily opportunities to engage in the outdoor environment. Where this is not possible, the provision of opportunities to promote children's gross motor skills in the indoor environment is advised.
- Practitioners are advised to broaden their use of interaction strategies that extend children's thinking and language during play. The 'Interactions' pillar in the online *Aistear*, *Síolta Practice Guide* offers advice and guidance in this regard.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is fair.
- Children present as happy and content. They are at ease with the practitioners, their peers and the learning environment.
- Children demonstrate particularly high levels of enjoyment and engagement when they make decisions about where, what and with whom they play.
- Many children displayed a sense of achievement during the session. For example, two children worked together to independently complete a puzzle; they celebrated their success and called on a practitioner to share their achievement. Currently, the children do not have access to the documented observations about their learning.
- Children demonstrate a developing sense of identity and an ability to describe their interests and personal experiences. For example, a group of children made reference to their Roscommon jerseys and a child discussed his up-and-coming birthday plans.
- Many children rely heavily on practitioners when they are required to respond to different social situations. Practitioners are quick to help children to resolve the problem and to reinforce their expectations of appropriate behaviour.
- Most children demonstrate the ability to communicate their thinking and ideas. This was evident on the day of the inspection as a child was very articulately discussed and described his favourite dinosaurs.
- A small minority of children use mathematical language naturally in their conversations with peers and practitioners. Practitioners also place an emphasis on the formal teaching of numbers and colours at circle time and through the use of commercial worksheets.

Actions advised

- Practitioners are advised to include children's observations in their individual journals and to provide them with ongoing access to their journals. This will assist in promoting children's awareness of their changing and developing abilities and in developing their capacities to make connections between their past and present learning experiences.
- Practitioners are advised to consistently empower all children with the necessary skills to independently resolve disagreements as they arise and to build relationships with their peers.
- Practitioners are advised to use every day playful opportunities to promote children's early language, literacy and numeracy skills. To this end, they are advised to reconsider the use of worksheets and the more formal teaching of these skills.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is fair.
- The practitioners are provided with generous amounts of time and space each week to assess and plan for children's learning and development. Practitioners reflect on practice informally on a daily basis. There is potential to further optimise the use of these planning times.
- In previous years, practitioners have engaged in professional development opportunities in relation to *Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* and the *Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education*. More recently, the manager has completed the nationally accredited Leadership for Inclusion in Early Childhood (LINC) programme. *Síolta* and the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* are not used regularly to inform quality assurance practices in the setting.
- Practitioners exchange information with parents through daily informal conversations, a texting system, and the sharing of children's journals. Documented observations of children's learning and development are shared with parents at the end of the ECCE year.
- Close links exist between the setting and the local primary school. Previously, a teacher visited the setting and engaged in conversations with children. The school principal and teachers also invite the children to visit the school and involve them in their annual school tour and sports day.

Actions advised

- The setting manager and practitioner are advised to make optimum use of planning times to support and enhance reviews of practice. To this end, regular engagement with the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* online tool will assist in identifying what is working well in the setting while also identifying areas in need of further development. In addition, engagement with relevant and current professional learning opportunities as they become available is further advised.
- Practitioners are advised to regularly send the children's individual observations and journals home with the children so that they, their parents and families can develop a greater awareness and appreciation of their child's learning abilities and achievements. In doing so, practitioners could also encourage parents to share their own thoughts on their children's learning and development.

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	**Fair**
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	**Fair**
Quality of management and leadership for learning	**Fair**

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

- Due to unforeseen circumstances on the day of the inspection the daily routine had to be changed and I feel this affected the session. Outdoor play could not be facilitated on the day due to health and safety issues.

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

- I have reviewed the children's daily routine and the children have greater opportunities in choosing and organising their own learning experiences. We have minimised the number of transitions during the daily routine and increased the use of visual aids in signalling pending changes.
- We have reviewed how we document children's skills, interests and learning dispositions in their observation records and we include the Children's observations into their individual journals and the children have regular access to them. These journals are sent home on a regular basis so that the parents and families get to see and appreciate their child's achievements and abilities during their time in our school.
- We have a large outdoor classroom which consists of all the materials we would use in the indoor classroom. Also, in the outdoor area are an outdoor playhouse with swings and a slide, balancing blocks, a ladybug trail, Fairy Garden and a construction area, sand and water area, an outdoor area for their farm, lots of outdoor toys to ride on and sit on as well as toys for general play, a mud kitchen with accessories, outdoor chimes and many colourful Tractor tyres and planters which the children have helped us plant grass and flowers and soil. Since we have returned to school at the end of August we have spent 99% of our school days in this area.