An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION - FOCUSED INSPECTION

REPORT

Service Name	Happy Start Montessori Pre-school
Service Address	Little Angels Rock Road Ballyshannon County Donegal
DCYA number	17DL0217

Date of Inspection: 09-03-2018

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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(s) 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

Date of inspection	09-03-2018
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with service owner/manager • Meeting with practitioners • Observation of interactions during one pre-school session	• Interaction with children • Review of relevant documents • Post-inspection feedback meeting with the service owner/manager

CONTEXT OF SERVICE

Happy Start Montessori Pre-school is a private setting located in the town of Ballyshannon, County Donegal. Although the service has been in operation since 1981, the new owner/leader has recently taken over the management of the pre-school since September 2017. The pre-school offers two sessions, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Both offer the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme to participating children. On the day of the inspection, the morning pre-school session was inspected. The session was led by the owner/manager, two assistant practitioners with twenty-one children present. 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 very good.
- There is a warm and welcoming atmosphere within the setting whereby the children and their families are greeted personally upon arrival. The morning routine promotes an appropriately timed period for sustained engagement in Montessori work and exploration of a variety of experiences.
- A visual daily routine has been created so that the children can comprehend the outline of the session through the use of imagery and clocks to depict the timings related to the activities. This offers a sense of security and consistency for the children as they are prepared for the different events of the day.
- Snack time promotes children's independence through the assignment of helper roles. It is utilised as a social opportunity for the children to build relationships with their peers and with the practitioners.
- Effective transition strategies such as the use of a ten-minute timer, music and the 'fairy' help prepare children for the changes to activities. During inspection, the transitions to and from outdoor play to snack created lengthy periods of waiting on the subsequent activities to commence for the children.
- Practitioners are highly sensitive in their approach to the children. They demonstrate empathy and warmth when comforting some children during the morning transition into pre-school. There is scope to maximise on this positive approach through the creation of a key-person approach whereby each practitioner is assigned designated groups of children for observation and nominated interactions.
- The uniqueness of each child is fostered in the service by displaying the children's individual creations in the entrance hall, individually created self-portraits within their birthday balloons and family photographs are placed on the family tree display.
- Children are gaining a sense of their identity in the wider world though the provision of cultural activities exploring the location of Ireland within the continent of Europe. Children have the opportunity to gain an awareness of adult roles in the community through the monthly visit from the local librarian.

Actions advised

- It is advised that practitioners review the transitions to and from outdoor play and when the children are transitioning to snack to minimise the waiting time experienced and to promote purposeful engagement in activities.
- It is advised a key person approach is developed to facilitate practitioners in undertaking more frequent observations, focused interactions and discussions with specified groups of children and their families.

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.
- There is a broad-based curriculum in place informed by *Aistear*, *The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. Plans are structured on a long, medium and short-term basis. Some of the children's learning interests are noted on the 'suggestion board' to inform activities. A photo book outlines the various activities experienced by the children throughout each term. As of yet, the planning does not visibly promote the children's emerging interests, enquiries and learning needs.
- Assessment is completed in the form of developmental observations in relation to the Montessori curriculum and termly observations of the children's experiences which outline the next steps to progress their learning.
- Practitioners view the children as highly competent, developing their self-help skills, independence and confidence through motivational encouragement and autonomous input into their learning during the session.
- Peer interactions are promoted through the opportunities provided for pair and small group interaction during the morning. Teamwork is strengthened when the children collaboratively carry large puzzles and resources to identified locations.
- Practitioners use a range of effective strategies when interacting with the children, modelling the use of materials, scaffolding the children's learning through encouragement and providing open-ended questioning to develop their thinking.
- The indoor learning environment and resources effectively stimulate and extend the children's learning. In addition to the Montessori materials and discrete areas of learning, the children access the art easel, playdough to create 'biscuits' and 'buns' and a water tray to explore the concept of floating and sinking.
- During the inspection the outdoor area was accessed for the weekly Physical Education session. The children had opportunities to exercise, throw bean bags into hoops and use the large hoops to roll, hula and bounce. There are limited opportunities for creative, language, socio-dramatic and construction play in the outdoor area.
- Practitioners effectively utilise the interactions with the children to develop expanded vocabulary and mathematical language through discussions, questioning and books. Practitioners effectively utilise a soft toy, 'the duck' during circle-time to promote speaking and listening skills.
- Practitioners provide opportunities for the children to experience fulfilment and success during play. They support connections in learning through the facilitation of reflective questioning. Practitioners utilise observations to guide the children's learning within the Montessori curriculum, offering appropriate challenge to support individual needs.

Actions advised

- It is advised that practitioners develop planning to reflect an emergent and enquiry-based approach, providing a balance between adult and child-led experiences.
- Practitioners are advised to review the outdoor area to develop provision for daily access to creative, language, socio-dramatic and construction play in the external learning environment

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is very good.

- Children demonstrate high levels of engagement and motivation as they interact with and explore the range of materials and experiences on offer during the morning routine. Children demonstrate persistence and initiative during their self-selected learning activities.
- Children regularly and confidently share their learning achievements with peers and the practitioners. They demonstrate increasing co-ordination of their fine motor skills during activities such as when constructing the pink tower, painting and using the tweezers and tongs during practical life activities.
- Information documented about the children's learning outlines their achievements and areas for progression. Children are extremely content and secure in the environment, describing family backgrounds, experiences and individual preferences. They are developing the ability to play co-operatively and are building strong relationships with one another. As of yet, the children do not have regular access to records outlining their individual interests and progression in learning.
- Children have the opportunity to learn about the role of the librarian through monthly visits to the pre-school. The parish priest occasionally visits and the children visit the church on occasions such as at Christmas to view the tree. There are minimal opportunities for the children to gain a broader awareness of community roles.
- Children have the opportunity to develop turn-taking in conversation during circle-time and utilise language effectively when describing, making requests and interpreting experiences. Children have a growing understanding of the meaning and use of mathematical language as observed in the floating and sinking water activity, in their use of number rods and when identifying the date and the month.
- Children engage in and explore the natural environment through planting experiences, discussions about animals and when describing the 'bee's nest' using resources on the nature table.
- Children make sense of the world through the use of library reference books to extend their knowledge of dinosaurs and other areas of interest. This supports them to make connections between new and previous learning. Children are developing a good capacity to problem-solve when reflecting on *'I wonder why'* questions.

Actions advised

- Children would benefit from further opportunities to extend their sense of belonging within the local community and to develop an awareness of the variety of community roles.
- Children would benefit from organised opportunities to reflect on their successes and achievements through regular access to and discussions about their recorded learning experiences. The development of unique observations outlining individual dispositions, interests and learning needs would support greater connections in learning.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- There is a strong ethos of professionalism, teamwork and collaboration in the service as the manager and practitioners are dedicated to providing high-quality learning experiences.
- The manager and practitioners engage in monthly staff meetings which include documented reflections on practice, upcoming events and areas for review. The manager has begun to review practice utilising self-evaluation tools from the *Aistear / Síolta Practice Guide* to guide and record areas for improvement.
- Appropriate systems are in place to enable the smooth organisation of educational experiences. Planning is consistently recorded and informally reviewed weekly by the practitioners. The daily routine supports an organised approach to a range of activities undertaken.
- Each practitioner is valued in their role and is provided with opportunities to become involved in various aspects of the daily experiences. All practitioners have the opportunity to attend Montessori network meetings to promote professional reflection with peer Montessori services.
- Parents and families are made aware of the policies and procedures of the service within the information booklet provided when registering their child. Parents have the opportunity to formally meet with the practitioners in the final term to discuss their children's learning. There are minimal opportunities for the formal sharing of information with regard to the children's learning on a continual basis throughout the year. The manager plans to create a template whereby parents can share their thoughts and views with regard to their child's educational experiences.

- Transitions into the service are supported by an annual 'Open day' and organised viewing of the rooms for the parents and children. The manager plans to create a profile form to elicit information about each child to support the settling-in process.
- Transitions to school are supported by the use of photographs to visually prepare children for the transition to their specific primary school. There are six schools in the locality to which the children transition. There are minimal opportunities in place for professional collaboration with the teachers in the schools. As of yet, there are no measures in place to share information with regard to the children's learning with the primary schools.

Action advised

- It is advised that the manager develops information sharing practices to support the continuity of the children's experiences during the settling-in transition and subsequently when moving on to primary school. Creating a profile form for completion by parents upon registration and presenting a summary of the children's learning to the junior infant teachers will promote connected learning experiences.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is very good. This was exemplified in the constructive engagement in professional dialogue around the key findings of this inspection.

Summary of Overall Inspection

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

Language used in Early-Years Education-focused 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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