An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

Setting Name	Harmony Montessori
Setting Address	19 Inis Síoda Tullyvarraga Shannon County Clare
DCYA number	09CE0031

Date of Inspection: 04-10-2018

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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(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 setting's provision in each area.

Early-Years Education Inspection

Date of inspection	04-10-2018
Inspection activities undertaken • Pre-inspection meeting with setting manager • Interaction with children • Review of relevant documents	• Observation of interactions during the pre-school session • Post-inspection feedback meeting with setting manager

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Harmony Montessori has been established since 1990 and is located in a residential area in Shannon, County Clare. Harmony Montessori provides a sessional pre-school to children participating in the first and second year of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the morning of inspection, the sole practitioner and nine children were present. 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 excellent.
- The welcoming, homely atmosphere is commendable as the children and families arrive to the setting. The practitioner greets each child at the door and welcomes parents inside, discussing the day ahead and events from home. Children place their coats and bags in their dedicated hooks, marked by their pictures and names. Each child has an individual bag on their hook that is used to borrow and return books and items from the setting when the children choose to take them home.
- Commendable routines support children to make many decisions about their learning during the day. The practitioner begins the day by consulting and reflecting with children on what they would like to do based on their discussions the day before. The children organise and lead their learning experiences as they plan what to do and who they would like to do it with.
- Transitions are completed in consistent consultation with children as the children and practitioner negotiate how much time is needed before preparing for meal-times or going outdoors. These transitions are informed by the needs of the children and each child plays a part in actively preparing for changes in the routine.
- Respectful, reciprocal relationships are evident between the practitioner and children. The practitioner is supportive and encouraging. She skilfully prompts children to work together and to discuss their ideas. The practitioner models and prompts children to reflect on the guiding rules in the learning environment as she encourages children to think about what might happen if these rules are not followed. The children have autonomy over their actions and behaviours as they then discuss the rationale together.
- The practitioner facilitates many opportunities during the year for children to engage with the local community. Outside visitors, family members and people of interest are invited in to speak with the children and annual events and trips are organised. The children's sense of identity and belonging is supported through the addition and creation of books and displays that depict their cultural and family backgrounds. Information is gathered from parents about children's cultural backgrounds and this information is used to inform special events and learning activities.

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 excellent.
- A broad-based curriculum that is informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* is in use. The practitioner has developed a blended approach to curriculum practice using the principles of the Montessori Method of education and the emergent and inquiry-based approach.
- Planning for children's learning and development is organised on a spontaneous, short, medium and long-term basis. The practitioner makes daily notes using an 'in the moment' planning template to capture children's emerging interests and uses these to inform the short-term plan.
- Regular reflection using a daily diary supports the documentation of children's emerging interests and needs. These are referred to during the week and specific individual investigations are organised for children. The practitioner documents and monitors the children's progression through the Montessori materials and supports the children's emerging interests with these resources also.
- Individual learning records are used to narratively reflect the learning progression of individual children during the year. The practitioner commendably details the meaningful learning taking place for each child within these records from a whole-child perspective.
- Group learning stories are used to display learning projects that children engage in as a group using photographs and text. These stories highlight the group and individual learning that takes place during large-group experiences. Each child is supported to participate in a way that is appropriate to their stage of development.
- Commendable learning environments support children to learn through play and playful activity. Well-established interest areas provide a range of materials that invite children to explore, initiate and expand their learning and development. A large outdoor area provides a natural environment for children to engage with the natural world. On the day of inspection, the children gathered apples from the apple trees using their toy trucks and wheelbarrows to later make apple juice.
- The learning environment and planned experiences support the development of pre-literacy and numeracy skills. Mark-making materials and mathematical equipment is freely available both indoors and outdoors. The practitioner draws attention to certain letters and sounds during play based on the sand-paper letters that the children have been exploring in the Montessori equipment. She regularly uses IT technology with children to investigate topics and interests together to inform their group projects.
- The practitioner has made excellent efforts to tailor the curriculum experiences to reflect each individual child. She has completed the Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) training programme and incorporates specific strategies to support the diverse dispositions and needs of children in the setting.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is excellent.
- The children are highly engaged and motivated in their learning and development. The children initiate their play intentions and organise and lead their learning during play.
- They demonstrate excellent capacity to investigate, hypothesise and try out different ways of doing things during their play. The children discuss and negotiate their ideas together as they collaborate and explore. They gather materials from different areas of the room to extend their play intentions. On the day of inspection, a small group of children used many different sized blocks to create a shelter for small-world play animals, this led to the children trying to balance different materials to create a roof and eventually gathering finger torches and lights to place inside.
- The children enjoy books and stories and regularly discuss and refer to story characters during their play. The children show great interest in exploring story themes as they think and talk about storylines and characters.
- The children make connections between previous knowledge and their current learning experiences. They refer to previous investigative projects where they gathered information on the

computer about whales and the size and dimension of their body parts. This information informed discussions during play. The children regularly reflect and discuss their experiences and refer to images and digital displays to review their learning.

- The children show great appreciation for the natural world when outdoors. They explore how to get the apples from the tree branches that are up high and work together to collect these apples. The children regularly use mathematical thinking and language during their play. They skilfully refer to the displays, chalkboards and text in their learning environment as they demonstrate understanding of text and symbols and their meaning.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is excellent.
- The sole practitioner has commendably worked to develop the curriculum practice in the setting. She has developed a curriculum statement to visually represent her blended approach to support children's learning and development. This supports the emergent and inquiry-based approach and the principles of the Montessori Method of education.
- Reflective practice is a key element of the practitioners' professional approach and she has made changes to practice based on self-reflective processes through the LINC programme. Through this training programme the practitioner engaged with the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* and continues to review its contents. The practitioner completes professional reviews of her own practice every week on how she has contributed to the children's learning and identifies areas for self-improvement. She regularly consults with the local County Childcare Committee for training and events and is part of a networking group of providers who meet regularly to discuss practice.
- The practitioner prioritises continuous professional development opportunities based on the needs of the children in the setting and is currently engaged in upskilling opportunities. She has previously completed the Healthy Ireland Smart Start programme to develop practice in health and well-being for the children and families.
- Excellent efforts are in place to consistently consult and share information with parents during the year. Newsletters, learning stories and displays detail children's learning and are strategically placed to highlight children's learning in the environment. Children's individual learning portfolios are shared with parents during the year and online social media platforms are used for parents and the practitioner to share photographs of events at home and in the pre-school.
- Individual meetings are held with parents during the year to discuss children's learning progression. The practitioner discusses children's strengths and learning styles in relation to their transition to primary school. She shares links to videos and songs the children are exploring in the weekly plan.
- The practitioner supports children and families with the transition to school and has made links with the local primary school. A transition statement is completed with parents about their child and the school welcomes this document every year.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The manager/practitioner attended the post-inspection feedback meeting. She demonstrated capacity to identify priorities for improvement and the commitment to bring about changes in practice that enhance children's learning and development.

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

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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