An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)
Final Report

Setting name	Headstart Pre-school
Setting address	Brookfield Enterprise Centre Rossfield Avenue Tallaght Dublin D24EV96
TUSLA registration number	TU2015DS074
DCEDIY number	09DS0083
Date of inspection	05-12-2023
Date of issue of report	08-04-2024

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	05-12-2023
Inspection activities undertaken • Pre-inspection meeting with the setting 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 manager and early years educators	

Context of setting

Headstart pre-school is a community setting located in Brookfield Enterprise Centre in Tallaght. The setting has been in operation since 1998. It provides a morning and an afternoon pre-school sessions for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. Fourteen children and four educators, one of whom was the manager, and two assistants employed under a community employment programme were present during the inspection. A member of the board of management, the manager and one of the educators attended the feedback discussion following the inspection. 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 was very good
- The children benefited hugely from the warm and caring atmosphere of the setting.
- The educators knew the children and their families very well. On arrival to the setting, the children and their parents were greeted in the entrance hall by the educators in an upbeat manner. Conversations with parents were friendly and relaxed.
- The relationships between the educators and all the children were highly commendable. In their positive interactions with each other, the educators acted as role models for the children. They related to the children in a kind, nurturing and responsive way and were sensitive to their individual needs. Throughout the session, the children actively sought out the educators for support and comfort.
- A key person system was in place. Each key person had responsibility for a group of children; for observing and documenting their learning and for sharing information with parents.
- The documented daily routine supported the children's active learning. It provided the children with opportunities to engage in child-led and adult-led activities. There was time allocated for indoor and outdoor free-play periods.
- In general, the children's transitioning between activities was calm and smooth. Some transitions were signalled by advance notice and the educators used verbal guidance to encourage the children to tidy up.
- Mealtimes were observed to be relaxed, social occasions. They provided opportunities for social conversations between the educators and children as they sat together and discussed their families, food likes and dislikes. They were also used as an opportunity to promote healthy eating and the children's independence skills. For example, children were invited to have breakfast, encouraged to wash their own hands and pour their own drinks.

- The children's sense of identity and belonging was strengthened through the value the educators placed on inclusiveness within the setting. The children's uniqueness was represented in the environment through photographs, birthday charts and artwork displays. The children's awareness of cultural diversity was promoted through books and some pretend play resources. Flags of different countries and key words in the children's home languages were also displayed.
- The educators reported that prior to Covid-19 restrictions, they actively encouraged family and community involvement and operated an open-door policy for parents. At the time of the inspection, parents were invited to attend a Christmas event, and the end-of-year graduation celebration. Photographs representing places of interest in the local community were displayed.

Actions advised

- To ease children's transitions throughout the day, it is advised that verbal notice using visual and audio cues be used consistently to draw the children's attention to the end of an activity.
- To further strengthen the children's sense of identity and belonging to their families and the community, the educators are advised to reintroduce the open-door policy for parents particularly at arrival and collection times. They are also advised to provide opportunities for parents, professionals, and members of the local community to share their expertise and cultural experiences with the children. Furthermore, visual displays of families and cultural activities is advised.

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 good.
- A play-based curriculum linked to *Aistear; the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* was implemented in the setting. The educators regarded play as the central medium through which children learned and developed.
- The educators engaged in long-term, medium-term and short-term planning. Planning was thematic based; the educators reported that plans were often changed to incorporate the children's emergent interests. Future learning identified for individual children was linked to the children's developing skills and learning goals.
- Information on children's learning and development was gathered through learning stories and observations. The children's strengths and areas for development were recorded in the observations.
- At the end of each month, the educators shared information on the children's learning, their development and social skills with parents. Folders containing samples of the children's artwork, photographs and learning stories were shared with parents at the end of each pre-school year.
- The educator's interactions with the children were positive and kind. The educators sat at the children's level and praised and encouraged the children's completion of work. There were good examples of the educators playfully engaging during child-led role play and construction activities.
- The educators were effective in supporting the children's communication and thinking skills. They used comments and open-ended question and ensured a good balance between talking and listening.
- The learning environment consisted of an outdoor area, three learning rooms, and a connecting corridor. The learning rooms were set out as areas of interest, for construction, pretend play and tabletop activities. Children freely moved between the learning rooms and used the corridor space for pretend play. The children had daily access to the outdoor area.
- Effective practice was evident in relation to the promotion of the children's language and early literacy and numeracy skills. The educators provided opportunities for the children to

engage with mark-making activities, storytelling, action rhymes and song throughout the session.
- The educators promoted an inclusive environment. They linked closely with parents and with other professionals such as the public health nurse, speech and language therapist and social workers to support children and families. The setting availed of support under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM).
- For many families English was a second language; the educators supported the sharing of information with parents through the use of a computer translation application and support from other parents.

Actions advised

- To build on observation and planning practices already established and to further support the emergent curriculum, the educators are advised to develop a short-term planning system that is informed by the children's emergent interests and next steps in learning.
- It is advised that the educators provide opportunities for the children in their small groups to plan for, share, and recall learning experiences. It is advised that individual learning journals be created, in collaboration with the children, this will support the children reflect on learning and connect their current, present and future learning.
- The educators are advised to review the learning environment. In so doing, it is advised that emphasis be placed on creating more clearly defined areas of interest, placing similar items of interest together and providing a greater range of real and natural resources throughout the areas. It is advised that the 'Environment audit tools' in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* be used to support the implementation of this action.

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

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements was very good.
- The children demonstrated interest, enjoyment and fun in their learning.
- The children appeared at ease and secure in the setting and were comfortable engaging with the educators.
- The children's use of language was good. They greeted each other on arrival, they had good listening skills and could ask and answer questions in context.
- Throughout the session, the children worked independently alone, in pairs and in small groups. Peer interactions were positive, and many good friendships were evident. Some children were observed helping their friends and inviting them to play. The children also demonstrated a good awareness of rules and boundaries, and very good self-regulation, sharing and turn-taking skills were observed.
- It was evident that the children's voices were heard and respected. Throughout the inspection, the educators attentively listened to the children, and they followed their interest in activities. It was also noted that the children's comments were included in documented observations.
- At the time of the inspection, it was noted that the children's social skills and their sense of self and others were developing well. They shared news from home, spoke about family members, and used photographs to identify themselves and others.
- The children were capable and competent learners. They had ample time to explore and complete activities to satisfaction. They made many decisions about their own learning as they chose and lead play activities. This was particularly evident when they initiated the 'Sleeping Bunny's' game and when they built 'Dens' with large blocks and blankets.
- The children's developing imaginative and creative skills were demonstrated as they engaged in role-play, construction and some sensory activities. Occasionally the children shared these learning experiences with others. For example, they discussed looking after their babies, building volcanos in the sand and making telescopes from connectors.

- The children displayed very good fine motor and gross motor skills. These were evident in their effective use of construction and mark-making equipment and when they engaged in activities such as digging and filling wheel barrows with stones and using hoppers when playing outside.
- Many children demonstrated a great interest in books, stories and mark-making and they had a good awareness of print, shape, colour and number. Some children referred to writing letters in their name, while others used the pictures in books to tell the story. Supported by the educators, the children also used mathematical language such as fast, slow, tall and small to compare the speed of a wheel and the height of a building. Some children accurately named numbers they wrote 'look this is my age, 4'.

Action advised

- The educators are advised to provide more opportunities for children to express themselves through the use of more freely available mark-making equipment and sensory resources. It is also advised that template art be replaced with more open-ended creative resources.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was good.
- During the inspection, it was clear that the manager and educators supported each other.
- The manager used informal meetings, chats and informal supervision sessions along with annual appraisals to support the educators in their roles. The board of management provided informal support to the manager.
- The educator's roles and responsibilities were clearly defined. All educators had an opportunity to lead learning during the session.
- The setting availed of external support and training through the local childcare committee and Early Childhood Ireland.
- Educators were encouraged to engage in regular training. At the time of the inspection, they had engaged in accredited early years and mandatory training and had completed the Leadership for INClusion (LINC) in Early Years programme, Equality and Diversity and Lámh sign language training.
- The setting's policies and procedures were shared with parents through a parents' handbook. Information was also shared by means of parent meetings, informal chats, email, letters, phone calls and monthly reports.
- The setting established a consistent approach to settling children into the setting. This included a parents meeting at the beginning of the year and a phased settling-in period where parents were welcome to stay with their children until they were settled.
- Links with the local primary schools Home School Liaison Community Liaison (HSCL) coordinator were established to support the children's move to school. The HSCL sits on the settings Board of management and comes to talk to the children about the move to school. Information on the children's learning and development was shared at the request of schools.

Actions advised

- It is advised that regular team meetings and supervision sessions be introduced to support the educators to plan, discuss and review the curriculum. It is also advised that the educators use the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* as a resource to carry out self-reviews.
- To enhance parent's engagement in the setting, the educators are advised to seek the views of parents and include them in policy development and reviews.
- The educators are advised to review their settling-in policy and to develop a transition to school policy. As part of this action, it is advised that 'All about me information' be sought from parents at the beginning of the year for each child and that this information be used to

support the children's settling in phase. It is also advised that the National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NCCA) *Mo Scéal* resources be used to further strengthen the links and the sharing of information with the primary school's children will move on to.

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	Good
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	Very good
Quality of management and leadership for learning	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