An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

Service Name	First Steps Child Education Ltd.
Service Address	Heronswood Montessori, Holy Well National School Church Road Carrigaline Co. Cork
DCYA number	14CC0496

Date of Inspection: 20-01-2020

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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 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 Inspection

Date of inspection	20-01-2020
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with service manager • Meeting with practitioners • Meeting with owners	• Observation of interactions during a number of sessions • Interaction with children • Review of relevant documents • Feedback to service manager, practitioners and owners

CONTEXT OF SERVICE

First Steps Child Education is an urban, privately owned early years setting. Three practitioners provide early years education and care for a maximum of twenty-two children during a morning session. On the day of the inspection nineteen children were present. The early years setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised of the report; a response was not received from the setting.

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.
- A caring ethos prevails. The practitioners create a very warm, welcoming and affirming atmosphere. They show a positive regard for the children and their families.
- The daily routine offers a long free-play period indoors and some daily outdoor time. This is followed by snack time and circle time. The daily routine is displayed in picture sequence for the children.
- The children organise their lunch autonomously, and they sit, eat and chat together. On the day of the inspection, some practitioners eventually joined the children during snack time.
- Tidy-up time is announced ahead of time and all the children engage very well in sorting, pairing, matching, organising and cleaning their environment. The transition to go outside creates a long, inactive waiting time for some children, who get dressed quickly. This waiting time could be reduced, by one practitioner going out with the first group straight away.
- Relationships are responsive, respectful and reciprocal. The practitioners model and provide guidance and encouragement for positive behaviour in an effective, meaningful manner. Recognition and encouragement are regular features of the responses to the children.
- Practice is child-centred and respectful and the uniqueness of each child is recognised and supported.
- Some good opportunities are provided for the children to develop an appreciation of themselves as individuals and members of groups. The children use their own stick-puppets to sign themselves in in the morning. A welcome sign which incorporates the various languages of the children is displayed in the foyer.
- Family and community members are encouraged to visit the setting to share their skills and interests with the children.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to consistently create a really relaxed, family-type mealtime, where adults and children organise everything together and then sit, eat and communicate together. This is conducive to a healthy life-style, as well as language acquisition and development.
- The practitioners need to place a greater emphasis on celebrating diversity within an inclusive learning environment. The creation and use of a family wall display would be worthwhile in this regard.

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 good.
- A broad-based Montessori curriculum is documented and implemented to support the children's learning and development. The children's interests are followed in daily practice.
- A variety of assessment approaches is used to gather information about the children's learning and development. These include the Montessori checklists; and one narrative observation on each child per month, which can be seen by parents at request. In addition, there are lovely photo displays of the children engaged in activities; links between these activities and the children's learning are not highlighted. Each child also has an individual learning journal with a collection of art work, linked to some pre-identified learning outcomes.
- High-quality interactions with the children are facilitated. The practitioners evidently know the children very well and engage and motivate them in their learning and development in a very respectful and caring way.
- The indoor environment is aesthetically pleasing, purposefully structured and richly resourced with Montessori material and other toys, to afford a broad range of play. The outdoor area, which is used on a daily basis, is under-resourced and in need of development. A plan about the creation of a natural play space is on display in the foyer.
- Child-inititated/led, practitioner-framed play is recognised and utilised as the main medium through which the children learn and develop. The children experience a beautiful mixture between periods of exploring materials and resources in a highly concentrated manner and periods of active/interactive exploration and play.
- The children's language, literacy and numeracy skills are fostered very effectively. Songs are used for different occasions and activities throughout the day; a broad variety of mark-making opportunities and high-quality books are freely available; and a story is read every day. The Montessori mathematical materials promote high-quality mathematical thinking and learning.
- In particular, the daily use of the self-correcting Montessori materials, provides more complex, varied and challenging experiences for the children in accordance with their individual needs and abilities.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to focus their assessment more on the individual child's interests and learning dispositions, which will then inform the planning of an emergent curriculum. Children's work and all photo displays need to have clear, succinct links to learning and development to highlight learning outcomes. The use of the 'Planning and Assessing' pillar of the online *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* is advised.
- The play value of the outdoor area needs to be raised. Areas such as a sand-pit, a mud kitchen, a water-wall, equipped with a broad range of versatile, manipulative, sense-rich, and natural materials need to be created and available to the children on a daily basis. The outdoor environment, in particular, needs to provide rich opportunities for the children to become aware of the natural environment, its features, materials and plants. It also needs to afford active exploration and the development of a healthy, strong physical body and physical fitness. The 'Learning Environment' pillar and the self-evaluation audit available in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* provide meaningful information in this regard.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is excellent.
- The children demonstrate enjoyment in their activities, and are motivated, interested and eagerly engaged in them. They display positive learning dispositions, such as initiative, self-confidence, resilience, resourcefulness and persistence.
- The children's ability for strategic thinking and planning is very evident in the way they autonomously prepare, carry out and tidy-up their painting activities.
- As a result of a majority of children being very interested in playing in the home corner a rotation system has been established, whereby every twenty minutes a new group of children can play in

the home corner. While this is a short term solution, which is working, it does not allow the children to follow their own intrinsic motivation and is not conducive to the development of in-depth play.
- The children understand and respect the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and they show regard for and understanding of the rights and views of others.
- The children's personal and social skills, such as problem-solving, taking responsibility, negotiating, co-operating and building relationships are very well developed.
- Language is used competently to give and receive information, make requests, express opinions and ideas and create and re-create roles.
- The children are representing their ideas, thoughts, feelings and creativity in a broad range of ways, through mark-making, making art, role play, song and rhyme and interactive play.

Action advised
- In the interest of establishing an emergent curriculum, based on the children's intrinsic motivation and interests, the home corner needs to be reviewed to find a more child-friendly solution. This could be achieved either by extending the home-play area or by creating a second one. In addition, making other play areas, such as the construction area or the cosy-corner more inviting, might alleviate the problem. Supporting the children to find their own solutions in regulating play situations is also advised.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- Practitioners have daily informal meetings in the morning to reflect and plan together. A daily diary is used to make notes of outcomes. There are no formal whole-team meetings.
- An ethos of teamwork, collaboration and partnership is evident.
- There is clarity about the roles and responsibilities of the practitioners with regard to educational activities. Every practitioner has the opportunity to take a leadership role in promoting high-quality learning.
- The stated philosophy and vision of the setting is evident in the practice of all staff and leaders. They are good role models, and promote high standards for the work of the setting.
- Clear two-way channels of communication are fostered between the setting and the families. These include an informative notice board, regular newsletters, informal daily chats and lovely photo displays in the entrance hall.
- Transitions into and from the setting are managed sensitively and effectively to ensure continuity of experiences and progression in learning and development. Gradual, family-friendly settling-in procedures are in place and the setting has established good, meaningful working connections with the local primary schools.

Action advised
- Regular whole-team meetings need to be arranged, so that the practitioners can collaboratively self-evaluate their practice and work using the resources of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide.*

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	**Excellent**
Quality of management and leadership for learning	**Very Good**

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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