An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)

Final Report

Setting name	Leeson Park Creche and Montessori
Setting address	39 Leeson Park Ranelagh, Dublin 6 Dublin D06CX63
TUSLA registration number	TU2015DY328
DCEDIY number	09DY0334
Date of inspection	01-10-2024
Date of issue of report	11-12-2024

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	01-10-2024

Activities conducted during the Inspection

- Pre-inspection meeting with the setting owner and manager
- Review of setting documentation and records relating to the children's learning and development
- Review of the education resources and facilities
- Observations of interactions during the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme session
- Interaction with young children
- Interaction with early years educator
- Feedback meeting with the administrator, manager, and the early years educator

Context of setting

Leeson Park Creche and Montessori, was established in 2006, it is a privately-run setting, located in Dublin 6. It provides full-time and part-time daycare and pre-school education to children aged from one to six years. At the time of inspection, six children were enrolled in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the morning of the inspection, an educator and two children were present in the pre-school room being inspected. The manager, administrator, and educator attended the post-evaluation meeting. They reported that over the past year, the setting had been undergoing a period of change, with the manager and educators having been employed there for just over a year. The setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised in this report, and the response submitted on behalf of the setting can 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 requires improvement.
- The atmosphere in the setting was welcoming and calm.
- The relationships between the educator and the children were observed to be positive, kind, and reciprocal. The educator fostered positive interactions amongst the children and encouraged sibling interactions. It was reported that occasionally, children from the toddler groups were brought together with pre-school aged children.
- During the inspection, the children were greeted by the manager or one of the educators at the entrance to the building and brought to their learning room. Currently parents do not enter the building and have limited opportunities to engage with their children in the learning environment. The manager reported that the children's key person had opportunities to chat with parents at collection time.
- The daily routine outlining the sequence of events for the fulltime programme was documented for the children. The morning ECCE session included time for free play/breakfast, circle time, Montessori activities, and dinner time. Opportunities for the children to engage in free play activities during the ECCE session were very limited, as a substantial amount of time was dedicated to Montessori activities. Additionally, the children did not engage in outdoor play during the session.
- Dinner time was a social occasion where the educator sat and chatted with the children. However, during this time, the educator was observed doing many things for the children, such as mixing the food on their plates and, on occasion, spoon-feeding them.
- The children's uniqueness was supported in the environment through nice displays of photographs, and a family wall, and a birthday chart. The children's interests were also noted on an interest chart.
- Parents of children transitioning to primary school were invited to the end-of-year graduation event.

Actions advised

- The educator is advised to revise the daily routine. In doing so, it is advised to reduce the time spent on Montessori activities and introduce a substantially longer period of free play. It is also advised that opportunities for outdoor play be incorporated into the ECCE session.
- To support the children's independence skills, the educator is advised to encourage the children to help prepare for dinner time. For example, the children could distribute the plates and cutlery and serve their own food. Additionally, to support the children's healthy-eating habits, the educator is advised to encourage the children to eat independently without adult assistance.
- The management team is advised to offer opportunities for parents to connect with their children in the learning environment and to engage in activities together.

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 requires improvement.
- The curriculum approach in the setting was based on some of the principles of the Montessori Method of Education. At the time of inspection, the curriculum alignment to *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework,* and *Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*, was limited.
- The educator engaged in medium-term and short–term thematic planning to progress the children's learning and development.
- Developmental checklists and observation records related to the children's physical, cognitive, language, and social development were completed by the educator. These records contained limited information about the children's interests and achievements. Learning was also documented in group and individual *Aistear* books.
- Interactions in the setting were positive. Throughout the inspection, the educator sat with the children at their physical level and extended their learning through naming and supporting the children to complete Montessori activities.
- The learning environment consisted of an indoor learning room and a large outdoor space.
- The indoor learning environment included a quiet, soft area and designated shelf space for Montessori activities, such as practical life, geography, and language. There was also shelf space for some art and craft, small world, and construction play resources. Some dress-up clothes and dolls were available in the quiet area. During the inspection, the children had very little opportunity to play with resources not linked to Montessori work. As a result, their engagement in pretend play, creative, and sensory activities was very minimal.
- The pre-school learning room led directly out to the outdoor area. At the time of the inspection, it was noted that while there were some boxes with gross motor and pretend play resources available, the sand and water trays and kitchen and house were empty. On the day of inspection, the children did not play outside.
- The educator fostered the children's early language, literacy and numeracy skills through Montessori activities, books, some mark-making equipment and through songs and rhymes.

Actions advised

- The management team and educators are advised to review the curriculum. While maintaining the principles of the Montessori Method of Education currently in place, they are advised to strengthen their approach to purposeful learning through play. This can be achieved by aligning the Montessori Method of Education with an emergent play-based curriculum underpinned by the principles of *Aistear*. It is also advised that the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* be used to assist in the development of the emergent based curriculum and used to devise a curriculum statement.
- The educator is advised to review the current approaches to observation and documentation. In this regard, it is advised that more regular strengths-based observations, identifying children's emergent interests, needs and next steps in learning be undertaken and used to guide planning.
- To enhance both the indoor and outdoor play experiences for the children, the educator is advised to complete a review of the environments using the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* 'Environment Audit'. The educator is also advised to place an increased emphasis on providing a greater range of freely available play resources in designated play areas.

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

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements requires improvement.
- The children were at ease in their surroundings and have settled into the pre-school environment well.
- The children demonstrated effective decision-making skills and good concentration when choosing and engaging in Montessori activities. However, it was also noted that they were passive during these activities and were observed to be sitting at the tables for much of the morning.
- Throughout the inspection, the children displayed positive learning dispositions, such as persistence and resilience and their self-regulation skills were observed to be developing well.
- The children communicated their interests and made requests both verbally and non-verbally. Although the educator acknowledged what was being said or alluded to, there was no opportunity for the children to deviate from the Montessori activities and explore their interests further.
- Whilst playing with the Montessori resources, the children demonstrated an interest in building and mark-making activities. As they waited for dinner to be served, they also showed an interest in role-play activities with the dolls. However, materials and opportunities that promoted creativity and engagement in role play were limited and not freely available to the children during the morning routine.
- The children demonstrated a growing understanding of letters, numbers, colours, and shapes, and showed enjoyment in songs and rhymes. However, there was evidence that there is an overemphasis on the development of literacy and numeracy through the use of worksheets and copybook activities.

Actions advised

- The educator is advised to provide the children with a wider range of freely available play experiences. It is further advised that the children have daily access to the outdoor area during the morning session.
- The educator is advised to motivate and encourage the children's interests, spontaneous play, expression, exploration, and creativity in a more playful and unstructured manner.
- To support the children's developing language, literacy, and numeracy skills, the educator is advised to replace templates and worksheets with more open-ended, creative, and mark-making materials. They are also advised to place the books closer to the quiet area. Additionally, using open-ended questions will help scaffold and extend the children's language and thinking skills.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning requires improvement.
- Monthly team meetings and regular check-ins between the educator and the manager served as opportunities to discuss issues, concerns, and the day-to-day operation of the setting. Induction meetings for new educators were held to help them settle into their roles and the setting.
- Non-contact time was provided for the educator to engage in planning and to document learning for the children.
- The manager reported that the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* was occasionally used to reflect on practice. However, while the environment audit was used to review the environment for the younger age groups, it had not yet been used to review the pre-school environment.
- The setting had availed of external support and advice from the local county childcare committee and other support agencies. At the time of the inspection, it was reported that the educators had not engaged in continuing professional development.
- During the inspection, it was noted that the settings mission statement, and many of the setting's policies and procedures, as well as the associated parents' information book, did not reflect the actual practices of the setting.
- Information on the children's learning was regularly shared with parents through a computer application. Additionally, opportunities were provided for parents to meet formally with the educators to discuss their children's progress.

- To support the children's transition into the setting, the children and their parents were invited to visit, and 'All About Me' information on each child was gathered from parents. The owner reported that a phased settling-in approach was implemented, allowing parents to stay with their children until they were settled. The children's transitions between learning rooms were also completed using a phased-in approach.
- The educator prepared the children for primary school through discussions and activities. Information on the children's development was only shared with the schools that the children were moving to upon request.

Actions advised

- The management team is advised to review and update the setting's mission statement, policies, procedures, and the parents' handbook. This will ensure that all documentation accurately reflects the current practices and values of the setting.
- The management team are advised to seek continuing professional development (CPD) training for the educator in the areas of *Aistear* and play. This will support best practice in the setting and ensure that *Aistear* is effectively implemented.
- To assist with the implementation of the actions in this report, the management team is advised to seek support from *Better Start*, the National Early Years Quality Development Service.

Summary of overall inspection

Area	Quality level
Quality of context to support children's learning and development	Requires Improvement
Quality of processes to support children's learning and development	Requires Improvement
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	Requires Improvement
Quality of management and leadership for learning	Requires Improvement

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	Examples of descriptive terms
Excellent	**Provision that is excellent** is exemplary in meeting the needs of learners. This provision provides an example for other schools and settings of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Excellent; exemplary; outstanding; exceptionally high standard; with very significant strengths
Very good	**Provision that is very good** is very effective in meeting the needs of learners and is of a very high standard. There is potential to build on existing strengths to achieve an excellent standard.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful
Good	**Provision that is good** is effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to build on existing strengths in order to address the aspects to be developed and achieve a very good standard.	Good; of good quality; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; strengths outweigh the shortcomings; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Requires improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard** is not sufficiently effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is good or better.	Fair; less than effective; less than sufficient; evident weaknesses that are impacting on learning; experiencing difficulty; shortcomings outweigh strengths; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard** is not meeting the needs of learners. There is immediate need for significant action to address the areas of concern.	Weak; poor; ineffective; insufficient; unacceptable; experiencing significant difficulties; serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated; requiring significant change, development and improvement to be effective

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

APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

Currently we only have full time E.C.C.E children in our care. Therefore, garden times were split between rooms where the most appropriate time slot was dedicated wholly to an E.C.C.E session. However, we have already implemented report recommendation to build garden/outdoor play into E.C.C.E hours.

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

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