An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)

Final Report

Setting name	Little Acorns Children's Centre Ltd.
Setting address	Brickens Claremorris County Mayo F12DX49
TUSLA registration number	TU2015MO068
DCEDIY number	09MO0025
Date of inspection	11-12-2024
Date of issue of report	26-03-2025

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 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	11-12-2024

Activities conducted during the Inspection

- Pre-inspection meeting with the setting 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 two Early Childhood Care and Education Programme sessions
- Interaction with children
- Interaction with early years educators
- Feedback meeting with the setting manager and two early years educators

Context of setting

Little Acorns Children's Centre Ltd., is a community-based setting located in Brickens, County Mayo. It offers two morning Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme sessions to participating children. Both sessions were observed. On the day of the inspection there were thirty-one children, the setting manager and five educators 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 was good.
- A very warm, nurturing, affirming atmosphere was evident. The educators showed a kind and caring approach as they interacted with the children and their families. The educators greeted the children as they arrived into their rooms where they effectively supported the children to join in an extended period of child-initiated play.
- A key-person approach was effectively used by the educators to organise observations and act as a point of contact for their designated children and their families.
- Snack time provided a social experience where the children engaged in conversations with their peers and the educators.
- Throughout the session the children spontaneously and competently shared news from home with the educators and their peers.
- The daily routine was flexible and successfully provided periods of both child-initiated and educator-led activities in the indoor environments and for a period of time in the outdoor learning environments.
- The educators verbally announced and on occasion used timers to alert the children to times of transition. On a small number of occasions, some of the children were engrossed in their play and were unsure about the changes happening.
- Respect and recognition of each child's uniqueness was evident. For example, there were personalised coat hooks, birthday charts, photographs of the children and some of their families along with a selection of their creative work on display. At the time of the inspection, the children did not have access to materials which represented their community.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to review and further develop their use of auditory and visual supports to assist all of the children to anticipate, predict and be actively involved in times of transition. The 'Supporting Transitions' resources as outlined in the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide,* could further support with this action.
- To further strengthen the children's developing sense of identity and belonging within the setting, the manager and the educators are advised to increase the visibility of the local community and all of the children's families within the learning environments.

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.
- The educators implemented an effective play-based curriculum that was informed by *Aistear*: *the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. They provided the children with a broad range of learning experiences and focused on play as the central medium for education. There was some evidence that the educators incorporated the children's interests into the short-term plans.
- The educators used a range of assessment approaches to document the children's learning and development. These included anecdotal notes, learner record observations, photographs, and samples of the children's creative work. The educators had yet to fully record the progression of next steps for all the children's learning.
- The educators knew the children well and were attuned to their verbal and non-verbal cues. For example, they noticed when the children became upset or frustrated and offered appropriate suggestions to enable the children to manage these times. They were calm, patient and respectful in their interactions with the children and became play partners when invited to by the children.
- The bright indoor environments housed a variety of resources including construction toys, socio-dramatic props, table-top resources, mark-making materials, play-dough and home corners. The educators also created relaxing reading areas and the children were observed to explore books as they desired. The indoor learning environments also included a small range of open-ended materials.
- The children had a designated period of time at the end of the session in the outdoor learning environments. This provided them with opportunities for engagement with multi-sensory experiences using sand, water, mud and mulch. They had access to a large mud kitchen, covered play area and engaged with spinning and cycling equipment.
- The learning environments provided the children with a suitable range of play types. The educators offered good opportunities for the children to spend time outdoors engaged in physical play.
- The children's language, literacy, and numeracy skills were effectively fostered through play. The educators offered opportunities for the children to engage in mark making and manipulate modelling clay. These activities helped the children develop positive dispositions towards science, mathematics, and the arts. Commendably books, rhymes, and action games were also enjoyed by the children throughout the morning.
- The setting had established links with external agencies, where needed, to support the inclusion of children with additional learning needs.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to further develop the enquiry-based nature of the curriculum and strengthen the distinction between planning group learning experiences and planning to progress each individual child's learning. To provide consistency across all sessions the curriculum plans should reflect the outcomes of the educators' observation and assessment which focus even more on each child's unique interests, abilities, learning styles and needs. Any assessment documentation should be shared with the children and their families regularly to support partnership in learning. Guidance is available in the Planning and Assessing pillars of the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* and the Assessment series of *Insights: Quality in Early Years Education.*
- The educators are advised to increase the opportunity for the children's creative expression in the indoor learning environments through the provision of a wider range of real, open-ended and sensorial materials. The environmental audit in the 'Learning Environment' pillar of the *Aistear Siolta Practice Guide* could be a useful tool in this regard.
- The educators are advised to provide the children with seamless access to the indoor and outdoor learning environments. Adaptation of the daily routine to provide greater opportunities for physical play and activity will further enhance the children's overall learning, development and wellbeing. The Inspectorate' *Insights - Quality in Early Years Education* webinars Learning through child-initiated/child-led play; Developing Children's Physical Skills; and Effective Outdoor Learning Environments could assist with this action.

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

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements was good.
- The children organised their play experiences with their peers. They were actively involved in play activities, either alone, in pairs and or in groups. It was evident that friendships were forming.
- The children were developing positive dispositions for learning. In particular, the children showed sustained engagement while playing in team games such as 'Mr Wolf' and with messy resources in the outdoor mud kitchen area. There they became engrossed in exploration and investigation of the materials, their properties and how they could be manipulated.
- The children had good opportunities to develop control and coordination of their gross-motor skills. This was particularly evident during the time they spent outdoors, playing ball, spinning, playing games and running.
- The educators were developing individual learning portfolios for the children. These portfolios were visible and accessible for review by some of the children.
- During a large group story time, a small number of the children's attention wavered, and they wandered off to explore other areas of the setting. The educators tried to encourage them to return.
- The educators provided effective opportunities which supported the children to develop self-help skills, for example, they independently engaged in handwashing, and putting on and off their coats. Children expressed their pride in completing these tasks.
- The children used their verbal and non-verbal communication skills effectively to communicate their needs, thoughts, ideas and requests. They showed an awareness and appreciation of their own uniqueness and sense of self. Many children talked about their lived experiences throughout the session.

Actions advised

- To further promote the children's engagement in their learning, the educators are advised to plan adult-initiated activities such as, story time sessions for their key group of children. The educators' facilitation of smaller groups could enhance the opportunities for the children to participate and sustain their interest.
- The educators are advised to document the children's own views and interpretations of their artwork this could support the children to further recognise and reflect on their learning and achievements and foster a deeper understanding of their educational experiences and promote active engagement in their development.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was good.
- A commendable ethos of teamwork, collaboration and partnership was evident. The manager and the educators expressed their commitment to delivering high-quality early learning provision.
- Informal internal evaluation, and management support and supervision sessions were conducted by the manager. The agreed quality improvement actions were implemented accordingly. A systematic collaborative approach to recorded internal review, self-reflection, and evaluation through *Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Education* had yet to be established.
- The manager and the educators engaged in two-way communication with the parents and families each day at arrival and collection times. A messaging application was used to share updates to provide the parents with information about the activities and events experienced by the children. The educators planned parent/teacher meetings as needed.
- The voluntary management committee and the manager supported the educators to engage in continuous professional development and share their learning across the setting. For example, educators had completed the Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years programme (LINC) which supported the team to reflect on and enhance inclusive practices across the setting.

- The educators effectively supported the children's transition into the setting by gathering relevant information about each child on the setting's enrolment form. Visits to the setting arranged by the educators for the children and their parents supported the settling-in process. The parents were also given a handbook which provided an overview of the general practices in the setting. A staggered intake approach was used to support the children to settle in.
- To support the children as they transition to primary school, the educators facilitated discussions and room-based activities. Positive relationships with the local primary school were also established. The educators' use of a transition report to share recorded information to promote continuity of the children's learning experiences from pre-school to primary school was under review.

Actions advised

- It is advised that the manager conduct regular formal and recorded supervision meetings to further support the educators in their roles and to identify areas for professional development.
- The manager and the educators are advised to implement a consistent system for formal recorded self-evaluation and reflection. The educators' regular reflection using the self-evaluation tools from the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* could support this action.
- It is advised that the manager and the educators develop end-of-year transition reports for all the children in collaboration with the children and their parents to summarise the children's learning and achievements. This could further inform parents on their child's learning and enhance transition practices as the children move to primary school.

Summary of overall inspection

Area	Quality level
Quality of context to support children's learning and development	Good
Quality of processes to support children's learning and development	Good
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	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	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

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