An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)
Final Report

Setting name	Little Explorers Childcare
Setting address	12 Newtownmountkennedy Town Centre Newtownmountkennedy County Wicklow A63F840
TUSLA registration number	TU2015WW255
DCEDIY number	14WW0245
Date of inspection	19-05-2023
Date of issue of report	29-09-2023

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:

- 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	19-05-2023
Inspection activities undertaken • Pre-inspection meeting with the setting manager • Meeting with relevant early years educators/other members of staff • Review of setting documentation and records of children's learning and development • Review of the education resources and facilities • Observations of interactions during two sessions • Interaction with the children • Feedback meeting with the setting managers	

Context of setting

Little Explorers Childcare is part of a group of four, privately-owned early learning and care settings located in County Wicklow. This purpose built, full day care setting was established in 2014 and provides a morning pre-school session for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme in two rooms. On the day of the inspection, a total of thirty one children and six educators were present. The manager and senior manager attended the post-inspection meeting. The early years setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised of the report; a response for publication 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 very good.
- A friendly and welcoming atmosphere prevailed in the setting. While the majority of the children attended the setting on a full time basis, educators were observed warmly greeting some children and parents as they arrived into the learning environments for the ECCE session.
- The routine of the morning was flexible with ample time for freely chosen play both indoors and outdoors. Children were given the choice to participate in activities such as circle time and chose when they were ready to join their friends for snack time.
- The educators viewed snack time as a social occasion and an opportunity to promote independence and relationship building. The children were very articulate and sociable in helping one another and engaging in conversation.
- The children demonstrated strong bonds with the educators and were observed deeply engaged in play with them as playful partners. A key person approach was used to further nurture these relationships. Each key educator had responsibility for the gathering and recording of information on the learning and development of a group of key children and for sharing this information with parents.
- Children were supported to become confident and competent and manage their own self-care needs. For example, children were observed washing their hands, serving themselves at snack time, pouring their own drinks and tidying up once they had finished eating.
- The educators provided opportunities for the children to develop an appreciation of themselves as individuals and as members of their families and community through displays of family photographs including pets, photographs of the community such as local schools and a "we are unique" display that the children had created.

Action advised

- Educators are advised to enhance the transitions within the daily routine by implementing a consistent, child-centred approach involving the use of visual and auditory prompts. This will provide important structure, consistency and security for children, allowing them to predict and cope with changes during the course of the day.

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 very good.
- The educators effectively implemented a play-based curriculum, aligned with *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. Examples of good practice from the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* were thoughtfully displayed around the room to inspire practice and reinforce particular benefits to children.
- The educators compiled comprehensive curriculum planning to support the children's learning, organised into short-term, medium-term and long-term plans. Children's interests and next steps for learning were documented and weekly reflections on the curriculum were conducted by the educators.
- Assessment of children's learning and development was captured by the educators through monthly individual observations, regular group observations and the use of a software application for sharing observations and photographs with parents and families. Children's emerging interests were recorded on a large board in the learning environment and these fed directly into the short-term curriculum planning.
- Interactions between educators and children were warm and positive. A balance between adult and child in conversation and in playful engagements was observed.
- Play was the central medium through which the children learned and developed within the setting. Play opportunities were freely available, accessible, appropriate and well-resourced to sustain purposeful learning and active exploration.
- The environment was laid out into interest areas such as a home corner, construction area, mark-marking area and sensory play. Outdoors children had access to ride on cars, climbing frames, sensory play and mark-making materials.
- The children had access to high-quality books, linked to their interests and play areas. They enjoyed regular opportunities to listen to and explore stories and songs with the educators.

Action advised

- Educators are advised to revise the long-term curriculum plan to outline, in broad terms, the aspirations for children's learning and development. The dispositions, skills and learning outcomes for children attending the setting over a two year cycle should be identified.

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

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements was excellent.
- Children demonstrated enjoyment and enthusiasm in their learning. They were deeply engaged in playful learning experiences and participated eargerly in activities organised by the educators.
- Children's choice and voice was highly respected throughout the morning. Children were consulted on the timing of activities and transitions and their suggestions during circle time were responded to positively.
- Children had the opportunity to be a classroom helper with assigned jobs each day, for example setting the tables for snack time. They took great care in fulfilling these roles.

- Children were affirmed in their feelings and supported to resolve conflict that arose. Educators respectfully comforted children when necessary. One educator was observed kneeling in front of an upset child and asking “Would you like a hug?”
- Group learning journals depicted the children’s achievements and progress through photographs and written summaries of events. The journals were accessible to the children throughout the morning. Individual learning journals containing some artwork and observations were also complied with the children.
- The children were aware of their natural environment and its’ animals and insects. The setting had a small number of baby chicks that they had hatched from incubated eggs and a planned trip to the farm to reinforce their learning. A project on the life cycle of the butterfly was also discussed in one room.
- During circle time, a prop was passed around to invite children to share their news with the group if they so wished. This activity provided children with the space to recall and reflect on experiences and was supported by an attuned educator.
- The children had a strong sense of their community and the various roles of people within it. On the day of the inspection a vet came in to visit one of the pre-school rooms and two teachers from a local primary school visited the second pre-school room to meet the children and discuss their occupations.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was excellent.
- A very strong management structure supported the educators in a hands-on manner.
- The professional ethos in the setting was commendable. The senior manager, manager and educators each demonstrated a strong commitment to providing a high quality ECCE programme for children attending the setting.
- Very positive team work was observed on the day of the inspection. Roles and responsibilities in the setting were clear and equitable and educators were observed effectively communicating responsibilities and tasks with one another.
- The supportive policies and procedures in place for educators and team members included a comprehensive induction, regular support and supervision, fortnightly room reviews and monthly team meetings.
- Management meetings and meetings with other settings under the same owner occurred regularly to share information and ideas related to practice and management.
- The managers and educators were very skilled in setting self-evaluation and individual self-evaluation practices. They engaged in regular meetings to review, evaluate and plan for children’s learning and development. The *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* was regularly used to support and document this cycle of review.
- The managers had established links with support agencies such as the local Primary care team, county childcare committeee and Better Start Access and Inclusion Model (AIM).
- The managers and the educators recognised the importance of engaging in continuing professional development and upskilling. Professional learning programmes completed included the Leadership for INClusion (LINC) in the Early Years programme.
- The educators implemented a commendable approach to managing transitions. Children had access to photographs of local schools and discussed the schools they would be attending. Local primary school teachers were invited to visit the setting and interact with the children and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment’s *Mo Scéal* reporting templates were used to transfer information on children’s learning and development to the relevant schools.

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

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