**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

# EARLY YEARS EDUCATION - FOCUSED INSPECTION

# REPORT

| | |
|---|---|
| **Service Name** | Little Hands Montessori |
| **Service Address** | 43 Rossberry Avenue, Lucan, County Dublin |
| **DCYA number** | 09DS0003 |

## Date of Issue: 12-02-2018

An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

## WHAT IS AN EARLY YEARS EDUCATION-FOCUSED INSPECTION?

The Early Years Education-focused 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-focused Inspection

| | |
|---|---|
| **Date of inspection** | 12-02-2018 |
| **Inspection activities undertaken**<br><br>• Meeting with service manager<br>• Meeting with practitioners<br>• Meeting with board of directors (including parent representatives on the board)<br>• Other | • Observation of interactions during a number of sessions<br>• Interaction with children<br>• Review of relevant documents<br>• Feedback to service manager and practitioners |

## CONTEXT OF SERVICE

Little Hands Montessori is a privately owned service. It is located in a room in a private dwelling in Lucan. It was established over nine years ago. It provides a morning session for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, following a play-based curriculum with elements of the Montessori pedagogy. On the day of inspection, fourteen children were present together with the owner/practitioner and one other practitioner. The owner attended the post-inspection feedback meeting. 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 is excellent.
- The atmosphere is characterised by sustained warm, calm and caring interactions which are very supportive of the children's learning and development. The practitioners welcome the parents and children into the room at the start of the session.
- The children are very familiar with the environment and the routines. The routine and structure of the day provide the children with opportunities to be active agents in choosing and organising their own learning activities. The children display autonomy and agency as they choose between the materials in the environment. The children's familiarity with the routine is supported effectively through the use of a visual display of the daily routine.
- Snack time is seen as a social occasion. The practitioners sit and eat with the children and engage them in discussions.
- Transitions from one activity to the next over the course of the day are effectively signposted, with a verbal announcement, and the consistent use of a sand-timer to count down to the upcoming transition. Waiting times are used effectively to engage the children in learning through songs, rhymes and discussions.
- The practitioners are very effective in the way they provide guidance, affirmation and encouragement towards positive behaviour. The use of positive language, the encouraging of children to work together or help each other, and the consistency of practice help to reinforce the classroom expectations for children.
- The uniqueness of each child is nurtured and respected in various ways in this learning environment. For example, there are numerous displays depicting the child's individuality which include displays of 'my family', 'all about me' and 'how I feel', a birthday chart and the children's names on their coat hooks. The children have also experience of parents sharing their different cultures and languages. In addition, a culture shelf has been developed with items for the children to explore and there are words in different languages on display in the room.

## 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 very good.
- A play-based curriculum with some Montessori elements is in place. The curriculum is aligned to *Aistear; the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. There are short-term, medium-term and long-term plans. These are thematic and incorporate seasonal events and celebrations. The short-term plans incorporate some of the children's emergent interests.
- The children's progression in learning is documented using the *Aistear* Learning Record templates, Montessori checklists, and individual learner journals. The individual journals contain samples of art and crafts, free mark-making, and photographs of the children involved in activities. The practitioners' observations and individual learner journals are shared regularly with parents and are freely accessible to both children and parents. Currently, some of the observations identify the next steps of learning for the individual child. There is scope to develop the potential of the journals through the addition of the voice of the child and to use them more directly in planning learning activities for the children.
- The indoor environment is inviting, with many natural and open-ended materials that support and promote exploration and imaginative play. There are many interest areas that encourage the children to engage in different types of play; these include a book area, nature area, culture shelf, writing area and an art area. The literacy and numeracy materials provide opportunities for children to engage with new concepts in a playful manner. All of the materials are freely accessible to the children.
- The children have daily access to an outdoor area. It provides many opportunities for explorative, imaginative and large movement play as well as opportunities for the children to explore the natural environment. The outdoor resources include a balance beam, swings, a play house, a mud kitchen, a seating area, a tree, tyres, and raspberry plants.
- Many positive, authentic and affirming interactions were observed on the day of the inspection. Practitioners act as play partners, follow the child's lead in play activities, and often affirm, support, guide, and scaffold children's thinking and reasoning.
- The practitioners engage the children in story-telling and exploration of topics through drama and movement. For example, on the day of the inspection the practitioners encouraged the children to dramatise a trip to the moon, prompting them to share their thoughts and ideas about what they might see, how it might feel and what they might do.

*Actions advised*

- Practitioners are advised to ensure that their planning processes are consistently and directly informed by the developmental needs and interests of the individual child as recorded in their observations. When planning to extend the children's learning, practitioners are advised to think about the individual child and his/her interests and development needs, and to incorporate the child's voice in the planning and documenting process.
- The practitioners are encouraged to reflect on their role in children's play and to plan and predict how they could scaffold and extend the children's learning further. In this regard, the preparation of some open-ended questions and the use of 'I wonder' questions that will provoke and challenge children's thinking is advised.

## AREA 3

## QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is very good.
- The children are secure and confident in exploring their learning environment. They display enjoyment and engagement in their activities. They make many decisions about their activities and present as very capable in carrying out their intentions.
- The children are experiencing success and achievement. This was illustrated on many occasions throughout the session observed.
- The children are beginning to develop an awareness of mathematical concepts and sometimes include mathematical language in their play. On the day of the inspection, they counted items, classified and compared items, and discussed the different attributes of items, drawing comparisons between the size of different items.

- The children show a developing awareness of the meaning and uses of print. This is supported through their engagement with books and stories, rhymes and songs and free-mark making.
- The children enjoy sharing similar experiences, interests, ideas and opinions with the practitioners and their peers. They engage in discussions about their learning experiences; this was particularly evident during their dramatic play.
- The children often engage in collaborative peer play and it is evident that they have made strong connections as a group. They refer to children who are absent and discuss being friends with one another and playing together outside of the setting. They often form into pairs and small groups of three and four children to engage in socio-dramatic play.
- The service has established some connections with the local community. There are currently no visual representations of those connections in the learning environment.

*Actions advised*

- The practitioners are advised to provide regular opportunities for the children to recall, share, and discuss their learning. This could be facilitated through a circle time or small-group recall time at the end of the day where children could share the highlights of their day, their evolving interests and their ideas for the next day.
- The practitioners are advised to provide visual representations of the local community and to facilitate discussions and activities to enhance the children's understanding of their locality and the people living and working in it.

## AREA 4

## QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- The practitioners reflect and discuss their practice on an informal basis, daily and weekly. The outcomes of such meetings are not documented.
- There is a professional ethos in the service. There is clarity around the different roles and responsibilities. Effective teamwork and shared leadership are evident.
- The team has identified a clear vision of their curriculum where the Montessori Method and *Aistear* are implemented effectively.
- The practitioners are committed to continuous professional development. They have undertaken Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) and *Aistear* training.
- Home-service links are very good. An information day and a parental handbook are provided for parents in advance of their child starting in the service. Parents are invited to participate in activities in the service. A newsletter and messaging service provide regular updates to parents.
- Information about each child's progression is communicated regularly with parents through the sharing of the practitioners' documented observations of the children and the children's individual learning journals, and through informal discussions at arrival and collection times. The parents are encouraged to comment and provide feedback on their child's learning.
- The service is currently developing its policy on transition from pre-school to primary school. It has made contact with the local schools.

*Actions advised*

- The practitioners are advised to use the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to formalise their review and self-reflection process on quality development in the pre-school.

## CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is excellent.

## Summary of Overall Inspection

| Area | Quality Level |
|---|---|
| Quality of context to support children's learning and development | **Excellent** |
| Quality of processes to support children's learning and development | **Very Good** |
| Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements | **Very Good** |
| Quality of management and leadership for learning | **Very Good** |

## Language used in Early-Years Education-focused 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. |

*Published October 2018*