An Roinn Oideachais

Department of Education

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

Setting Name	Mellowes Childcare
Setting Address	Moygrehan Athboy C15 W288 County Westmeath
DCEDIY number	17WH0162
TUSLA REG NO.	TU2015WH016

Date of Inspection: 16-11-2021

This inspection took place in the context of public health restrictions necessary to limit the spread of Covid-19

An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

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 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 setting's provision in each area.

Early Years Education Inspection

Date of inspection	16-11-2021
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with setting owners/managers and three practitioners • Observation of interactions during a number of sessions	• Interaction with children • Review of relevant documents • Feedback to setting owners/managers and practitioners

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Mellowes Childcare is a privately-owned and operated setting. It offers full-time and sessional services. Two morning sessions are provided through the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. Both sessions were visited during the inspection. On the morning of the inspection, there were twenty-seven children and four practitioners 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.
- The atmosphere in the setting is warm and welcoming as children are individually greeted on arrival. At the end of the session, parents collect the children in the outdoor environment and engage in natural and relaxed conversations with practitioners about their child's day.
- Relationships between children and practitioners are consistently kind and respectful. Practitioners are very responsive to the children's needs and regularly foster caring and respectful relationships between the children.
- Practitioners use strategies during times of movement between areas and experiences. These include verbal notices and the singing of a song. Prior notice, in advance of such a transition, is not given and therefore children are not adequately prepared for a change in the daily routine.
- Opportunities are provided that gives recognition for the uniqueness of each child and their families. For example, photographs of the children and their families on display in the environment act as powerful opportunities for discussion between children and practitioners.
- Snack time is a relaxed social occasion where children and practitioners sit together and engage in natural conversations.
- Prior to Covid-19 restrictions being introduced, there were many opportunities for children, parents and practitioners to come together. These included an annual Christmas concert, a graduation ceremony and a sports day. In light of the current public health guidelines, parents have been unable to attend such events in recent times. Practitioners have been innovative in overcoming this challenge and have recorded the Christmas concert and shared it with parents.
- Many connections have been established with the local community. A relationship with a nearby nursing home has seen children make and send cards to the residents. A recent visit from members of *An Garda Síochana* to the outdoor classroom has also supported the children in getting to know people within their community.

Action advised

- Practitioners are advised to reflect on how children are prepared for times of movement from one experience or area to another. Advance notice, consistently using visual and auditory cues, would be helpful to inform children that a change is about to happen. Such strategies prepare children for a change in the routine and help to make times of transitions predictable and gradual.

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 approach, with clear links to *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*, is used to support children's learning and development. There are elements of the Montessori Method of Education in one of the two sessions where children are in their second year of the ECCE programme.
- Curriculum plans are organised on a long-term, medium-term and short-term basis. These plans incorporate seasonal events, celebrations, seasons, skills, numbers and shapes. There is some recognition of children's varying interests, strengths, cultural backgrounds and previous learning experiences throughout the planned curriculum.
- Practitioners gather information about children's learning using a variety of methods, including narrative observations, photographs and annual developmental checklists. Documented information about individual children's learning and development is shared with parents termly.
- Practitioners facilitate many effective interaction strategies with children. They are very responsive and display a great awareness of the children and their presence in the environment.
- The indoor environments are safe and well maintained. A wide selection of Montessori materials are provided in one of the learning environments. A separate soft play room and multi-use room for relaxation and other activities are also available to the children. Limited open-ended and real materials impact on the possibilities provided for the children to extend their learning and development through play.
- An attractive and well-designed outdoor environment provides a variety of spaces for children to explore. Many highly effective opportunities to support children's gross motor skills are provided, such as climbing structures and balancing beams. An outdoor classroom offers children the opportunity to engage in the outdoors in all weathers.
- Practitioners recognise the importance of play as a medium through which children learn and develop. They offer a variety of play types and adopt the role of play-partner in supporting and extending children's learning and development.
- Practitioners skilfully foster children's literacy skills. They facilitate rhymes and songs at circle time and provide a variety of books throughout both environments. During the inspection, after a child mentioned being brave, a practitioner was highly effective in discussing this emotion with all the children and in doing so, encouraged an expanded their use of vocabulary.

Actions advised

- Using the information gathered by practitioners in the assessment approaches, they are advised to streamline the planning processes ensuring that children's dispositions, values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding are consistently planned for. This will further support and strengthen the implementation of an emergent curriculum.
- Practitioners are advised to review the resourcing of both indoor and outdoor environments. The availability of a wide variety of open-ended and real everyday resources, such as buttons, wooden utensils, nuts and bolts, throughout the environments would further enrich the play opportunities provided to children. Use of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* environment tip sheet entitled 'Using open-ended materials' and engagement with the self-evaluation tool can be beneficial in informing such practice.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is very good.
- Children present as content and happy and it is evident that they are enjoying themselves.
- Most children display high levels of interest and motivation during their play. On the morning of the inspection, several children participated in story time and remained engaged for an extended period of time.

- Children display effective personal and social skills such as co-operating and building relationships. They play together in pairs and small groups with many friendships developing.
- Many children present as effective communicators as they use non-verbal and verbal means to express themselves. They ask questions, request help and often clarify their thinking with others.
- Children experience achievement throughout the sessions. They have access to their learning scrapbooks and have opportunities to engage in their artwork which is proudly displayed in each of the environments.
- Many children are developing a positive understanding of their identity as members of families. For example, children regularly refer to their family members and share stories of personal experiences throughout both sessions.
- Some mark making opportunities are available. Frequent use of templates, colouring pages and adult-led crafts limits opportunities for children to freely express their feelings, thoughts, ideas and creativity.
- Children display an awareness of the natural environment as they freely discuss bears and hibernation with one another. Management report plans to build on this in the coming months with the development of a sensory garden.

Action advised

- Practitioners are advised to provide children with regular opportunities to express themselves through a variety of media. Reconsideration of the frequent use of templates, adult-led crafts and colouring pages, which focus largely on the final product, is further advised.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- Various channels of communication are used to share information with parents on a regular basis. These include phone calls, monthly newsletters, a parent handbook and a social media page.
- The manager and practitioners meet regularly to reflect on practice, policies and procedures. Practitioners are allocated time each week to plan for and document children's learning and development.
- Clear strategies where practitioners share knowledge and experience of professional development opportunities with the wider team is not evident. This has resulted in missed opportunities for all practitioners to further enhance their professional practice.
- Practitioners demonstrate a clear sense of teamwork and partnership. They work well together and communicate regularly throughout the sessions.
- A settling-in policy informs practice as children start in the setting for the first time. To begin with, children and parents visit the setting. Once registered and prior to starting, children are offered settling-in visits to adjust to their new environment and to become comfortable with the practitioners.
- Practitioners are proactive in effectively managing children's transition from the setting to primary school. A teacher from the local school visits the children each year in response to a personal invitation received from the children. Within the physical environment, additional books and photographs are made available to support and promote conversation. This further prepares children for their move to primary school.
- Practitioners prepare a developmental checklist and share this with parents at the end of the ECCE year. This form of assessment does not reflect the whole child; their strengths, challenges, interests and dispositions.
- Previously, management and practitioners have engaged in mentoring through The Quality Development Service in Better Start. They report this to have been a positive experience that further enhanced practice in the setting.

Actions advised

- Management are advised to introduce clear strategies where all practitioners share their experience of their engagement in professional development opportunities with the wider team. This will ensure that the skills and knowledge garnered will benefit all practitioners and their professional practice.

- Practitioners are advised to replace the use of annual developmental checklists with '*Mo Scéal*' transition templates. Devised by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), this template encapsulates the whole child while also aligning with the themes of *Aistear.*

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	**Very good**
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.

Published June 2022