An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)
Final Report

Setting name	Smarties Academy
Setting address	5A Beaumont Avenue Churchtown Dublin 14 D14HE94
TUSLA registration number	TU2015DR192
DCEDIY number	15DR0296
Date of inspection	24-10-2023
Date of issue of report	16-01-2024

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	24-10-2023
Inspection activities undertaken • Pre-inspection meeting with the setting owner/manager • Review of setting documentation and records of children's learning and development • Review of the education resources and facilities • Observations of interactions during one session • Interaction with the children • Feedback meeting with the setting owner/manager	

Context of setting

Smarties Academy is a privately-owned, full day care and after school setting in south Dublin. The setting was established in 2015 and provides a morning pre-school session for children availing of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. On the day of the inspection, eight children and two educators were present. The owner/manager was also present on the day and 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 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 friendly and calm atmosphere prevailed in the setting. Soft music was playing in the background while the educators warmly greeted the children on arrival and engaged in informal conversations with the parents at the door.
- A key person approach was in place for recording and sharing observations with parents and the names of the key educators and children was displayed.
- Children were supported to become confident and independent with their self-care needs. They were affirmed as they removed and hung up their coats and managed their personal care routines such hand washing and cleaning their noses.
- A daily routine was displayed on the door for adults and a picture format visual routine was displayed for the children. The children's visual routine was not referenced during the observation and upcoming transitions within the daily routine were not prompted.
- The educators used wall displays which featured the children's birthdays and families and template artwork to nurture the children's growing sense of identity and belonging.
- Meal times were valued as social occasions. The educators sat with the children and discussed topics of interest with them. The children were not involved in the preparation of the meal or the clean-up routines.
- Relationships between the educators and children were respectful, responsive and caring. The children frequently hugged the educators and initiated conversation with them.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to introduce strategies to support children to navigate from one activity to the next and reduce waiting times for children during these periods of transition.

This could include referencing the visual routine, consistent verbal and visual cues and using songs or games that involve the children in the transition process.
- The educators are advised to utilise meal-time activities to further support the development of children's self-help skills. For example, the children could prepare the tables, self-serve their food and drinks and clean up after their meal.
- In order to strengthen the children's sense of community, the educators are advised to include opportunities for the children to learn about people and places in the local community.

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 a play based curriculum approach that was informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and elements of the Montessori Method of education.
- The documented curriculum comprised of monthly and weekly thematic planning that identified art and craft ideas, baking and science experiments.
- Information about the curriculum was communicated to the parents through a software application. The educators recorded and shared both group and individual observations with parents. The educators also use the system for taking and sharing photographs of the children's engagement in learning experiences and activities.
- The educators used calm, positive tones when interacting with the children. They were observed engaging the children in conversations about their home life and their families.
- The indoor environment was organised to support children's engagement in play and efforts were made to create interest areas to support children's play.
- Children had direct access to an outdoor area which provided opportunities to develop their gross motors skills. The equipment and toys included ride along toys, construction materials, a climbing wall and balance equipment.
- Children's emergent literacy and numeracy was supported through engagement in songs and rhymes, counting activities and musical movement during circle time and throughout the morning. A print rich environment and access to Montessori language materials further supported the children's language and literacy development.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to enhance their observations of the children's learning and development by identifying the emergent interests and planned next steps for learning, and to use this information to inform the short term curriculum plans.
- The educators are advised to extend the resources available in the interest areas and provide more opportunity for children to engage with real-life and open-ended materials.
- The educators are advised to increase the time allocated to children's freely chosen play and to make educator-led, whole-group activities optional, so that the children can independently choose to join in or to engage in alternative play experiences.

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

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements was very good.
- The children were interested and very engaged in the play activities and explorations that they initiated and lead themselves. It was noted that a small number of children were engaged in the educator-led learning activities.

- Children enjoyed the opportunities to interact with peers and educators. Friendly chatter was heard throughout the day. Children collaborated very well during the art and craft activity, taking turns and sharing with one another.
- The children demonstrated a positive sense of wellbeing and achievement. They received regular praise and affirmation from the educators.
- Children were patient and mannerly at snack time and during the periods of transition.
- Storytelling and circle time was greatly enjoyed by all children. They demonstrated active listening skills during circle time and participated in a flash card game with enthusiasm.
- The children were observed playing cooperatively in pairs and small group, it was evident that friendships were formed.
- The children had opportunity to play with children from younger age groups, including siblings, during meal times. The educators also suggested that on quieter days the children were not separated into different rooms.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to promote children's self-expression and creativity by encouraging process focused art and craft and reducing the emphasis on templates during creative activities. In addition, educators are advised to capture the child's voice on their creations.
- The educators are encouraged to provide the children with plentiful opportunities to engage in sensory rich experiences, both indoors and outdoors such as sand, water and natural materials for exploration.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was good.
- The owner/manager discussed that informal meetings and job chats with the educators happen regularly.
- The educators utilised quieter periods during the week as informal opportunity for curriculum planning and review and to complete and share the children's observations.
- The owner/manager provided hands on leadership and regularly visited the room and engaged the children in conversations. At times, the manager modelled practice for the educators as she led the learning experiences.
- Sharing information with parents was effectively achieved through informal conservations at the door during arrival and collection times, along with the software application that the educators used to share information with parents. The manager sent regular email updates to families.
- The owner/manager was supportive of educators accessing and engaging in continuous professional development courses and attending workshops. One educator is currently upskilling her qualifications to degree level.
- The owner/manager accessed support and information from the local county childcare committee and Early Childhood Ireland. She has made links with external agencies such as Better Start Access and Inclusion (AIM) with a view to optimising support and the participation of all children.
- Transitions into the setting were supported using a child-centred settling-in approach and parents completed a detailed registration form to support educators to get to know their child.
- Transition out of the setting included a transitions pack prepared by the educators and shared with parents and schools. Photographs of the local schools and uniforms have

previously been used as props to support children's understanding and awareness of local primary schools.

Actions advised

- The owner/manager is advised to introduce a formal approach to support and supervision sessions and team meetings with the educators.
- The owner/manager is advised to establish a formal, recurring approach to internal evaluation to identify and plan for quality developments within the setting. They are advised to avail of mentoring support from Better Start Quality Development Service for support with this.
- It is advised that parents are encouraged to participate in the day-to-day life of the setting and are welcomed into the children's learning environments. In addition, it is advised that a Parents handbook is developed and shared with parents so they are aware of the setting's ethos, policies and procedures.

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	Very 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
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