An Roinn Oideachais

Department of Education

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

Setting Name	Stepping Stones Playgroup
Setting Address	Rockforest Knock Co. Tipperary E538K24
DCYA number	09TN0030

Date of Inspection: 28-09-2021

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(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 setting's provision in each area.

Early-Years Education Inspection

Date of inspection	28-09-2021

Inspection activities undertaken

- Meeting with setting owner/manager and two practitioners
- Observation of interactions during session
- Interaction with children
- Review of relevant documents
- Feedback to owner/manager and two practitioners

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Stepping Stones Playgroup is a private setting located in Knock village, near Roscrea town in County Tipperary. It currently caters for ten children through the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. On the day of the inspection, seven children were present with the owner/manager and two practitioners. The early years setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised of the 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 very good.
- The children are greeted warmly and they are praised regularly. Positive behaviour is encouraged and minor conflicts are resolved subtly.
- The daily routine provides for some periods of child-led play. There is potential to support the children to actively choose and organise their learning and development activities to a greater degree.
- The children are supported to manage their self-care needs, and many do so independently.
- Snack time is a social occasion. The children eat and chat together, they discuss healthy food, and they enjoy listening to a story.
- The children's sense of identity and belonging is nurtured. Their recent achievements are highlighted and each child's name is shown on their coat hook and cubby. The children demonstrate confidence as they circulate.
- The setting is well integrated with the local community. Prior to Covid-19 there were visits from a local *Garda*, nurse, members of the fire brigade and Red Cross, parents spoke to the children about their roles, and a special occasion was hosted for grandparents. In the neighbourhood, the children observed farm animals and enjoyed the local tractor run. These activities will resume whenever public health guidance permits.

Action advised

- To afford the children more opportunities to choose and organise their learning, the practitioners are encouraged to facilitate lengthier uninterrupted periods of open-ended play. In addition, the children need to be enabled to continuously access more of the setting's materials and resources.

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 good.
- The practitioners use observation checklists to monitor each child's progress. A photograph display is generated for each child; the child's strengths, interests and backgrounds are acknowledged. There is a photograph booklet for each child, featuring their activities.

- A play-based curriculum is implemented. Daily activities are provided for and weekly themes are explored; the children's interests and parents' feedback are considered when selecting themes. Overall, there is potential to develop the planning practices to strengthen the implementation of an emergent curriculum.
- The indoor environment incorporates two well-maintained, spacious rooms. Appropriate play materials are provided. In both rooms, some of the space is occupied by tables which are used for table-top activities and snack time. There is potential to re-organise these rooms to enhance their play value.
- The outdoor environment is a very purposefully-structured area which inspires exploration and physical development. Very beneficial resources are provided including ride-along toys, climbing and playground apparatus, tyres which the children jump through, a boat structure and a large sand area which supports multi-sensory experiences.
- The practitioners interact with the children as energetic play partners.
- At times during the inspection, adult-initiated and directed learning activities were prioritised. There is scope to review this approach in favour of more child-initiated and child-directed learning.
- It is very evident that the children are learning in an inclusive environment. Children with additional needs receive support; the setting avails of advice through the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM).

Actions advised

- To further enhance the provision of an emergent curriculum, more focussed short-term planning documents are required. These need to be informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and the children's strengths, dispositions, individual and group interests. Use of the *Aistear* Learning Record Template is recommended. Advice is provided in the Planning and Assessing pillar of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide*.
- The setting is encouraged to allocate more of its indoor space to designated play areas which can feature the setting's ample materials. These areas could reflect the children's emerging interests and support even more construction, socio-dramatic play, and play which promotes creativity, language, physical development and imagination.
- In place of some of the adult-directed activities, the practitioners are encouraged to enable the children to become more fully engrossed in play scenarios and to recognise, support and extend the learning opportunities that arise naturally during play. Advice is provided in the Play pillar of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide.*

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is good.
- Through their learning experiences, the children experience a sense of achievement, most notably in the outdoor environment.
- The children take turns and co-operate with each other and they demonstrate empathy.
- Some opportunities are provided for the children to reflect on their developing abilities by reviewing their photograph booklet. These opportunities could be extended.
- Through the setting's displays and associated learning activities, the children are gaining an understanding of different countries. An age-appropriate map of the word is on display.
- To support early literacy and numeracy, the children sing songs and recite rhymes and the practitioners read stories to them in an expressive manner. During this inspection, the children counted and recognised numbers and they described colour, texture, size, shape and pattern as they handled shells.
- There is some formal instruction relating mostly to literacy and numeracy, and the children complete template-based activities on sheets and in a workbook. Some of the children's creative endeavours are template based. A review of this approach is merited.
- The children's physical skills are developing well through outdoor play and focussed physical activities which promote core strength and agility. They enjoy moving to music and games such as musical statues.
- The children's appreciation of the natural environment is developing well. On site, they observe the rescue chickens and vegetable plot, and they explore freely in the diverse natural landscape.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are encouraged to enable the children to review their photograph booklet more regularly. This will help them to appreciate their developing abilities and achievements. The booklets could be sent home more frequently, and parents could discuss the contents with their child and provide written commentary alongside the practitioners' annotations.
- In place of template-based activities and formal instruction, the children could be supported to explore literacy and numeracy concepts to a greater degree during their playful experiences. Increased use of the available resources including the playdough, peg boards, construction and mark-making materials would be valuable. To support creative expression, additional opportunities to use junk art materials, an easel, and paints would be beneficial.

AREA 4
QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- The owner/manager is committed to the setting and to the children's overall wellbeing. She works hard to develop an effective learning environment for the children.
- There is clarity around the practitioners' roles. Throughout the session, they lead some learning activities.
- On a daily basis, the owner/manager and the practitioners informally reflect on the children's learning experiences and where necessary, they modify the upcoming activities. They consider how to address children's needs as they arise. To promote ongoing development, the setting could engage in more robust and systematic reflection and review.
- The owner/manager and practitioners have completed training and they have taken part in professional development (CPD) opportunities, including courses relating to behaviour, communication, and anxiety in children. The owner/manager has completed the Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) programme.
- The owner/manager and practitioners converse with parents at drop-off and collection time and they follow up with phone calls where necessary. They disseminate information regarding the curriculum on a weekly basis and photographs are shared using a closed social media platform.
- Transitions into the setting are usually supported by inviting each child to visit the setting; this practice will recommence whenever possible. The children transition to various primary schools. The owner/manager reports that the setting liaises with the schools that seek information about the children. For each child, the *Mo Scéal* templates are completed and parents can choose to share this information with the primary school.

Action advised

- The setting is advised to systematically engage with the pillars and self-evaluation tools contained in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide.* Further practical advice and inspiring ideas across a range of themes are available in the online publication *Insights* – *Quality in Early Years Education*. The practitioners could view and discuss these materials collaboratively.

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	**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

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 2021