An Roinn Oideachais

Department of Education

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

Setting Name	The Schoolhouse Montessori
Setting Address	Ballyhack Fairyhouse Road Ratoath County Meath A85 E265
DCEDIY number	09MH0033
TUSLA REG NO.	TU2019MH197

Date of Inspection: 19-10-2021

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

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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	19-10-2021
Inspection activities undertaken • Pre-inspection meeting with the setting owner/practitioner • Observation of interactions and activities during a pre-school session • Interaction and discussion with the children	• Discussion with the early years practitioners Review of educational resources and facilities • Review of relevant setting documentation • Feedback to the early years practitioners • Post-inspection feedback meeting with the setting owner/practitioner

CONTEXT OF SETTING

The Schoolhouse Montessori was established in 1999. It provides a morning, sessional pre-school programme for twenty-two children enrolled on the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. It also offers an optional, additional thirty minutes care at the end of each session. The owner/practitioner, two early years practitioners and twelve children were present on the day on the inspection. The owner/practitioner attended the post-inspection feedback meeting. In response to Covid-19, the setting has introduced and implements infection prevention control measures. The early years setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised of the report, and the response of the setting will be found in the appendix of this report.

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 good.
- There is a warm and welcoming atmosphere in the setting. Parents are greeted individually at arrival and home times and information is shared, verbally, between the setting and home.
- The children have been placed into two key groups, the junior and the senior group, dependant on which ECCE year they are in. One practitioner is assigned to each group. The groups join together with their key person at their own table for daily planning, recall, snack and small-group time.
- Warm and caring relationships have been established between the practitioners and the children. The practitioners' interactions are sensitive, responsive and calm.
- The children relate positively to each other. When problems and social conflicts, typical of the pre-school years arise, the children turn to and rely on the practitioners to resolve them.
- The practitioners know the children and their families well and engage in frequent conversations with the children about their home lives and events outside the pre-school. This positively supports the children's developing sense of identity and belonging.

Actions advised

- To enable the children to solve everyday problems and social conflicts they encounter in their play and learning activities, it is advised that the practitioners support the children to develop problem solving skills.
- To further nurture the children's developing sense of identity and belonging as a key aspect of the curriculum programme, it is advised that the practitioners introduce activities, displays, photographs, artefacts and resources that will support the children to explore who they are as individuals, as a pre-school group, as a member of their family and as a person in their community. It is also advised that diversity in society is respectfully and accurately represented in the resources and materials available in the playroom.

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 fair.
- The practitioners have knowledge of *Aistear; the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. They implement a predominantly play-based programme which incorporates some aspects of both the Montessori and the HighScope curricula. The setting's ethos and philosophy is briefly outlined in the setting's parent guide. At the time of inspection, the setting's curriculum programme was not documented.
- The setting has a form of planning in place which consists of naming the daily small group and large group activities. These activities are based on practitioner-selected themes and concepts and template-based craft activities.
- The practitioners maintain full group checklists and Montessori mastery record sheets for the children.
- The practitioners often spontaneously respond to extend the children's interests as they emerge in play and conversation. The children's current and emerging interests are not yet recorded or incorporated into planning for the next steps in their learning and development.
- During the session observed, the practitioners sometimes used effective pedagogical strategies such as playing at the children's physical level and encouraging the children's play ideas. At other times, practitioners used more directive and didactic strategies to teach practitioner-selected concepts.
- The children's early literacy and numeracy are effectively supported through the practitioners' frequent, personal conversations, use of rich vocabulary and sentence structures and their use of counting and numeracy vocabulary in play activities and in real life situations.
- The practitioners demonstrate capacities to support the children's learning and development through child-led play and playful practitioner-facilitated activities.
- The practitioners effectively and enthusiastically introduce traditional and new songs and rhymes along with storybook reading to the children on a daily basis.

Actions advised

- It is advised that the practitioners develop, document and implement a play-based, emergent curriculum that is informed by *Aistear.*
- It is advised that the practitioners use a wide variety of assessment approaches to gather information about each child's individual learning experiences and achievements.
- It is advised that the practitioners use the assessment information to inform short-term planning for the next steps in learning, both at a group and at individual level.
- It is advised that the practitioners expand their use of strategies to support children's learning in playful activities; using open-ended questions, sustained shared thinking, problem solving and encouraging physical and mental exploration.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is good.
- The children are very well-settled. They arrive in the morning eager to begin their play and learning.
- The children are very keen to share their experiences, thoughts and ideas and they take every opportunity available to communicate with the practitioners and their peers.
- During indoor and outdoor free play periods, the children have a lot of time to choose their own play and learning activities. At times, the practitioners encourage the children to complete activities that they have selected such as, puzzles, literacy templates, colouring-in sheets and craft activities.
- The children enjoy each other's company and are respectful of each other. Some strong and loyal friendships are developing among children.
- The children are making choices to play in different social situations, intentionally alone, in small groups and in larger groups.

- The children are following their intrinsic physical needs and many are choosing to play on the floor, making puzzles, constructing, creating small world play and transport play.
- Some children are demonstrating developing capacities to play co-operatively, sharing ideas and developing play scenarios together. On the day of inspection, three children worked together for an extended period of time building tall towers on the floor and then knocking them over. A group of children created a very exciting, fast-paced game of car chasing on the floor around the tables.
- The children are experiencing fun and enjoyment in their self-chosen play and learning activities.

Actions advised

- It is advised that the children are provided with time each day for practitioner-facilitated, small-group discussions to support their communication, language and thinking skills. Planning, recall, lunch and small-group time present wonderful opportunities for the children to be supported to communicate freely.
- It is advised that the practitioners re-assess the indoor and outdoor learning environments to ensure they support the children's developmental and learning needs and their current interests. Use of the self-evaluation tool in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide,* 'Creating and using the learning environment' will greatly support this action.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is good.
- There is a professional ethos in this setting. The owner and practitioners are committed to providing a quality learning experience for the children.
- The practitioners have not had opportunities, in recent times, to engage in continuing professional development to enhance and update their practice.
- The owner/practitioner provides clear leadership. There is very positive team working between the practitioners. Roles and responsibilities are shared equitably. Each practitioner took a leadership role at different times during the pre-school session observed.
- The practitioners meet termly to plan around established themes and seasonal events.
- Information about the setting is shared with parents in a parent guide and informally through daily conversations and social media.
- The owner/practitioner meets with the parents of children transitioning to primary school to share a written report with them on their child's achievements and mastery in the Montessori curriculum.
- The setting has established positive relationships with the local primary school.

Actions advised

- It is advised that the owner/practitioner accesses the support of the Better Start Quality Development Service to begin the process of developing and embedding an emergent, enquiry-based curriculum and associated planning and assessment approaches in the setting.
- It is advised that team meetings are held more frequently to allow for the team's professional engagement in planning, review, reflection and self-evaluation. Resources in the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* can be used to support the team's work at these meetings.
- To further support the children's transition to primary school, it is advised that the practitioners begin to explore using the *'Mo Scéal'* learner profiles available at www.ncca.ie.

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	**Fair**
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	**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.

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APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection **activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.**

(1)Actions advised

' It is advised that the practitioners develop, document and implement a play-based, emergent

Curriculum that is informed by Aistear.'

While I appreciate these comments, our school has been using the Montessori Program and High Scope Program for the almost 23 years with great results. Within these Programs we have all the elements of the Aistear areas of: ID & Belonging, Wellbeing, Communication, Exploring and Thinking.

(2)Actions advised

'It is advised that the practitioners use a wide variety of assessment approaches to gather

Information about each child's individual learning experiences and achievements.

The time and requirements of this assessment takes up considerable time each day by staff.

It is advised that the practitioners use the assessment information to inform short-term planning

For the next steps in learning, both at a group and at individual level.'

I appreciate the suggestion about gathering information about each child and using it to plan other learning outcomes. We have in the past indirectly always done this while working with the children daily.

We always do observations with each child. This is normally performed when they start at the school at the beginning of the school term to introduce all the equipment and activities to each child. These observations run from for 45 mins two/three time per week from mid-September – Mid October annually.

We then run observations and assessments on each child again from January – February. Based on our results, we always arrange to meet with the parents early March to discuss our findings.

Finally we run observations after Easter to finalise how the children performed over the year and to raise awareness to their parents on how they performed and if there is any Red Flags that require more attention.

Due to Staff/child ratio, the care of each child is our primary concern daily. We have 11 children on each table (totalling 22 on both tables). These children are supported and cared for by the Leader of that table.

In order to justify the advice about documenting observations on a daily basis for all the children. It would take 1.50-2 hrs after school daily to support this. This involves staff taking notes while looking after the children, which is impossible. This means we are prioritising note taking above the care of the child! Manpower is the issue here.

Also the factor in the cost of having to pay staff, extra to stay back each day after school to achieve this suggestion. Unfortunately childcare rates do not support this financial cost to the Childcare Setting. Finance is the issue here.

While I take on board the comments at this time, what has been suggested that we plan for each child, individually is presently untenable within our daily routine with the children in our school.

(3) Actions advised

'It is advised that the practitioners expand their use of strategies to support children's learning in Playful activities; using open-ended questions, sustained shared thinking, problem solving and Encouraging physical and mental exploration.'

In my professional opinion, we already support this comment and observation.

(4) Actions advised

'It is advised that the children are provided with time each day for practitioner-facilitated, small-Group discussions to support their communication, language and thinking skills. Planning, Recall, Lunch and small-group time present wonderful opportunities for the children to be supported to Communicate freely.'

We implement these requirements daily already. Each of the children are given an opportunity to be supported and to communicate freely within the Montessori Program and High Scope.

(5) Actions advised

'It is advised that the practitioners re-assess the indoor and outdoor learning environments to ensure they support the children's developmental and learning needs and their current interests. Use of the self-evaluation tool in the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide Creating and using the learning Environment will greatly support this action.'

We are constantly reassessing our indoor and outdoor area to support the children's developmental and learning needs. Past funding has supported this need greatly.

(6)Actions advised

'It is advised that the owner/practitioner accesses the support of the Better Start Quality Development Service to begin the process of developing and embedding an emergent, enquiry - based curriculum and associated planning and assessment approaches in the setting.

It is advised that team meetings are held more frequently to allow for the team's professional Engagement in planning, review, reflection and self-evaluation. Resources in the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide can be used to support the team's work at these meetings.

To further support the children's transition to primary school, it is advised that the practitioners Begin to explore using the 'Mo Scéal' learner profiles available at www.ncca.ie.'

Over the coming year we will look at the advice and consider the recommendations.