An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

Service Name	Unikids Childcare
Service Address	University Business Park National Technological Park Castletroy County Limerick
DCYA number	09LK0071

Date of Inspection: 27-04-2018

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agus Scileanna
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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 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 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 Inspection

Date of inspection	27-04-2018
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with service manager • Meeting with practitioners • Observation of interactions during a number of sessions	 • Interaction with children • Review of relevant documents • Feedback meeting with the service manager and practitioners

CONTEXT OF SERVICE

Unikids Childcare is a privately-managed childcare centre which has been in operation since 2005. It is located in a purpose-built facility in a large business park near the University of Limerick. It provides full day care, and morning sessions for children availing of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. These sessions are divided into a senior and junior programme. On the morning of the inspection, forty-one children and five practitioners were present. One of the practitioners in the junior room is employed through the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) to support children with additional needs. The setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised in this report, and the response submitted on behalf of the setting can 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 excellent.
- The staff in the setting has successfully created a very welcoming, calm and respectful atmosphere. The children are welcomed by their designated key person on arrival and appear confident and relaxed.
- It is very evident that the routines in the setting nurture children's emotional security. The organisational procedures are very clear and consistent in supporting children's learning and development while attending the setting.
- The children are supported very effectively to be active agents in choosing and organising their own learning activities within the programme. The children have freedom of movement within the rooms; there is a real sense of children having ownership and agency within the programme of activities and the environment.
- Positive relationships have been successfully developed between the practitioners and the children and families using the key person approach. This provides all children and families the opportunity to build a relationship with one key person in the setting. The practitioners invest time getting to know their key children; on the morning of the inspection, their interactions with their key children were very responsive and respectful.
- Transitions are managed remarkably well. They are seamless and calm. The children receive plenty of notice of upcoming changes in activities; a low-toned bell, songs, visuals and verbal reminders are used effectively. On the day of the inspection, it was clear the children knew what was expected of them during the transitions.
- It is commendable how the practitioners guide the children towards positive behaviour. They help the children to understand the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and encourage them to manage for themselves minor struggles such as taking turns with materials. They provide very clear, timely guidance and reminders to the children around day-to-day procedures. The children were involved in constructing some of the class rules at an earlier stage in the pre-school year and they clearly observed, respected and reminded each other about these during the session observed.
- Nurturing children's sense of well-being and belonging is commendable in the setting. All of the children have individual cubbies for their artistic creations and drawings and individual learning journals that celebrate their achievements. There are various attractive photographic displays in the

base rooms and the welcome area. Many of these depict individual children's families, what their families love to do together and where they live. Children's birthdays, handprints with personal comments from their parents and learning stories from group projects and community outings are also displayed.

- The staff in the setting has very successfully integrated and made genuine connections with the local community. The children and practitioners take regular walks together through the community and they discuss and photograph community landmarks.
- Lots of opportunities are provided for parents and families to come together in the setting. These opportunities include cultural days, outings, annual fun days, library visits, fundraising events, anniversary events, graduations. Parents are also invited to come to the setting to share their interests and skills with the children throughout the year
- Diversity is recognised and embraced in the setting. They have culture days to celebrate the many and varied rich traditions the children and families attending the setting have. Many of the children's home languages and phrases, songs, and food types are incorporated into the setting.

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 very broad and balanced curriculum that is underpinned by the principles of *Aistear, The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* is apparent. It is influenced by elements of the High/Scope approach.
- The curriculum is very child-centred and places a great value on children's self-initiated play and hands-on explorations as a means through which young children learn and develop. This is complemented very successfully by the attentive practitioners who organise learning experiences for small groupings of children. These stem from their observations of what the children are interested in, such as creating drawings for a book or a skill they want the children to gain mastery over, such as using a scissors
- Planning for curriculum implementation is organised on long-term, medium-term and short-term (weekly) basis. The development of an emergent, enquiry-based curriculum has commenced where the short-term (weekly) planning templates take due account of children's emergent interests and needs.
- The approaches to gathering information about the children's learning experiences and achievements is commendable in the setting. The practitioners' pedagogical documentation viewed on inspection celebrates and makes children's learning achievements and progression in learning visible. These included individual learning records with comments from parents, learning stories, free drawings with comments and thoughts from the children.
- There is a very good balance between adult-directed and child-directed activities, with both adults and children making decisions in partnership with each other. Children are viewed as competent, capable individual learners. They have freedom of movement and freedom of choice to engage with their environment.
- The practitioners very successfully engage and motivate the children in their learning; they use appropriate and effective interaction strategies and pedagogies to facilitate a broad range of learning experiences. They are flexible and cognisant of children's intentions, needs and interests when preparing the environment and scheduling activities. The practitioners provide the children with timely and sensitive guidance, gentle promptings and reminders about specific rules and initiate natural conversations with them.
- The indoor environments are spacious with very well resourced designated play areas. These successfully support children's independence, social engagement, creativity, imagination, and desire for hands-on exploration.
- The children have daily access to the outdoors. Each room has its own outdoor space and the setting has a large shared outdoor space that provides for many and varied learning experiences.
- Play is highly respected and valued in the setting as a significant means by which the children learn and develop. The practitioners very effectively support children's learning by joining in children's

play, by facilitating and extending children's play through questioning, adding extra props and making suggestions.

- The practitioners support the children to collaborate with each other; they also encourage children to take responsibility for looking after the environment by labelling each learning area with a different colour. For example, on the morning of the inspection, small groups of children took responsibility for sorting and cleaning the specific areas of the room that matched the colour they were that week. Each week the groups rotate to clean a different area.
- The children's emergent language and literacy skills are fostered very successfully through a language-rich, enquiry based environment. The practitioners encourage the children to actively participate in poems, songs, rhymes and stories and they use an expanded vocabulary and language when interacting with the children. An extensive variety of books is available and accessible to the children and many opportunities for free drawing and mark making are provided. On the morning of inspection, the practitioners and the children shared in reading a story that the children had created after a recent project on planets. The dictated story was transcribed by the practitioners and was developed into a large book with photographs and children's drawings.
- The enquiry-based small group activities and the play opportunities effectively build children's positive dispositions towards science, engineering and maths.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to consider progressing children's learning further by focusing more on the 'next steps' in their learning as informed by observations and the children's evolving interests, strengths, knowledge and dispositions.
- The practitioners are advised to consider how they can move children's mathematical enquiries on when they are involved in play and small-group projects and then evidencing this. Ideas on supporting and developing mathematical learning and competencies through play is available in 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 excellent.
- The majority of the children demonstrate very high levels of enjoyment and sustained engagement in their learning.
- They appear very confident, capable and competent in making decisions about their learning and during their learning experiences.
- The children know what is expected of them and are very respectful of the boundaries when using materials. They eagerly take responsibility during the cleaning routine and in looking after their belongings and personal care needs.
- The majority of the children are very good communicators and have developed positive pro-social skills. They use imaginative language and ask 'I wonder why' questions. They share their ideas, feelings and thoughts with clarity and self-confidence and they demonstrate an ability to play cooperatively.
- The children are developing a positive understanding of their own individual identity and their identity as members of a family and of the wider community.
- The children displayed many positive learning dispositions towards learning. For example, on the day of the inspection, they were very motivated, resourceful and creative when engaging with the open-ended materials. They discussed their ideas when drawing, painting and using playdough and they negotiated roles during socio-dramatic play.
- The children enjoy exploring sound, rhyme and repetition in language. On inspection a group of children marched enthusiastically to the beat of familiar rhymes and songs they sang while walking to the dining room for their snack.
- A number of children competently recognise and write their name. They also demonstrate a keen interest in reading books and decoding the print in the room.

Action advised

- The practitioners are advised to facilitate more opportunities for the children to talk about their learning achievements, experiences and play intentions. This could happen in small groupings

with their key person who shares her observations with them and supports them to share their thoughts. Bringing the large-group journals into the rooms for the children to view and discuss will support this.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- The staff in the setting has successfully created a culture of individual and team reflection with a strong sense of commitment to providing quality-learning experiences for the children. Each staff team reflects on their practice regularly; this supports their planning processes and actions for change.
- The management team has a clear structure in place for all staff to attend training and to take a leadership role in planning and implementing the curriculum.
- On the morning of the inspection, the staff teams demonstrated professionalism, teamwork and confidence in their practice.
- Regular staff meetings are held for planning where weekly reflections, key observations, conversations with the children and parental comments are taken into account. Each staff team has planning folders and observation templates for their key children.
- The setting have strong links established with the local County Childcare Committee in relation to continuous professional development.
- The staff has created many and various means of consulting and communicating with parents. They place a high value on involving parents in their child's learning and development while attending the setting. Parents and families receive a comprehensive handbook that outlines the ethos and the curriculum along with the policies and procedures of the setting. A key worker system is in place which contributes very effectively to communications between home and the pre-school. Communication is further supported by parent notice boards, large-group learning journals, photographic displays and children's learning observations which are available to view every day.
- Transitions into and out of the setting are well supported. Meaningful information about each child is gathered on enrolment and when children move between the rooms in the setting. While the sharing of information with schools has yet to be established, discussions with the children happen during circle-time about going to school.

Actions advised

- To further support and inform on-going review and improvement practices, the practitioners are advised to make greater use of the self-evaluation tools in the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide.*
- The practitioners are advised to consider utilising the tools available in the 'Supporting transitions' pillar of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide.* This will support further reflection on supporting children when transferring from pre-school to primary school.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

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

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	**Excellent**
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.

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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.**

- Each staff member plans for their small group the end of the week the staff reflect on their planning.
- Use of individual journals in the rooms where children put in all their activities. Staff refers to the journals to plan "the next steps" for each child. Child's observations are in their journals to plan for new activities. Children are divided in to small groups to reflect what they have done so far or what they can do next. New equipment has been introduced in the rooms to encourage their mathematical skills e.g. measuring jugs, weighting scales, money matching games.
- Key worker system implemented in the room.
- Children's learning journals are kept in the room so children have access to them.
- Staff have become familiar with their self-evaluation tool and they are implementing in their rooms. They have reviewed each area in their room using the checklist.
- Staff have become familiar with the "supporting transitions" pillars and will use this information during the whole preschool year keeping in mind any information passed from parent to teacher.