An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)

Final Report

Setting name	Littlle Mischief Day Nursery /Montessori.
Setting address	Banagher Court Piltown County Kilkenny E32AY90
TUSLA registration number	TU2015KK099
DCEDIY number	13KK0128
Date of inspection	25-02-2025
Date of issue of report	09-05-2025

What is an Early Years Education Inspection?

The Early Years Education Inspection model is used to provide evaluative information, advice and support in relation to the education of children aged birth to six years in early learning and care settings. The inspections will affirm good practice and provide advice to support internal quality development processes that optimise children's education experiences and outcomes.

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

Date of inspection	25-02-2025

Activities conducted during the Inspection

- Pre-inspection meeting with the setting manager
- Review of setting documentation and records relating to the children's learning and development
- Review of the education resources and facilities
- Observations of interactions during two Early Childhood Care and Education Programme sessions
- Interaction with young children
- Interaction with early years educators
- Feedback meeting with the setting owner, manager and deputy manager

Context of setting

Little Mischief Day Nursery/Montessori is a privately-owned Early Learning and Care (ELC) setting located in Piltown, County Kilkenny. Established since 2015, this setting is one of two sister settings. It provides full day, part-time and sessional care to toddlers and young children on a daily basis. The setting runs two concurrent morning pre-school sessions for children who are participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the morning of the inspection, a total of twenty-nine children were in attendance, with five early years' educators across both learning environments. 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.
- The educators had created a caring ethos and friendly atmosphere. They greeted children and parents warmly during arrival and collection times.
- The educators planned daily routines which were familiar to the children. The programme of activities included table top activities, free play, outdoors and a blend of adult-initiated and child-initiated activities. The educators had developed visual daily routine displays.
- Snack time was a social occasion for the children. The educators provided the children with their placemats and selected a 'helper' in the moment, to give out the children's lunches. The children put their leftover waste in the bin and put their lunchboxes and placemats away.
- The children were confident in their self-care skills, they independently put on and took off their coats and wetsuits, washed their hands and attended to their bathroom needs. Some children participated in 'helper' roles, such as giving out lunch bags during snack time. At times the children were unclear about what some roles involved. For example, two children were called up as helpers during circle time discussions about the weather and did not participate in any role.
- In some instances, the educators provided the children with verbal signals of upcoming transitions. Throughout the morning, transitions were in the main, announced in the moment, and did not include the use of any visual or auditory aids.
- The educators promoted kindness and friendships amongst the children, through child-friendly posters, songs and classroom rules.
- The relationships between the children and the educators were affectionate. The educators in both learning rooms, shared responsibility for all children's learning and development, and for communicating with their parents. They did not implement a key person approach.
- The educators provided the children with direction during activities, which limited their opportunities for choice and self-directed learning.
- The children in one learning room were supported to recognise emotions through a child-friendly poster display. In the main, strategies to support the children to express emotions was not observed.

- The children's uniqueness was recognised and valued. The educators had created photographic displays of the children engaged in learning activities, along with photographs displayed at their coat hangers, for their birthday displays and of their families.
- The setting operated an open-door policy for parents. Parents were welcomed into the setting for the children's annual Christmas play and end of year graduation.
- Diversity was valued and reflected in the setting. The educators provided the children with access to books and dolls which reflected different cultures. The educators had recently invited a parent into the setting to discuss their cultural celebrations and traditions. The manager had completed diversity, equality and inclusion training.
- The educators supported the children's connections to the community, by involving them in charity walks and road safety events and by organising an annual trip to Kildalton College, located in the village.

Actions advised

- In order to strengthen the children's independence and engagement in the daily routine, the educators are advised to develop more visual and auditory aids for the children across both learning environments. The inclusion of child-friendly 'helper' role displays and extending transition strategies to include more verbal signals, songs, bells and sand timers. This will support the children to predict whose turn it is and in becoming independent active learners.
- The educators are advised to develop and implement a key person approach, which can be used to facilitate learning in small key groups. This will extend upon children's thinking and reasoning, language and skills and their autonomy in self-directed learning, in addition to supporting educators planning for their key children's emerging interests and needs.
- The educators are advised to develop daily strategies which will consistently support children to express their emotions and discuss their feelings.

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, which was influenced by the Montessori Method of Education and which was informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.*
- The educators planned on a long-term, medium-term and short-term basis. Medium-term planning was guided by seasonal and cultural themes and topics. The short-term plans were an extension of medium-term plans with associated activities. The educators noted interests from children, these were in the main broad and recorded as group interests.
- The educators had completed termly assessments of the children's learning and development. These observations included developmental checklists, photographs and descriptions of learning, and documented next steps in children's learning progression. Observations were shared with parents on request or if a concern emerged. The children had their own scrapbooks which included their artwork, photographs and formal tracing worksheets.
- The educator's interactions with the children were supportive, calm and fun. They praised and encouraged the children's achievements and engaged them in two-way conversations.
- The indoor learning environments included some defined interest areas, such as, a book area, construction areas and play kitchen areas. The outdoors consisted of a secure tarmac and astro grass area and climbing wall, and an additional grass area with slides, a basket swing, a mud and play kitchen and two play houses.
- The resources included well maintained blocks, transport vehicles, small world animals and figurines, toy dinosaurs, dolls and dolls clothes, and a wide variety of puzzles. The children had access to a small amount of real and natural open-ended materials across the learning environments.
- The educators had created print rich environments which fostered the children's emergent literacy and numeracy skills. They had access to weather and season displays, Montessori sandpaper letters and numbers, and a wide range of books.
- The children in one learning room engaged in a free-drawing activity representing their families and were supported to name who they were drawing. Many of the children's completed artwork included the use of templates and colouring-in pages.

- The educators had created inclusive learning environments, which ensured the participation of all children in the setting, and which supported children to engage in activities at their own developmental pace.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to document all children's inquiry based and emergent interests into short-term plans. This will support the educators to extend upon children's individual observations, strengths and to document specific knowledge and learning dispositions. They are further advised to complete more regular assessments of children's learning and development using the *Aistear* learning record templates, and share these with parents on completion.
- The educators are advised to review their indoor and outdoor learning environments, to include more defined areas such as, home areas, mark making and art areas, messy play areas and books areas. They are further advised to ensure that more real, open-ended and natural materials and loose parts are freely available to the children.
- The educators are advised to limit the children's engagement in formal writing practices and their use of template art and colouring-in pages and to instead provide more opportunities for the children to explore their creativity and mark making through process art 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 demonstrated fun and enjoyment in their learning experiences.
- The children had developed nice friendships as they played cooperatively with their peers, in pairs and small groups.
- The educators supported the children to make connections to past, present and future learning. This was effectively demonstrated during a circle time activity where the children recalled the days of the week and reflected on the changing seasons and which clothes to wear.
- The children experienced opportunities which increased their confidence and coordination in their fine and gross motor skills. They participated in stacking large pegs and making pictures with magnetic boards indoors, and going down slides and playing chase games, when outdoors.
- The children had a growing understanding of health and nutrition. They had opportunities to discuss items on the food pyramid and playing outdoors was part of their daily activities.
- The children had an awareness of their uniqueness. They had completed 'all about me' displays which recorded their favourite songs, food and animals. On review of the children's documentation, the educators missed some opportunities to consistently record and document the children's voices.
- The children had opportunities to engage in songs and rhymes and had access to musical instruments.
- The children had a growing understanding of the meaning and use of mathematical language. There were two posters representing time in one learning room and the educators held discussions with the children about size of their pets, in the other learning room.
- The children were aware of the wider world, they participated in themed activities about the solar system and the lifecycle of plants and insects. There was a globe and a world map display across the learning rooms.
- The children had access to a sensory box which included textured balls and 'squishies' and had access to Montessori sensory bags with a range of fasteners. Whilst there were sensory tuff trays and sand trays in the outdoor environment, these were empty and not used on the day of the inspection.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to consistently record and make the children's voices more visible across the learning environments. Capturing the children's comments, suggestions, ideas and thinking and reasoning language, on their art work, in their learning observations and journals and during small group time discussions will support this.
- The educators are advised to include more freely available multi-sensory materials and opportunities for children to engage with these materials across the learning environments.

The inclusion of children's daily access to sand, water and playdough will support their engagement in sensory rich experiences.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was very good.
- There was oversight and responsibility for the programme of learning and care by the owner and managers. Roles and responsibilities were defined, in terms of manager, deputy manager, room leaders and educators.
- The managers and educators held informal daily meetings to share updates and address any emerging concerns. Formal team meetings were held every six weeks and minutes of meetings recorded operational procedures.
- The educators reflected informally on curriculum activities, in terms of what worked well and areas for development. Two educators had completed the '*planning and assessing'* self-evaluation tool in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide,* as an individual reflection. There were no formal structures in place to engage the whole team in internal review or self-evaluation opportunities.
- The manager carried out check-ins with the educators on a daily basis and operated an open door policy. The owner provided support to the educators, as needed.
- There were comprehensive policies and procedures developed for the setting. The settings long-term plan consisted of monthly events and a brief outline of events and activities. It did not detail how the learning programme supported the development of the children's knowledge and skills and their learning dispositions.
- The educators attended regulatory training. The manager had completed the *Leadership in INClusion in the Early Years (LINC)* programme and two educators had completed *Lámh* training courses.
- The educators held effective two-way communications with parents. They shared the children's learning and development progress informally on a daily basis, and regularly posted the children's activities on a social media application. General updates were shared via the telephone and a recap of events were provided to parents via monthly newsletters. Formal one-to-one meetings were offered throughout the year, and a parent's handbook was shared with parents.
- The educators implemented effective settling-in strategies. Existing children had transitioned across the learning rooms and were familiar with the educators. New children and parents were supported to attend face-to-face onsite meetings and settle in on a phased basis, over a week during the summer period.
- The educators had developed high effectively strategies for children transitioning from pre-school to primary school. They had developed strong relationships with their local feeder school. They completed the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment *Mo Scéal* templates, and with parents' consent, shared these with teachers. They developed social boards and put school uniforms in the learning environments when preparing the children for this transition. In addition, many children had siblings attending the afterschool service.

Actions advised

- The management and educators are advised to formally engage as a whole team in internal review and self-evaluation processes to support quality improvement developments. They are further advised to document agreed decisions and shared responsibilities amongst staff. The action planning templates and self-evaluation resources in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* will support this.
- The management and educators are advised to develop a long-term plan which is aligned to their curriculum and which reflects their ethos in terms of children's learning and development outcomes.

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	Very 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	Examples of descriptive terms
Excellent	**Provision that is excellent** is exemplary in meeting the needs of learners. This provision provides an example for other schools and settings of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Excellent; exemplary; outstanding; exceptionally high standard; with very significant strengths
Very good	**Provision that is very good** is very effective in meeting the needs of learners and is of a very high standard. There is potential to build on existing strengths to achieve an excellent standard.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful
Good	**Provision that is good** is effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to build on existing strengths in order to address the aspects to be developed and achieve a very good standard.	Good; of good quality; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; strengths outweigh the shortcomings; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Requires improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard** is not sufficiently effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is good or better.	Fair; less than effective; less than sufficient; evident weaknesses that are impacting on learning; experiencing difficulty; shortcomings outweigh strengths; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard** is not meeting the needs of learners. There is immediate need for significant action to address the areas of concern.	Weak; poor; ineffective; insufficient; unacceptable; experiencing significant difficulties; serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated; requiring significant change, development and improvement to be effective

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

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