

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT FOR FACTUAL VERIFICATION

Setting Name	Ballybrack/Killiney Montessori
Setting Address	The Parish Centre St. Matthias Church Church Road Ballybrack Co. Dublin
DCYA number	14DR0277

Dates of Inspection: 27 – 28 November 2018



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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	27 – 28 November 2018
Inspection activities undertaken	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interaction with children• Review of relevant documents• Feedback to setting owner/manager and practitioners

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Ballybrack/Killiney Montessori, a privately-owned setting, was set up four years ago. It provides four pre-school sessions, three in the morning and one in the afternoon, and has recently introduced an after-school club. The learning programme in the setting is informed by the Montessori approach, with elements of play included. During the inspection, forty-nine children who are in their first and second years of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, the owner/manager, seven practitioners and five students on work experience were present. The owner and the assistant manager attended the post-inspection feedback meeting.

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 practitioners have established positive, respectful relationships with the children and their families. Parents bring their children into the room and settle them at an activity before leaving.
- As children move into the pre-school rooms, they confidently hang up their coats and put their lunches away. They display confidence in selecting and organising their activities and the areas in which they wish to play.
- The visual daily routine is displayed at child height and transitions are signalled by the practitioners' use of verbal reminders, a child ringing a bell and songs and rhymes. The practitioners ensure suitable flexibility for the children in the routines. This was reflected during the inspection when practitioners decided to change the routine to offer children physical exercise indoors as, due to inclement weather, they could not go outside.
- Secure relationships have been developed between the practitioners and the children and a key person approach is in place. This approach is one in which the key person builds a secure, supportive relationship with the child and has primary responsibility for sharing information in relation to the child with his/her parents. A photographic display of each key person and her group of children is visible in the rooms. In this setting, the key person works closely with the children in her key group in planned small-group activities and has primary responsibility for recording information regarding their learning.
- Snack time is valued as a social occasion. The practitioners sit with the children and chat about their lives outside of the pre-school.
- Throughout the sessions, the practitioners offer children consistent praise and encouragement. The use of positive feedback and supportive encouraging gestures supports and motivates the children in their learning. Practitioners are very attentive to children's needs and support them to make decisions and choices in their activities.
- The practitioners actively model and provide guidance for children towards positive behaviour; they remind children to be kind to their friends and support the children as they negotiate minor disagreements.
- The uniqueness of each child is celebrated and reflected in a variety of visual displays. These include birthday balloons, the children's photographs and their names on their coat hooks.
- There are many occasions provided for parents to visit the setting. For example, parents, including a dentist and a fireman, have visited to share their work experiences. The parents go on the annual outing and attend the Christmas party and the end-of-year leaving party.
- The children's awareness of cultural diversity is reflected in the books and jigsaws in the rooms. There is scope to further reflect cultural diversity in the learning environments.

- The children are learning about their local community. They have had visits from the lollipop lady, and in some instances, have created blocks with photographs of areas of local interest that they use for play. There are plans in place to bring children on an outing to a local nursing home to visit senior citizens.

Action advised

- The practitioners are advised to further promote the diversity of the children and their families in the learning environments. This can be achieved by displaying the flags and languages of the children and their families attending the setting, and by engaging the children in discussions about family celebrations. This will support the children's awareness of diversity and the promotion of a more inclusive environment.

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.
- The curriculum in the setting is informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. It is reflective of the Montessori approach to learning and also promotes the use of play within the rooms.
- Planning in the setting is based on seasonal themes and activities selected by the practitioners. These plans are divided into monthly and fortnightly topics. There are occasional references to the children's emergent interests in the short-term planning.
- Practitioners have introduced individual learning journals to reflect children's engagement in the learning activities. These are shared with parents at each mid-term. The learning journals contain the children's drawings, with annotations of their comments, and photographs with descriptions of their engagement in the activities and the practitioners' observations of the children's learning.
- A large floor book contains photographs of the children's engagement in the planned topics. This is available to children and parents in the room.
- A number of approaches are used to record the children's learning. Checklists are completed at the start of the year and formal monthly observations linked to *Aistear* broadly note the next steps for children's learning. In the main, the observations embrace a strengths-based emphasis in the recording of observations.
- The practitioners use calm, positive tones when interacting with the children. There was occasional use of open-ended questions to challenge and extend children's learning.
- A very good selection of Montessori materials are located in the specific Montessori areas. During the inspection, practitioners were observed recording children's use of the Montessori materials.
- Play is valued and supported by the practitioners and the large bright rooms provide very good opportunities for playful learning. These include a variety of play types and opportunities for children to lead their own play. The rooms are divided into discrete interest areas, such as a construction and home corner area, a sensory area and a designated socio-dramatic play area. The play resources are clearly labelled, are available to the children and are rotated regularly.
- The children access the outdoor area on a daily basis and a variety of equipment, such as slides, a mud kitchen and tyres, a water run and play houses, are freely available to the children.
- The practitioners avail of the Montessori materials, everyday activities, songs, rhymes and games to support the development of the children's emergent literacy and numeracy skills. Practitioners model mathematical language in meaningful contexts. For example, they count children when they are going outside and discuss ages.
- Children with additional needs are well integrated and supported in this setting. A communications notebook is used by parents and practitioners for the mutual sharing of information and the practitioners engage with the relevant professional agencies.

Actions advised

- To assist in incorporating the individual children's emergent interests in planning and in identifying the next steps for their learning, practitioners are advised to avail of the 'Planning and Assessment' pillar in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide*. The promotion of a consistent approach to the use of strengths-based language in observations can be achieved by including the children's learning dispositions and interests.
- The practitioners are advised to develop a whole-setting approach to the use of strategies to support them in their interactions with the children. In so doing, the more regular use of open-ended questions and prompts will support the children's language development and promote their thinking and problem-solving skills.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is very good.
- Children demonstrate enjoyment and engagement in their activities and laughter and chat was heard regularly throughout the sessions. At the time of the inspection, an imbalance between whole-group activities led by the practitioners and small-group activities was observed. This led to a small number of children becoming disengaged on occasion.
- During the inspection, the positive learning dispositions, such as confidence, persistence and resourcefulness, shown by the majority of children helped them to achieve mastery and success in their learning experiences. Children worked together to make a large train track and negotiated about what to do with toys in the Santa hut.
- The children generally play co-operatively in pairs and in small groups and are beginning to understand the social rules of the setting. During the inspection, a few children demonstrated difficulty in expressing their needs, in turn-taking and sharing and in understanding the rules of the setting. The resulted in the practitioner stopping what she was doing with other children to resolve the minor disagreements.
- Children take an active part in the tidy-up routines; they put away their materials and push their chairs back after an activity. A child-helper routine is in place and children act as line leader and give out lunches and drinks.
- The children's sense of identity and belonging is reflected in many ways within this setting; they chat to the practitioners and their peers about their friends and what they like to play with. Many examples of children's free art with their added comments are evident in the rooms and their family photographs on the family wall contribute to the children's sense of their uniqueness.
- The children are given the opportunity to bring a small teddy from the setting home every week. The parents write down what happens, share photographs and on returning to the setting, the child discusses his/her activities with the teddy during circle time.
- All children take an active part and show great enthusiasm during the parachute game and singing activities.
- The children have many opportunities to make choices and to organise their own learning. For example, they can choose to use the Montessori materials or take part in play activities on their own or with peers.
- The children have access to a wide range of mark-making materials, such as paper, crayons, pencils and gluing. Children were observed drawing pictures, writing letters and posting them to Santa in the Santa post-box.
- The children use mathematical language confidently during their play. They discuss the number of cars they have, identify numbers, count the steps when completing activities and in their play with the construction materials discuss bigger and smaller buildings.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to embed a range of meaningful approaches and techniques, in consultation with children, which will support all children in the development of their self-regulation skills. This will support all children to follow the rules of the setting and to engage socially and co-operatively in the group.
- The practitioners are advised to promote small-group activities on a more regular basis. This will help optimise learning opportunities and offer children individualised support in line with their stages of development.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- Practitioners come together as a team once a term for formal staff meetings. The manager keeps practitioners informed of current issues through the use of regular memos.
- The owner accesses support, advice and training from external agencies, such as the local childcare committee, Early Childhood Ireland and private consultants. She is present in the setting every day and promotes a clear vision for the work of the setting.
- In order to support staff in their professional practice, the owner spends time in the rooms with practitioners. She offers support and mentoring to all staff on a regular basis and annual appraisals.
- Continuing professional development is valued and promoted within the setting. Staff have recently completed training in process art, yoga, Access and Inclusion and Together Old and Young (T.O.Y) a model for intergenerational learning.
- An open-door policy is in place and practitioners chat to parents at arrival and share information on the children's engagement and enjoyment of activities at collection time. A parents' notice board is at the entrance to the setting and each room has a phone that staff use to contact parents. Social media is used by the practitioners to inform parents what is happening in their rooms and to share photographs of the children engaged in activities. A parents' information book is emailed to parents at the start of the year and the owner emails bi-monthly newsletters. These newsletters update parents on upcoming events and provide information to support them in their parenting role.
- A very good approach to settling-in is in place. Parents are encouraged to visit the setting with their child in advance of their child starting. Practitioners also facilitate a meeting with parents before children start in the setting. Parents are sent a tip sheet on how to settle your child into pre-school. The setting facilitates a staggered, settling-in process. Parents are encouraged to stay with their child during the settling-in process. A record of their child's settling in and their strengths and needs is shared by practitioners with parents.
- The practitioners discuss with children their move to primary school and samples of the school uniforms are available to the children for discussion. The setting has had informal links in the past with local primary schools. Formal links have yet to be put in place.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to introduce more regular staff meetings and to avail of the professional self-evaluation tools in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to support them in their professional reflection and review of their practice.
- Practitioners are advised to reengage in the process of building links with the local primary schools, with a view to developing procedures that will support children's smooth transition from pre-school to primary school. The 'Supporting Transitions' document in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* and the development of a transition policy will assist in this process.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The owner/ manager and the assistant manager attended the post-inspection meeting and engaged professionally in the feedback discussion. The capacity of the setting 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	Very good
Quality of processes to support children's learning and development	Very 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-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.