



## Early-Years Education-focused Inspection Draft Inspection Report for Factual Verification

<i>Name of Setting</i> Stepping Stones Early Learning Centre	<i>Identifier number</i> 11OY0079
<i>Address of Setting</i> Clonaderg Ballinahown Athlone Co Offaly	<i>Date of visit</i> 06 May 2016

## CONTEXT OF SETTING

Stepping Stones Early Learning Centre is a sessional and privately owned pre-school. Provision in the setting is centred around a play-based curriculum which is underpinned by the principles of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. A total of 17 children were present during the inspection visit, all of whom were availing of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. Two practitioners and one student, who was under the supervision of the practitioners, were present.

### AREA 1: QUALITY OF CONTEXT TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- The quality of the context to support children's learning and development is excellent.
- The quality of adult-child interactions is excellent. The practitioners interact with the children in a respectful, kind and friendly way. Praise and encouragement are features of responses to children. At the start of the day, parents/guardians and children are warmly greeted. The practitioners know the children and their families very well and they provide opportunities for incidental conversations with parents as the session begins, alluding to some of the activities planned for the day.
- Approaches to bringing together children, families and practitioners in the setting are very well developed. Through regular 'stay and play' sessions, parents are given an insight into how their children are learning through play. In addition, a family wall entitled 'Stepping Stones Village', which includes both photographs and the children's own drawings of their families, and links to the local community, is prominently displayed at the children's eye level.
- Routines and procedures are shared with both parents and children in a way that promotes children's social and emotional security along with their learning and development. The daily routine is set out in a visual timetable for the children. For parents, the daily routines are documented in a regular newsletter that illustrates for them the learning opportunities in the play activities of their children.

### AREA 2: QUALITY OF PROCESSES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- The quality of the processes to support children's learning and development in this play-rich environment is excellent.
- The principles of *Aistear* and elements of the Montessori approach inform the curriculum planned and delivered in the setting.
- The practitioners demonstrate an in-depth knowledge and understanding of how to implement an emergent curriculum that supports the children's evolving interests. The practitioners plan flexibly with the children in response to the children's strengths, needs and interests.
- The practitioners' interactions with the children and their use of questions skilfully extend the children's learning in a way that respects the children's own interests and choices. The well-planned and stimulating indoor and outdoor environments also promote choice and variety in learning activities, with the children enabled to follow their own interests and ideas, both individually and in collaboration with other children.
- Elements of the high-quality environment available to the children in this setting include sandpits, construction areas, an indoor and outdoor library area, swings, a climbing frame, an outdoor mud kitchen, a large green playing field, rubber tyres, an outdoor 'enchanted forest', cycles, tractors, and a broad range of drawing and mark-making materials. The setting manager's ongoing commitment to planning and developing a purposefully structured outdoor environment has created meaningful and exciting opportunities for the children to develop their curiosity, imagination and desire for exploration.
- The practitioners regularly note the children's conversations and ideas to build a rich picture of each child's learning and development. This information is recorded in each child's individual learning journal. It is planned to make more specific reference to such information in the short-term planning.
- The setting's involvement of parents in the 'stay and play' sessions enables parents to be involved in promoting their child's active learning. Further, the practitioners discuss and share their ideas with families in order to support an integrated and consistent approach to the children's learning and development.
- There are regular opportunities for the children to plan for, think about, and talk about their play experiences. The practitioners place considerable emphasis on collaborative reflection with the children.

### AREA 3: QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements is excellent.



- High-quality early mathematical learning and appropriate pre-literacy learning are evident. For example, the children's involvement in the construction, sand and water activities, their mark-making activities, and their interaction with picture books as observed during the inspection demonstrated very good learning dispositions and conceptual awareness appropriate to their age and stage of development. The children also show a very good understanding of the natural environment and its materials, features, plants and animals.
- Children are able to discuss their artwork, their ideas and their interests, and show excellent capacity to make connections between new and previous learning.
- On the inspection day, high-quality oral language and social skills were observed during the outdoor play activities, particularly in the mud kitchen and in the role play of a number of children who had created a 'Garda station'.
- Overall, the children present as active learners who enjoy their learning and have a very good capacity to decide about, organise and sustain activities, both independently and collaboratively.
- The information documented, both pictorially and verbally, in the children's individual learning journals and in the overall group journal reflects an impressive range of achievements as well as rich, interconnected learning experiences that are appropriate to an early-education context.

**AREA 4: QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING**

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is excellent.
- Provision for transitions into and from the setting is exemplary. In advance of starting in the pre-school, the children are invited to attend an induction period with their parents/ guardians. Each child is also given a transitions book which contains images of the pre-school and a photograph of the practitioners. Before starting primary school, the children are accompanied by the practitioners on visits to the child's future school. In addition, an end-of-year report on each child, compiled by the practitioners, is shared with the child's primary school, subject to parental consent.
- Management's pro-active engagement with parents is commended. It includes parental newsletters, informal discussions, the 'stay and play' sessions, regular formal parent-practitioner meetings, the sharing of children's individualised learning journals with parents, the provision of a parental portal providing access to the setting's policies, and the use of end-of-year questionnaires to elicit parents' views about the provision in the setting.
- The setting is currently participating in the *Síolta Quality Assurance Programme*. As a team, the practitioners have been pro-active in identifying and addressing areas for improvement, and, as a result, they have expanded the curriculum beyond the walls of the setting and into the local community.
- The practitioners work together easily, professionally and highly effectively. Together they implement and sustain appropriate systems for the smooth organisation of the educational experiences and activities in the setting.
- The leadership for learning provided by the manager, the practitioners' maintenance of a daily reflective journal, and the commitment of all staff to on-going self-review are supporting continuous development of the very high quality of education provision in this setting.

**CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS**

The capacity of the practitioners in this setting to continue to deliver a quality service is excellent.

**Summary of Overall Inspection Findings**

Area	Quality Level
Quality of context to support children's learning and development	<b>Excellent</b>
Quality of processes to support children's learning and development	<b>Excellent</b>
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	<b>Excellent</b>
Quality of management and leadership for learning	<b>Excellent</b>

**Language used in Early-Years Education-focused Inspection reports**

<b>Excellent</b>	Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of children.
<b>Very good</b>	Provision that is very good is highly effective in meeting the needs of children.
<b>Good</b>	Provision that is good is effective in meeting the needs of children but with some aspects to be developed.
<b>Fair</b>	Provision that is fair requires practice to be improved to meet the needs of children.
<b>Poor</b>	Provision that is poor is inadequate and requires significant improvement to meet the needs of children.