An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Aghada Community Playgroup
09CC0276

Upper Aghada
County Cork

Date of Inspection: 18th December 2017

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS
INSPECTORATE

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Aghada Community Playgroup is located in a rural area and has been in operation since 2002. It relocated to its current purpose-built facility in 2014. It provides two morning sessions for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The facility has an expansive outdoor area which is richly resourced through donations from parents and the local community. Seventeen children and three practitioners were present in the ECCE room inspected. The setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised in this report, the setting chose to accept the report without response.

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 atmosphere is friendly and welcoming. There is great warmth and respect amongst all of the practitioners, the children and their families.
- A thoughtful and respectful three-step welcome and planning routine is implemented with the children. Firstly, the children are greeted individually by name. The children then move to another practitioner and indicate if they wish to play indoors or outdoors. A third practitioner then approaches the child with a puppet and engages in further discussion and planning.
- The children are active agents in choosing and organising their learning and development activities, as well as in managing their own hygiene and personal care needs.
- Snack time is seen as a social occasion and children are empowered to take on designated organisational roles at this time. Early in the morning, children buttered their own toast, with some delivering it to their friends who were playing outdoors. All of the practitioners sit with the children and engage in discussions during formal snack time when all of the children join together as a large group.
- The warm, affirming atmosphere, together with the purposeful organisation of the setting, nurture children's identity and belonging and support the inclusion of all children and their families.
- The setting is very well integrated with the community. The practitioners have organised for many visitors to come to the service. Photographs with the heading 'Our Community' are displayed in the book area and in the children's learning journals.
- In the richly resourced book area, a family tree is displayed. It includes photographs from home, photographs of occasions when parents visit the service, and free drawings that the children have made.
- Parents, children and families regularly come together during the year for celebrations and events. Great recognition and value is placed on the children's cultural and family backgrounds, as illustrated by the invitations to parents and grandparents to come to the service to share their skills, occupations and experiences in the community.

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 excellent.
- The setting has developed a broad-based, emergent curriculum that is responsive to the children's evolving interests and learning and is linked to the goals of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.*
- In their comprehensive planning, the practitioners document the approach to morning greeting time, what items will appear on the message board, large-group time and any new materials that have been introduced to the environment. The approach to planning is balanced in that it incorporates practitioners' ideas while at the same time being responsive and emergent in light of the children's evolving interests, needs and dispositions.
- Approaches to assessment are excellent. The children's individual journals show that the practitioners gather comprehensive information about the children's learning and development.

The journals contain samples of the children's art, samples of their free mark making and photographs of their activities. The practitioners document the children's quotes and thoughts about their creativity on the children's pictures. This assessment document provides a rich picture of each child's individual development and incorporates ideas of how to extend the learning for each child. Questions linked to the emergent interests of the children are shared with parents, thereby strengthening the link between home and the service. Group learning stories which are linked to *Aistear* detail the emergent interests of the children and are displayed in the relevant interest areas in the room.

- The indoor area is very well resourced and arranged in aesthetically pleasing and inviting ways. For example, the home area has real vegetables, a selection of real spices, acorns and pine cones. Such resources promote engagement, discussion and reflection.
- High quality interactions that support and extend children's learning were observed during the inspection. For example, in the home area one practitioner prompted children to investigate the spices by being responsive to their facial expressions and nonverbal communication.
- The outdoor area is freely accessible to the children at all times and provides great opportunities for exploratory, open-ended play. The sand area, the wood chip hill, and the concrete track facilitated many different role-play experiences during the inspection.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is excellent.
- Children are highly motivated and engage in activities that are accessible, well-resourced and that cater to their individual interests.
- The children interact co-operatively and use their strengths to attentively support one another through challenges that occur during play.
- The children demonstrate a concrete awareness of their unique and group identity. Large-group time is introduced with reference to which child emergent interest has influenced the planning.
- Children are extremely confident when communicating and are enabled to express themselves through role play, problem-solving and mark-making. The abundant opportunities provided to voice their opinions and the frequent noting of their contributions empowers the children to become self-assured.
- Children are developing a growing understanding of mathematical language through play. They count pasta shells and discuss who has more or less; they use blocks to compare their height differences and, when working collaboratively with a practitioner, they explore coins in the context of shopping.
- The children are inquisitive learners and their sense of enquiry is positively encouraged by the practitioners. Children have the opportunity to investigate and to explore nature through their discoveries of natural materials in the outdoor and indoor areas.
- A temperature gauge encourages the children to make an informed decision about whether to play indoors or outdoors; some check the gauge in making this decision.
- The children demonstrate a deep understanding of time. For example, one child said she was four years old like her friend but a different four, because 'my birthday is this year in December and her birthday is next year in March.'
- The children collaborate very effectively in their play. During the inspection, a large group of children played in the home area for an extended period of time, asking questions, working together, and recreating roles in their play. They negotiated roles and changed the direction of the play, extending each other's understanding and encouraging discovery.
- The children have a very good awareness of the natural environment which is supported by the freedom they have to move between the indoor and outdoor areas.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is excellent.
- The practitioners provide an efficient, well-organised and professional service. Appropriate systems are in place to support high standards in the pre-school.

- The practitioners are reflective and continually review their procedures. They use *Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* to inform their professional reflection.
- The practitioners are proactive in engaging with external agencies and training workshops to keep up to date with policy and practice changes and to improve the learning experiences of the children. They attend workshops by Early Childhood Ireland and have completed the *Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* formal Quality Assurance Programme twice. This process has strengthened the team and aided their development of critical reflection skills.
- A strong focus of the service is their work with families. A wide range of successful approaches is used to engage parents in the setting. Parents have the opportunity to receive information through the relaxed discussions at drop-off and collection times, through monthly newsletters, social media and two formal parent-practitioner meetings a year.
- The service implements an exemplary induction programme for children and parents. An open evening is held for all families of children starting at the service. In May, parents are introduced to their child's planned key worker and a second meeting in June focuses on allowing time for families to connect with one another.
- The practitioner uses a range of commendable approaches to support children's transitions to primary school. The children they attend the school's Christmas concert and book sale; the lollypop lady from the primary school visits the children as do the junior and senior infant teachers. The practitioners attend the official settling-in day at the school with their key children. This link to the local school is strong, with a concentration on supporting children and parents in this transition.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the service to continue to provide high quality educational experiences for the children is excellent. The professional and collaborative discussion that occurred at the post-inspection feedback meeting is indicative of the professional and accomplished approach of the service team.

Summary of Overall Inspection Findings

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

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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