An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Aishling's Little Angels Ltd.
10LS0078

Galesquarter
Cullahill
Portlaoise
County Laois

Date of Inspection: 29 March 2017

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

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Aishling's Little Angels is a privately-owned setting providing pre-school, full day-care and an after-school service. It has been in operation for over seven years and is located in the townland of Galesquarter. The setting adopts the Montessori Method of education in supporting children's learning and development. On the day of inspection there were twenty five children and three practitioners (including a practitioner as a support person for a children with additional needs) present in the room. 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 very good.
- There is a warm, caring and relaxed atmosphere evident as children arrive into the setting.
- Children are active agents in choosing and organising their learning and development activities. Practitioners promote children's independence throughout the session while providing suitable support and guidance where required.
- Snack time is a relaxed, respectful and social occasion where children and practitioners sit and eat together. A healthy lifestyle is promoted as practitioners discuss with children what healthy food they each have.
- Some times of transition throughout the morning are suitably managed by the practitioners to support positive learning experiences for the children. Other times, when children move from one activity to another, require more explicit strategies to support seamless movement for the children.
- Practitioners show sensitivity, warmth and a very positive regard for the children and their families. They regularly affirm the children's efforts and achievements using recognition, praise and encouragement.
- Respect for the uniqueness of each child is evident through the efforts made to provide an inclusive learning environment. An illustration of this was the efforts of one practitioner to incorporate words from a child's home language into the daily life of the setting, thereby nurturing the children's sense of identity and belonging.
- Practices in the setting are very inclusive. A practical example of this is how *Lámh*, an Irish manual sign system, is currently being taught to all children in the setting in order to promote communication amongst and the inclusion of all children in the setting.
- Practitioners have made strong connections with the community as illustrated by the performance of shows in the local community centre.

Action advised

- It is advised that practitioners plan for how children move from one activity or area to another. Further use of auditory cues combined with visual cues would be helpful in reminding children that a change is about to happen. Practitioners could also look at their roles during these times. For example, one practitioner could support a small group of children as they wash their hands while a second practitioner could facilitate songs and rhythms with another small group of children. Such strategies minimise waiting times and ensure that times of transition are calm and gradual for children.

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 good.
- A Montessori Method of education, informed by *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework,* is being used to good effect to support children's learning and development.
- Planning for curriculum implementation is organised on a short-term basis. A daily planning sheet is displayed for parents. While medium-term and long-term planning is evident in practice, neither types of planning are documented; this takes from the possibilities for regularly monitoring and

reviewing how the curriculum is being implemented. At the time of inspection, practitioners placed undue emphasis on a prescribed curriculum as distinct from a curriculum informed by the emergent interests of the children.

- A variety of assessment approaches is used to document and celebrate children's learning achievements. These include developmental checklists, individual art journals, individual learning journals and Montessori observations that evaluate the children's knowledge and understanding of the Montessori materials. There is scope for gathering, in a systematic way, information about the children's individual dispositions, values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding.
- Play opportunities through which children learn and develop are freely available. A rich array of learning spaces have been carefully prepared to provide for a variety of play types. In particular, many rich opportunities for socio-dramatic play are available.
- High quality interactions with children are facilitated. The practitioners engage and motivate the children in their learning, often acting as co-learners playing alongside the child. An observed example of this occurred during the children's role play when a practitioner took on the role of the doctor and, in so doing, supported and extended the children's learning.
- The spacious and richly resourced indoor environment is well maintained, safe and inviting for the children. Children have freedom to make choices around their engagement with the environment, resources and activities. Opportunities for the children to move freely between the Montessori, play and library rooms support the children to learn in a variety of contexts.
- Children have regular access to the spacious outdoor environment. Ample opportunities to develop children's physical fitness and gross motor skills are available through large open spaces, swings, a see-saw and a slide. Resources such as a toy house, a wooden ship and sand pit promote and develop children's curiosity, creativity and imagination for exploration.
- An inclusive approach is adopted where all children are valued and practitioners accommodate diversity in learning and interaction styles. Great attention is paid to the provision for children with additional needs in partnership with parents to ensure a consistent approach. Close links have been made with external agencies to order to optimise the support available.

Actions advised

- Using the 'Curriculum foundations' section of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide*, the practitioners are advised to prepare a curriculum statement to form the basis of a long-term plan that outlines the overall aims and objectives for learning and development. Having a long-term plan can provide a sense of purpose and direction to the curriculum being offered to the children, and can also support the tracking of progress in the children's learning.
- The practitioners are advised to incorporate the children's emergent interests into the planning process and to provide a more enquiry-based curriculum that is related to those interests. Practitioners could use the existing daily planning sheet to note interests that arise and reflect these in future plans. The use of predetermined curricular materials is not advised. Clearly documenting the children's own description of their learning will enable the gathering of more comprehensive and individualised information about each child's learning and achievements. Detailed observations such as these will ensure continuity in their learning while also informing the next steps in that learning.

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 engagement and enjoyment in their learning. One of the many observed examples of this was when a child was manoeuvring a tractor in the outdoor environment. He was engrossed in the task at hand and, as the tyre fell off, the child confidently turned the tractor on its side and placed the tyre back on. Throughout this time the boy was observed engaging in self-talk and demonstrating contentment in his play.
- Through the use of the Montessori materials, the children are seeing progression in their learning and are therefore experiencing success in their work. In addition, the many photographic displays of group learning experiences support the children in reflecting on their learning.
- The children demonstrate a sense of wonder and natural curiosity. This is supported by the practitioners who expose the children to experiences such as planting vegetables and creating a worm farm.

- Children make decisions about their learning. Some opportunities for children to plan and discuss the following day's activities were missed. The children would benefit from having further opportunities to be involved in planning for their learning on a daily basis.
- During the children's interactions with one another, their ability to communicate verbally and non-verbally was very effective. This was particularly visible in children with additional needs and amongst children whose home language differed from that of the setting.
- Some children have a very good understanding of the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. Overall, the children would benefit from practitioners sharing their expectations and providing clear guidelines around behaviour.

Action advised

- The provision of more regular opportunities for children to discuss and plan their learning experiences is advised. This will provide children with an opportunity to prepare for and anticipate what and how they might explore. It will also give children ownership over their learning as they will have had the opportunity to be involved in the decision-making process around their activities.
- Practitioners are advised to create with the children simple guidelines around acceptable behaviour. A visual representation of those guidelines would assist all children in understanding appropriate behaviour. It is important that practitioners provide encouraging advice to children about behaviour expectations. For example, practitioners could state what the children can do rather than using directive language. This will lay the foundations for supporting children to make decisions, to problem solve and to regulate their own behaviour successfully.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is excellent.
- Practitioners meet on a regular basis to reflect on and review their practice, policies and procedures in order to improve learning experiences and outcomes for children. Those meetings are also used as an opportunity to plan for future learning experiences based on their observations of the children. The current plan is to further develop the gardening experiences for children through the addition of a greenhouse.
- The use of parent questionnaires to elicit parents' views during self-review processes is commendable. The feedback from the questionnaires influences and informs future curriculum planning.
- The voice of the child is respected through a display called 'The Wish Tree' which documents the wishes of each individual child.
- The owner/manager provides an excellent role model for the staff, promoting high standards and fostering a clear vision and direction for the work of the setting.
- All practitioners engage in continuous professional development and are very involved with external supports to improve the quality of provision for all children in the setting.
- Practitioners have developed practical strategies to share information about children's learning and achievements with parents and families. This is achieved through the use of documentation, monthly newsletters, organised events in the community hall and end-of-year celebrations.
- Strong connections exist between the setting and the local primary school. A positive and collaborative relationship has been established to support continuity of the children's educational experiences. Practitioners, parents and children make a visit to the school as part of the process of moving from the pre-school to primary school.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The team of practitioners demonstrate a commitment to ongoing quality improvement. Their capacity to implement the actions advised above is very good, as evidenced by the open, reflective professional dialogue of those present at the post-inspection feedback meeting.

Summary of Overall Inspection Findings

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	**Good**
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	**Very Good**
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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