An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

An Duine Beg Montessori
09WD0020

Ballynageeragh
County Waterford

Date of Inspection: 3rd October 2017

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

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Established in 2008, An Duine Beg Montessori is a privately owned service located on the grounds of a private residence. Two practitioners, one of whom is the owner/manager, provide a morning Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The children attending the service come from a very wide catchment area. On the morning of the inspection the two practitioners and fifteen children were present. A third practitioner joined the group later in the morning. 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.
- There is a happy, positive and inclusive atmosphere. The children are greeted by name in a very upbeat manner and many hugs were given. Conversations between the parents and practitioners were relaxed and personal.
- A structured, flexible routine to support the children's learning is in place. On the morning of the inspection, the routine was not fully implemented as the practitioners used the opportunity of good weather to play outside.
- During the session the children were provided with ample opportunities to actively engage and self-choose activities and were observed to fully explore the environment both indoors and out.
- Snack time is a pleasant, social and learning occasion. On the morning of the inspection, it occurred outside. The children sat on the picnic benches and chatted happily together. The children prepared the snack. This included passing out cups and drinks and buttering and serving toast. A helper chart identifying the child and his/her job is displayed at the children's eye level.
- Transitions between activities are smooth and children handle them with great ease.
- Relationships between the children and the practitioners are caring and nurturing. The practitioners know all of the children well and operate a key worker system. The practitioners are calm with children. Praise and encouragement are regular features of the day. A child upset on arrival was appropriately comforted and supported by one of the practitioners until she settled. Some children who had previously attended the service came to visit while dropping off siblings and appeared happy to be in the setting.
- The uniqueness of each child is represented by child and family photographs, height charts, hand prints, and displays of children's work. On the day of inspection, it was a child's birthday and when the child arrived the practitioners encouraged all children to gather at the door to sing happy birthday. A big fuss was made of the birthday child with a cake and present.
- The practitioners regard family involvement in events, trips, and meetings as of paramount importance to the success of the service. Some of these events and meetings are held in the evenings to facilitate parents. In October the setting hosts a 'Get to know you night'. Parents, children and family members are invited for a social occasion with food. A number of years ago parents decided to use this occasion as an opportunity to raise funds for a local charity and this became a regular feature of the night organised by the parents.
- The setting has made good links with the local community. A local church deacon and a shopkeeper come for visits. Professionals and parents are also invited to share information on their professions and some parents have come in to read stories with the 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.

- An emergent play-based curriculum informed by the Montessori Method and linked to *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* is in operation in the setting. During the inspection, the practitioners were observed to spontaneously follow children's play ideas.
- Yearly and monthly documented plans inform weekly themes and activities. Although some of the children's interests are documented in the planning, there are no obvious links between the children's interests and individual observations records.
- A variety of assessment approaches are adopted to track the children's learning and development. These include the compilation of samples of the children's work, photographs, videos, diary notes, checklists, observations and developmental reports on what children can and cannot do.
- The practitioners effectively support children's active learning and play ideas through discussion, bringing other children into the play, and sitting with the children at their level. This, along with the balance between child-led and adult-led activities helps nurture the children's capacity to interact with one another.
- A safe, secure and child friendly environment provides opportunities for children to play daily, both indoors and outdoors. The large outdoor space provides many opportunities for gross motor skill development. A new outdoor area to the rear of the pre-school is currently under construction and, on completion, will provide the children with more hands-on experience with sensory and natural materials.
- The indoor space is divided in to specific learning areas and is well-resourced with construction, table-top, socio-dramatic and Montessori materials. Shelving is low and material is neatly displayed and accessible. On the day of inspection, creative and multi-sensory materials such as paint, sand, water and playdough were not available.
- Effective supports are in place to develop the children's language, numeracy skills, and literacy skills. These include a print-rich environment, opportunities for the children to discuss plans and review activities, an appropriate balance between listening and speaking, and good eye contact between practitioners and children. Rhymes, songs, story time, mark-making activities, and the use of mathematical language in general conversation are inherent in the daily routine. Some missed opportunities to extend children's ideas were missed owing to the use of closed questioning. Documentation indicates that children use templates and, from time to time, engage in activities such as letter formation, formal learning of phonics; such activities are not age appropriate and tend to limit the children's use of their imagination.
- Links are made with external agencies as required to support children's individual learning needs. The local speech and language therapist liaises with the practitioners in relation to children attending the speech and language service.

Actions advised

- It is advised that observations and development reports be strengths-based, focusing on what children can do, their emergent interests, likes and dispositions. To enhance planning practice, the practitioners are also advised to use information gathered though observation of the children to inform the planning of activities.
- To encourage children's development of interests, creativity and scientific exploration, it is advised that creative and multi-sensory material be made available daily as free choice activities.
- To further develop the children's language and thinking skills, it is advised that the practitioners incorporate more open-ended questions into general conversations. The use of project copies to promote literacy development and art templates for creative work is not advised.

AREA 3
QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is very good.
- The children's sense of well-being is evident in their enjoyment, motivation and interest as they participate in self-chosen activities and actively take part in adult-led group activities.
- The children have a healthy image of self and family. Photographs on the walls are a talking point as a new one is displayed. A child, while looking at photographs, described himself as 'popular.' A few children presented as shy and reserved while others were very energetic and sociable. The children co-operate with one another, take turns and have developed friendships.
- The children display confidence in their fine and gross motor abilities and are competent in taking care of their own personal needs. Outdoors, they were observed to climb, cycle, chase and hide in the maze.

- Children can play co-operatively in small groups, in pairs and alone. From time to time during the inspection, some small disagreements arose amongst the children. The practitioners tend to take a directive role in such situations as distinct from prompting and supporting the children to resolve the small differences for themselves. Circle-time discussion with the children about behaviour expectations indicated the children's knowledge of the relevant behaviour rules.
- The children are excited when they experience success and are happy to share different aspects of their learning with the practitioners. This was most notable when they played with Lego and made buildings such as a fire station. The children's level of concentration as they partook in these activities is noteworthy.
- The children have highly effective listening and communication skills. They were observed to successfully ask and answer many questions appropriately. The children's views are gathered during daily reviews of activities.
- The children's enthusiastic engagement in stories, songs, rhymes, books, drawing, art and construction is extending their literacy skills and mathematical language.

Action advised

- It is advised that positive behaviour management techniques such as conflict resolution techniques and positive rules be used in order to encourage the children's self-regulation and problem-solving skills.

AREA 4
QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is excellent.
- The systems in place to ensure the efficient day-to-day running of the service are informed by *Síolta*: *the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education.*
- A strong ethos of professionalism is evident in the setting. The owner/practitioner demonstrated good leadership skills and works in partnership with the other practitioners. There is clarity around roles and responsibilities. All practitioners were observed to be active in leading learning for children during the session.
- Planning and reviewing of activities takes place regularly. Informal team meetings are held from time to time and staff appraisals take place yearly. Issues of concern are documented.
- The service avails of external supports through the Local Child Care Committee and is involved with a number of support networks. Engagement in continuous professional development is ongoing. The service participated in the *Síolta Quality Assurance Programme*. At the time of the inspection, the service was awaiting a place on the LINC training programme.
- Systems for communicating with parents are very effective. Formal meetings are held at the end of the year on the evening of the graduation. Parents are given a written developmental report at the end of the meeting. Should parents need extra support, the practitioners provide opportunities for day, evening or weekend meetings as needed. Some events are held early evenings to accommodate for working parents.
- The parents are made aware of policies, procedures and the curriculum during the registration evening in May when they are given a tour of the service and a welcome pack. Exchange of information with parents during the year happens by sharing of the children's scrapbooks, photographic displays of the children's activities, phone conversations, notes and through the use of social media, text, and emails.
- The practitioners encourage parents to offer advice and or comment on concerns. Their views are sought by means of verbal exchange and the use of a comment box. This information is actively used by the practitioners to influence planning for the whole service. An example of this was described by the owner/manager when she discussed how the fund raising night is held in conjunction with the yearly graduation event. This was an initiative brought forward by the parents to help out community members. As this evening has become a big part of the yearly events that take place in the setting it has encouraged the link between the children their families with the wider community.
- Transitions to primary school are highly effective. The children's transfer to primary school is supported by sharing of information on the children's learning and development, classroom activities, picture displays of uniforms, visits from the local school principal, and visits by the owner of the pre-school to the primary school when the children start in the school.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE
The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is excellent.

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	**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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