**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

# Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

# Report

## Báile Beag First Steps Crèche
## 09WY0034

## Parish Centre Grounds
## Ballybeg
## County Waterford

**Date of Inspection: 4th October 2017**

## CONTEXT OF SETTING

Established in 2000, Báile Beag First Steps Crèche, is a community, purpose built service located in Ballybeg on the outskirts of Waterford City. Once aligned to the local Community Development Programme, the crèche became a separate entity following its growth and expansion over a ten-year period. Very strong links with the local Community Development Programme still remain. Twenty-six practitioners, some of whom are part of the Community Employment (CE) scheme, provide full-time, sessional and after-school services to children from the local area and beyond. Two morning and afternoon groups of children participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. On the morning of the inspection the ECCE group with the older children was inspected. Seventeen children and four practitioners were present. The setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised in this report, and the response submitted on behalf of the setting can be found in the appendix of this report.

## 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.
- A warm, inviting and inclusive atmosphere is evident in the setting. Children and parents are greeted by name in an upbeat and friendly manner.
- The daily routine in operation on the day of inspection, while not the same as the routine documented, facilitated the children's engagement in self-chosen free play, Montessori activities and adult-led activities.
- The approach to transitions between activities needs to be revised. Verbal reminders and countdowns are used for some transitions during the session. However, the many transitions throughout the day do not afford the children sufficient time to extend or develop play ideas or interests. Some prolonged waiting periods such as lining the children up before going outside resulted in children becoming a little distracted and uneasy. Noise levels were at their highest during these periods.
- As organised on the day of inspection, breakfast time is highly effective in promoting healthy eating, exercise and social skills. The children choose breakfast from a number of cereals offered and are encouraged to drink water from the 'Waterfall' bottle and to try some fruit. The children also help to serve the breakfast.
- From time to time, the practitioners use positive behaviour management techniques. There is some overuse of negative words such as, 'No' and 'Don't.'
- The practitioners are very inclusive in their approach to all children and their families. Practitioners and parents share books, rhymes and significant words in English and in the children's home languages. During sporting events, the service shows support for all of the children's nationalities. The children who visit family members in other countries are encouraged to share experiences verbally and through photographs.
- The longevity of the service in the community has stimulated strong, sensitive and trusting relationships with families. The manager and practitioners have an in-depth knowledge of the children and families. Parents are relaxed and chatty with both staff and management. As articulated by the manager, the service strives to offer a wraparound service to children and their families by providing additional information on support services available to parents. Community members such as the local Garda, fire personal and a gardener visit the service from time to time.

*Actions advised*

- The practitioners are advised to minimise the number of transitions during the day. This will help to ensure that learning experiences provided allow sufficient time for the children to engage in activities, to develop interests and ideas, and to master new tasks in a meaningful way. Additionally, it is advised that transition signals be given to indicate the end of all activities during the day. To further support the children's anticipation of the daily schedule, it is advised that a photographic display of the daily routine and a helper chart be developed and displayed at the children's eye level.

- It is advised that practitioners build on the effective behaviour management techniques used throughout the day to deal with particular incidents where children are presenting with challenging behaviour. Introducing strategies to manage this behaviour, such as, limiting the number of rules, and ignoring of negative behaviour when it is safe to do so, will help the children to self-regulate and build on their positive social skills.

**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.
- Provision in the setting is informed by *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and the Montessori pedagogy. Thematic long-term, medium-term and short-term planning is undertaken. Weekly themes are woven throughout daily activities. For example, during the inspection, the theme 'personal hygiene' was linked to the weekly story and art activities.
- Assessment is effective. Approaches used to gather information on the children's learning include observations linked to the themes of *Aistear* and the principles of *Síolta*, and the compilation of developmental notes reflecting what each child can do. All practitioners' notes and documented observations are shared with the children's individual keyworkers.
- Interactions in the setting are responsive and inclusive. The practitioners sit and playfully engage with the children at their level. They affirm the children's efforts and encourage peer interactions and, when playing outdoors, sibling interactions. Younger and older children are given opportunities to play together from time to time.
- The indoor and outdoor environments are large, well maintained and safe. They are purposefully structured into interest areas where children are free to actively choose and organise their own play ideas. Montessori, mark making, fine motor and gross motor activities are well catered for. Creative, sensory and natural material are not freely available; this restricts the children's use of their emergent exploration and investigation skills.
- The children's language, literacy and numeracy skills are promoted effectively by the practitioners. The children have very good access to books and writing materials. They actively participate in story time and the regular recitation and performance of rhymes. The practitioners effectively promote and model language. Some open-ended questioning such as, 'What happened…' and 'Tell me about…' is very effectively used. Numbers and mathematical language are incorporated by the practitioners into their natural and planned conversations with the children.
- Many supports are in place to meet the needs of children with additional needs and links have been made with the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM). To support children with language and hearing difficulties, a practitioner introduced *Lámh* signs to the group.

*Actions advised*

- Practitioners are advised to consult the *Aistear Siolta Practice Guide* pillars on curriculum and planning and assessment for self-review. This will help to further develop the emergent curriculum and strengths-based observations of the children. It is also advised that information gathered about the children's interests be used to inform short-term planning.
- It is advised that multi-sensory and creative materials such as paint, water and sand, be made freely available to children daily. It is also advised that the children's creative work be displayed at their eye level.
- It is advised that an audit of the outdoor area be carried out in order to ensure that that the children have access to natural, real, and recycled materials to develop their skills of exploration, investigation and experimentation.

**AREA 3**

**QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

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

- The children demonstrate enjoyment in their learning.
- Most children are motivated and engaged during activities and, overall, their concentration levels are very good. A small number of children needed some support to self-regulate.
- On the day of inspection the children actively planned and led play while following their own interests and while engaging in adult-led activities. They demonstrated persistence and collaboration in their play.
- The children have a natural curiosity and an eagerness to explore. For example, during the inspection, they showed an interest in changing the colour of the practical life water, exploring what was behind the fence in the shrub area, and gathering leaves for the nature table.
- They children have highly refined fine and gross motor abilities; these were evident in their effective use of table-top and construction equipment, their spontaneous use of writing materials, and in their running, climbing and cycling outdoors.
- The children's sense of identity and social skills are emerging. They can identify and share their feelings. Most display good turn-taking skills and happily help others.
- The children's interactions with practitioners and peers are positive. The children have a good understanding of language and communicate effectively. They play independently and co-operatively in pairs and groups as seen when they pushed each other on the swings and bikes.
- The children's overall use and understanding of language and mathematical concepts is commendable.

**AREA 4**

**QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING**

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- The management team has established very good systems to aid in the effective day-to-day organisation of the setting. The team also has a clear vision and direction for the ongoing work and development of the service.
- An ethos of professionalism amongst staff members is evident. There is clarity around all roles and responsibilities and a key worker system is operating very effectively. All practitioners in the room inspected had opportunities to lead and support the children's learning.
- The support systems in place for practitioners are commended. These include staff induction, in-house training, a variety of weekly meetings, and ongoing supervision. During meetings staff are given the opportunity to plan, reflect on and review practices, and to share information.
- Links with external agencies such as Early Childhood Ireland and the local County Childcare Committee have been established. These are used as a means of training support and advice. The service has availed of *Aistear* and *Síolta* training, and has participated in the Healthy Ireland Smart Start Programme. It has also engaged with the Better Start quality development programme.
- Highly effective formal and informal links have been established with parents. These include informal chats at drop-off and pick-up times and formal yearly meetings to discuss the children's progress. Information on the service is shared with the parents through social media and on the noticeboards located in the service.
- Transitions into the service are supported through one-to-one meetings with parents in advance of their child starting in the service and through encouraging parents to stay with their child during the settling-in period.
- Some links with the local primary schools have been established and are well used for the purpose of sharing information about children who may need additional support in primary school.

*Action advised*

- It is advised that the setting consult the pillar on 'Transitions' in the *Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide* in order to develop a transitions policy for use when children first start in the service and when they are transferring to primary 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 | **Very Good** |
| Quality of processes to support children's learning and development | **Good** |
| Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements | **Excellent** |
| 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. |

*Published April 2018*

# APPENDIX

# SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

# SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

**Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report.**

We found the whole experience positive, engaging and professional. The inspection provided us with affirmation of the work we are doing really well and real good pointers on how to further develop our practice to enhance the child's experience. This thorough feedback we value greatly and it will play an important role in our ongoing professional development.

***Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection*** **activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.**

Area1

- Over the years we have reviewed and evaluated programmes to continually develop an age appropriate curriculum. These have been carried out with all the stakeholders, staff, children, parents and external agencies. On advice from the inspectorate we have reduced the number of transitions, which has meant we now have a larger number of activities continuously available at one time in line with children's interests, parallel to this we have a visual display programme and a helper chart placed at eye level.

- Building on the self-review and reflective practices which are in place, we have followed recommendations by the Inspectorate in relation to challenging behaviours, we are now using new techniques i.e., ignoring of negative behaviour when it is safe to do so and one voice for correcting the child to help the child/children to self-regulate.

Area2

- To further develop the emerging curriculum and strength based on observations of children, we are now using the *Aistear Siolta Practice Guide* Pillars on curriculum, planning and assessment for self-review.
- On advice we further developed a multi-sensory experience for children both inside and outdoors. We now have sensory materials freely available daily instead of having them at intervals.

Area4

- As advised we are now in the process of developing a written transition policy in line with *Aistear and Siolta Practice Guide*, which includes entry into the service daily, regular and major transitions.