An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Ballyclough Playschool
09CC0141

Ballyclough Community Centre
Ballyclough
Mallow
County Cork

Date of Inspection: 11th October 2017

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

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Ballyclough playschool is a privately-owned setting. It is located in a shared room in a community centre. It provides a morning Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The pedagogical approach is play based. On the day of the inspection, eleven children were present together with the owner (who is the lead practitioner) and two other practitioners. 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.
- The atmosphere in the setting is warm and inviting, with a calm atmosphere. On arrival, all of the children are welcomed into the room by a practitioner.
- The children are active agents in their learning, freely choosing their play materials and activities on arrival and organising the play in collaboration with their peers.
- There is a well-established routine that provides opportunity for free play, group time, and large movement time. There is no visual representation of the daily routine.
- At snack time the children enjoy a healthy meal. The value of this time could be enhanced through the practitioners sitting with the children and facilitating group discussion.
- The children are supported to be independent in their self-care. They look after their belongings and their environment through tasks such as getting and opening lunch boxes, clearing up after their activities, and washing their hands before snack time.
- Transitions between activities are managed effectively with good use made of verbal prompts. The practitioners name items yet to be put away, and give recognition and praise for tasks completed.
- The children are provided with clear guidance around positive behaviour with positive fostering of respectful child/child relationships.
- The setting provides some opportunities for families to come together during the year, for example, at special occasions such as Christmas, at the end-of-year celebration, and on school trips.
- Connections have been made with the community and the children go on walks to some of the local amenities such as the playground and local post office. Through the setting's relationship with the community centre, the children are involved in collecting items to raise funds for different groups and engage in different activities with the local 'active retired' group, for whom the children sing Christmas songs each year. At the time of the inspection there was no visual representation of these commendable community connections.

Actions advised

- Practitioners are advised to use snack time to establish a sense of social occasion and to facilitate social interaction amongst the children. This can be fostered through sitting with the children to share the meal time occasion.
- The practitioners are advised to develop a visual display of the daily routine which will support children to recognise and follow the sequence of the day.

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 play-based curriculum is developed and is documented in long-term and short-term plans. The curriculum is mainly thematic, organised around the seasons and adult ideas. The short-term plans are detailed and contain some responses to the children's interests as noted by the practitioners.
- A broad range of information about children's learning is gathered through the use of developmental checklist observations, anecdotal observations, and individual learning journals. These contain samples of art and crafts, some free drawing and pre-writing templates, and

photographs of the children engaged in group events such as the Christmas activity. In the individual journals, there is scope for elaborating on the children's learning further. Currently the lead practitioner completes all observations. The next steps in children's learning are not identified in the observations.

- The practitioners use many effective interaction strategies to consistently support the children's learning experiences. They act as a play partner and support the children in playing together. They develop authentic shared conversations by asking open-ended questions and scaffolding and extending the conversations. For example, when a child was relating a recent experience of a fox, the practitioner encouraged the other children to listen and share their experiences and wondered if the fox was from the city or if he was a brave fox.
- The practitioners provide good support for children's early literacy and numeracy development through engagement with high quality books. For example, while reading a story about different creatures, one practitioner facilitated a discussion about the octopus, inviting children to guess and then count the amount of 'arms' it had. She then further developed the conversation by inviting the children to think about what it would be like to have eight arms and describe what they might be able to do.
- The indoor environment has some interest areas such as a home corner and a book area. Some materials are not accessible or displayed adequately to entice children to engage in different aspects of play. For example, in the book area, the books are not presented attractively. While the environment contains a range of resources, there is potential to extend and supplement the resources through the addition of opportunities for sensory and exploratory play with natural and open-ended materials.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to make greater use of the assessment information they have gathered about each child to inform their planning for the next steps in the children's learning. This will enable the curriculum to be customised in a way that is responsive to each individual child. Use of the *Aistear* learning record template can be effective in this regard.
- The practitioners are advised to combine the children's individual learning journals with the observations documented in order to create a rich assessment document that includes photographs of the children's recent learning activities, samples of their free drawing, and also incorporates the child's voice in the documenting process.
- The practitioners are advised to do audit of the indoor environment with a view to developing the range of open-ended and natural materials and equipment. The 'Learning environment' pillar in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* is a useful resource in relation to this.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is good.
- The children demonstrate enjoyment in their play. For the majority of the time they are engaged and motivated in their activities.
- The children often display resilience and perseverance. For example, at playtime a number of children chose to engage in a complicated threading activity and in cutting up paper for an art activity.
- The children present as competent learners that sometimes experience achievement and success. They share their success with the practitioners and their peers. For example, on completion of an art activity, the children showed their creations to the practitioners. At times, some children do not experience the same levels of success as others.
- The children are developing their understanding of the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and demonstrate an evolving capacity for conflict resolution. Several instances were observed where children worked together co-operatively to agree a solution. For example, during a play period in the home corner additional cups and teapots were found so that everyone could have some 'tea'.
- The children have limited opportunities to explore and represent their ideas and feelings in a creative way. The provision of sand, water, and free mark-making materials would enhance children's opportunity for creative self-expression.

- The children are supported to develop the capacity to reflect on recent events. For example, at large-group time the practitioner effectively facilitated a child discussing and recalling their recent visit from 'George' the pig.
- The children are encouraged to share their personal experiences with others during the day as they talk about their families and recent events in their lives.

Actions advised

- The children would benefit from greater opportunities to reflect on their learning. For example, after the children have played in the morning, they could come together to discuss, share ideas and reflect on what they were involved in as a means of consolidating and building on their learning experiences. Such opportunities could be provided through the small-group time led by the key worker or at snack time.
- In order to strengthen the children's view of themselves as active learners who regularly experience success and achievement, the practitioners are advised to develop in a more explicit way the children's awareness of their learning. This can be supported by facilitating regular access by children and parents to the children's learning journals, through photographic displays of previous learning experiences, and through displays of the children's own creative work.
- The practitioners are advised to maximise the opportunities for the children to engage in open-ended, practical and playful exploration of number and letter concepts (as distinct from the completion of templates or testing activities) and to express themselves creatively through the provision of materials for free art and mark-making.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is good.
- Team meetings take place weekly with informal discussions happening daily. At the time of the inspection, the outcomes of the team meetings were not documented.
- There is an effective, professional ethos in the setting. There is clarity around the different roles and responsibilities. Good teamwork and shared leadership are evident. There is scope to develop the shared leadership through a team approach to the development of the curriculum and the capturing of observations.
- The parents are supported to become familiar with the setting through the sharing of a parent handbook with information on the curriculum and practices of the setting. Parents are informed of their child's progress through informal discussions and through the sharing of the child's learning journal and a progress report at the end of the year.
- Connections are made and information is shared between the pre-school and the home environment. 'George', the cherished soft toy of the setting, visits each child's home during the year. The family creates a story of his visit using photographs; the child's narrative is shared in the pre-school and is documented. Parents are encouraged to attend events such as celebrations at Christmas, and an end-of-year school tour.
- The setting has established links with the local primary school and disseminates to the parents the information it receives from the school. The setting will share information on children's progress with the school subject to parents' consent.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to formalise their team meetings in order to develop and review their observations of the children, to plan for the next steps in the children's learning, and to develop ongoing self-review of practice in the setting. The self-evaluation tools contained in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* are a practical resource in relation to this.
- The practitioners are advised to proactively seek regular parental feedback on each child's education and learning and on overall education provision in the setting. The 'Building partnership with parents' pillar of *the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* provides useful guidance in this regard.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is very good.

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	**Good**
Quality of management and leadership for learning	**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 March 2018

APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report.

Overall we found the content of the inspection report very helpful. It encouraged us to reflect on our practices. We have used the actions advised to make changes that in turn will improve the quality of our setting. We found the actions advised to be practical and achievable. Since implementing these actions we have observed the positive benefits to children, staff and parents.

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

Staff sit with the children at snack time to facilitate social interaction between the children. A visual display of daily routines is now in place.

Area2

Aistear's learning record templates are now in use. Open ended materials such as empty food containers and dried foods are now available.

Area3

During snack time children are given the opportunity to share the activities they participated in during free play. Children now have more access and input to their learning folders and have more opportunity for free art and mark making as opposed to templates.

Area4

More formal staff meetings now take place, during which observations of children are discussed and planning for future activities also. We receive feedback from parents by sharing the Aistear Siolta records with them.